



**MEMBER
COMPLAINTS
PROCEDURE**

1. INTRODUCTION

The International Federation of Aromatherapists (IFA) is the voluntary regulator for aromatherapy operating worldwide, set up primarily to protect the public. As a Professional Body we set the standards that practitioners are required to meet continuously in order to be displayed on the register. The Code of Conduct, Ethics and Practice, detail the quality of care that you can expect from an IFA registrant, which are binding on all practitioners on the [register](#). If a member falls short of those standards, we need you to tell us in order to bring the registrant to account for their actions and protect public confidence in the profession. All complaints will be investigated thoroughly and sanctions will be imposed on a registrant if appropriate, in keeping with regulatory healthcare guidelines.

2. COMPLAINTS WE CAN DEAL WITH

- The care or advice received from one of our members
- The physical or mental health of one of our members
- A member's professional conduct
- A member's business practices that disadvantage or exploit clients
- A member's personal behaviour that directly impacts on their fitness to practice.

The IFA will not consider complaints that are raised more than one (1) year after the incident has occurred.

Please note however, we cannot arrange refunds or compensation or provide legal advice or become involved in legal disputes even if a complaint is upheld.

3. COMPLAINTS WE CANNOT DEAL WITH

- a) Complaints regarding aromatherapy practitioners who are not current members of the IFA. To check the register [click here](#).
- b) Complaints about companies, unless they are a registered corporate member. To check the register [click here](#).
- c) Complaints made anonymously that cannot otherwise be verified.
- d) Complaints that are not made formally in writing.
- e) Complaints where the complainant refuses or is unable to provide the necessary evidence to justify their claims; the emphasis of supplying evidence rests on the complainant.
- f) Complaints which fall within the jurisdiction of another regulator, for example:
 - i. Complaints regarding employment disputes or civil proceedings. However, the IFA reserves the right to act on the outcome of the proceedings if they relate to dishonesty.

- ii. Complaints regarding breaches of Data Protection which must be directed to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). However, the IFA reserves the right to act on the outcome of the proceedings.
 - iii. Complaints regarding a breach of the Committee of Advertising (CAP) code of practice, which is the role of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). However, the IFA reserves the right to act on the outcome of the proceedings.
 - iv. Complaints regarding claims for compensation – all practising members have insurance to cover claims and all registrants will provide their insurance details upon request.
- g) Complaints on a third party's behalf (unless the IFA receives written legal authorisation for someone to act on behalf of the client).
- h) Complaints in regard to contractual disputes between practitioners.

4. WHAT TO DO FIRST

You should always try and resolve any concerns with the practitioner before reporting it to the IFA, as complaints can usually be resolved at this stage. We will require to see evidence of these efforts. All registrants will have a written complaints procedure in place which we would expect you to have exhausted. We do however recognise that in some exceptional circumstances this may not always be appropriate.

5. RAISING A COMPLAINT

If you are unable to resolve a dispute with the practitioner then you may raise your concern with the IFA which will be investigated as outlined below. All complaints must be made in writing, written in English using the [Complaints Form](#). If this is likely to be a problem for you, you will need to ask someone to fill the form in for you.

For expediency, it would be helpful if the complainant could also draw attention to the specific codes within the [Code of Conduct, Ethics and Practice](#), to which their complaint relates.

6. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Confirmation

When we have received your complaints form, we will confirm receipt within three (3) working days.

Information gathering

The registrant will be sent a copy of the complaint made against them and asked for a response in writing. The complainant will be sent a copy of the registrants reply so they may comment on its contents if they wish to. The registrant will also be given a copy of the complainant's comments. If a copy of the clients or the registrant's health records is relevant to the investigation then we will ask permission to receive a copy of these.

Assessing the evidence

When we review a complaint, we will first assess the evidence in support of the complaint. Initially, the case examiners which consist of the head of the membership committee and operations manager, will review all the information and evidence relating to the complaint and decide whether or not to refer the complaint to the disciplinary or deal with it informally. The case examiners may decide upon evidence or lack thereof to dismiss the complaint at any stage. Complaints that arise due to oral communications will not necessarily mean a complaint will be dismissed, but may impact on how we intend to assess the complaint. This step is necessary to reduce the likelihood of frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaints.

Types of evidence typically include:

- Written policies
- Written correspondence
- Telephone recordings
- Witness statements
- Third party reports

The onus of responsibility for supplying evidence rests firmly with the complainant.

Deciding how to deal with the complaint

The IFA will then decide if it will address the complaint informally or formally.

7. INFORMALLY

- a) If there is no suggestion that the client is at risk or has been harmed, the complaint is likely to be dealt with informally. The IFA will make the complainant aware when it would be appropriate to deal with the complaint informally. The IFA may ask the complainant how they wish the IFA registrant to resolve the situation e.g. apologise, and the IFA will ask the registrant if they agree to do. If the client or the registrant does not agree that the complaint should be dealt with informally, or as progress is made, the nature of the complaint changes, the complaint will be dealt with formally.
- b) In some cases, especially where a complaint is between an IFA registrant and another healthcare practitioner, the IFA may suggest that the complainant and registrant undertake mediation. This is to try and help both parties to find a way to resolve the problem before the complaint is dealt with at a formal level. If the complainant or the registrant does not agree that the complaint should be dealt with through mediation, the complaint will be dealt with formally. If a complaint is made by another healthcare practitioner, IFA registrant or a member of the public who has no personal experience of the registrant it is also likely that the complaint will be dealt with formally.
- c) When complaints are dealt with informally, we ask that both the complainant and the registrant inform the IFA that a solution has been reached within four (4) weeks of the complaint being brought to the registrants' attention. If not, the formal disciplinary procedure will be instigated.
- d) At any stage of the complaint being made, the IFA may offer informal advice to the registrant about their future conduct.

8. FORMALLY

Some complaints cannot be dealt with informally and include, but are not limited to:-

- a) Abuse of trust – stepping outside professional boundaries and/or including financial exploitation of clients
- b) Conduct that falls below IFA standards
- c) Negligent behaviour e.g. caused by unfit to practice
- d) Unprofessional behaviour, which could bring the IFA into disrepute
- e) Professional incompetence
- f) Dishonesty
- g) Fraud or criminal acts
- h) Alcohol or substance abuse
- i) Violence
- j) Findings of other statutory regulators
- k) Registrants who receive more than two complaints of the same nature initially addressed informally

Complaints dealt with formally will follow the disciplinary procedure.

If the case examiners do decide to refer it to the disciplinary and complaints committee, we will write to the complainant and registrant confirming this and provide a copy of the disciplinary procedure.

9. INTERIM MEASURES

In serious or complex cases of suspected non-compliance or when it appears there could be an immediate risk to the public, the registrant will be suspended and removed from the IFA register of therapists for forty-two (42) days. This is known as an interim measure. This is to enable the disciplinary committee members to meet, consider and evaluate all the evidence. After the 42 days the member will be informed if a further 'interim measure' is needed to cover the additional time needed to deal with the complaint.

10. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

The IFA will endeavour to consider complaints in a timely manner and update the complainant and registrant at each stage.

Although we do understand that this may be a stressful and frustrating time for you please respect our [Service User Policy](#) in all dealings with IFA employees.

Each case is individual and delays may be inevitable due to:

- Gathering information from the relevant individuals concerned
- Difficulty finding dates when individuals are available

The complainant and registrant will be provided with anticipated timescales of dealing with complaints and will be informed of any revised timescales as and when appropriate.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY

When investigating a complaint, we will need to inform the named registrant involved, who will receive a copy of the complaint and any responses the complainant makes. The contact details of the complainant will be removed from any documents we send. All information shared between the parties involved, must be treated strictly private and confidential.