

Factsheet

For single parents in England and Wales **May 2016**

Freephone

0808 802 0925

Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline

How to complain to the Child Support Agency

This guide explains how to complain if you're unhappy with the service you've received from the Child Support Agency (CSA). It also covers what to do if your complaint isn't resolved, and how to escalate it. If you need to complain about the Child Maintenance Service see our factsheet [Using the Child Maintenance Service](#).

If you disagree with the calculation of the amount of child maintenance you should receive you probably need to appeal the decision, rather than complain. You can find more information on appealing against decisions in the factsheet [Challenging your child maintenance calculation](#).

Details of all organisations mentioned are listed at the end of this factsheet. For more information see our other child maintenance factsheets available at www.gingerbread.org.uk or call the Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline on 0808 802 0925. Calls are free.

What is the complaints process?

Complain to your case worker

You should start by complaining directly to your case worker or their manager. Their details should be on any letters you've been sent. You can make a complaint either on the phone or in writing. If it's over the phone you may want to make some notes of the call, who you spoke to, and the time and date; in case you need to take the complaint further.

You should get a response within 15 days. If you are not satisfied with the response, you can continue with the formal complaints process.

Stage one

Complain to the Complaints Resolution Team

If your issue hasn't been resolved to your satisfaction, or you have been kept waiting for more than 15 days you can contact the Complaints Resolution Team. This formally begins the complaints procedure.

You should receive a response within two days and they should either resolve your issue, or agree how it should be resolved within 15 days. If they think it will take longer than 15 days they should agree a timetable with you.

Stage two

Complain to the Complaints Review Team

If your issue has still not been resolved, or you've been waiting for an unreasonable amount of time you can contact the Complaints Review Team, or ask the Complaints Resolution Team to pass on your complaint.

You should receive a response within two days and they should either resolve your issue, or agree how it needs to be resolved within 15 days. If they think it will take longer than 15 days they should agree a timetable with you.

What should happen?

During the formal complaints procedure the agency should:

- Acknowledge your complaint within two days of receiving it
- Deal with you in a professional and polite way
- Take your complaint seriously and keep it confidential
- Put right any mistakes as soon as possible
- Tell you, within 15 days, the outcome or what progress they're making.

If they think they have made a mistake they should:

- Apologise
- Explain what went wrong and why
- Make the changes that put it right.

Still not resolved? Take your complaint further

Complain to your MP

If you feel that you're not getting anywhere with the Child Support Agency you can ask your MP to take it up on your behalf. It can be a way to fast track your issue as the CSA have a special unit to deal with correspondence from MPs. It also helps your MP to understand how the CSA is performing. You can find out how to contact your local MP on the [British Parliament website](#).

Independent case examiner

The independent case examiner is not part of the CSA and can give an independent view on your case. You can't contact the service unless you have been through the complaints process and not had a satisfactory outcome. You'll need to contact them within six months of receiving your final reply from the CSA. You can ask your MP to help you with the complaints process.

The independent case examiner should suggest ways an agreement can be reached, and should make recommendations about what should be done to resolve your complaint.

Parliamentary and health service ombudsman

The ombudsman is the final stage in the complaints process and is ultimately responsible for complaints about the Child Support Agency. You can only take your case to the ombudsman through your MP – you can't approach them directly. Before taking your complaint to the ombudsman you will be expected to have gone through the full complaints process, including the independent case examiner.

Getting compensation

It might be possible to get compensation from the CSA in some circumstances. There isn't a legal right to compensation, and it's likely you would need to push for it. Here are some examples of when you could be entitled to compensation:

- There have been significant delays in issuing forms, making calculations or reviewing liability
- There have been delays or errors in enforcing your payments
- Delays in passing on your money
- You have lost out financially – for example received bank charges because of a CSA mistake
- You've suffered gross inconvenience, embarrassment, breach of your confidentiality or severe distress.

Consolatory payments

These are small payments that can be made if the CSA has caused you serious inconvenience because they have repeatedly made mistakes. They can also be made if you have been caused severe embarrassment or humiliation, or your health has been affected. You don't necessarily have to have lost out financially.

You can get more details on how the CSA consider making a compensation payment or consolatory payment in the [Compensation for poor service: staff guide](#) available on gov.uk.

Further information

Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline

Freephone 0808 802 0925

www.gingerbread.org.uk

Provides free, confidential advice for single parents. No matter the challenge – around your finances, contact arrangements or help you could receive – our trained advisers are here with tailored advice that works for you.

One Parent Families Scotland Lone Parent Helpline

Freephone 0808 801 0323

www.opfs.org.uk

Run by our partner organisation, One Parent Families Scotland, the Lone Parent Helpline provides free, confidential advice and information for single parents in Scotland.

Child Maintenance Options

0800 988 0988

www.cmoptions.org

Information about your child maintenance options and making an agreement best suited to your circumstances. Information booklets, a maintenance calculator and a private agreement form are on the website.

Child Support Agency National Enquiry Line

03457 133 133

www.gov.uk/child-maintenance/contact

Information about claiming child support through the Child Support Agency

Coram Children's Legal Centre

<http://childlawadvice.org.uk>

The Child Law Advice website provides legal advice and information on all aspects of law and policy affecting children. Information is available on parental responsibility, contact and residence disputes.

Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Information and advice on a wide range of issues including benefits and tax credits. Check your telephone directory for your local bureau or find details on the website.

HM courts service

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-courts-and-tribunals-service

Find information, court forms and guidance for civil procedures and family matters. Forms and guidance on how to complete them can also be obtained from your local county court.

Law Society

www.lawsociety.org.uk

Use the website to find a solicitor in your area.

National Family Mediation

0300 400 636

www.nfm.org.uk

Can answer general enquiries relating to mediation and put callers in contact with local mediation services.

More from Gingerbread

The following related Gingerbread factsheets for single parents are also available:

- > [Using the Child Maintenance Service](#)
- > [Challenging your child maintenance calculation](#)
- > [Enforcing payment of child maintenance](#)
- > [Getting legal help](#).

Download them from our [website](#) or call 0207 428 5420 to request them

Become a Gingerbread member

Membership is available to single parents in England and Wales. Join a community of thousands of single parents who benefit from the mutual support, free advice and information provided by Gingerbread. You can also meet other single parents at one of our local support groups.

Visit our [website](#), call 0800 018 4318 or email membership@gingerbread.org.uk

Gingerbread

Single parents, equal families

Gingerbread, the charity for single parent families, is registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee, no. 402748, and a registered charity, no. 230750. The Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline is supported by the Department for Education, HMRC, The Big Lottery and other funders and is accredited by the Helplines Partnership.



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