



Complaints Policy

Includes guidance on:

- Expectations a client may hold through the referral, assessment and counselling process.
- Responsibilities expected of MCS through the referral, assessment and counselling process.
- Guidance on whom to contact in the event of an organisational complaint: Within MCS, Trustees, BACP, Charity Commission.

Document Type: Organisational policy

Reference: O-002

Document Author: Policy work group

Document Purpose: This policy outlines the client and Service expectations and procedure in the event of a complaint.

Responsible Group: Board of Trustees.

Date Ratified: July 2019

Where this is to be held: In the main MCS office, digitally

Information from/sourced/referenced:

- https://knowhownonprofit.org/organisation/operations/legal/copy_of_policies
- ‘The Good Trustee Guide’, and discussion with policies working group.
- MCS document “Roles and Responsibilities”
- MCS Policies and procedures

Abbreviations / Clarification of Terms

- BACP - British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy
- Counsellor / counselling should be taken as a reference to all the different types of therapist/therapy at MCS

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Version History:

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Contents

	Page
Introduction	4
Expectations	4
Referral	4
Assessment	4-5
Counselling	5
Organisation	5
Contact Addresses	6
Monitoring	6

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Marches Counselling Service (MCS) prides itself on having strong, clear policies that define, regulate and inform how MCS operates.
- 1.2 Policies guide the organisation based upon its strategy and ethos. They help set the culture of the organisation, encouraging each member to work with conscience and integrity to develop MCS as a service that provides high quality and affordable therapy and training services.
- 1.3 MCS policies are developed with the involvement of members at all levels of the organisation. All policies shall be subject to review, and no policy shall be held to be absolute, but should be flexible and adaptable to meet the changing needs of the service and the community of Herefordshire.

2. Expectations

- 2.1 The nature of counselling and psychotherapy is such that no guarantees can be given that it will bring about the resolution of difficulties which a person might seek. For many, thinking about the difficulties they face, as has been well documented in the literature, can initially make a person's situation seem worse.
- 2.2 Counsellors will be aware of this possibility and should be able to support clients through such times, and give reassurance that what they are experiencing is not unusual. Realistically, without looking at our life it is difficult to see how we might ever make any changes. This challenging period is often the initial stage in coming to terms with and learning to cope with or indeed change the things in one's life which are problematic. Some people may already be experiencing this when they access psychological therapy, but for others it may be a new and difficult experience.
- 2.3 Although there are no guarantees of outcome, our feedback from clients indicates that most achieve a reasonable level of success in learning skills and developing understandings which then improve their quality of life.

3. Referral

- 3.1 Whether you have contacted us yourself or been referred to us by someone else, for example your GP, you should expect to hear from us within a week to arrange an assessment appointment. Please let us know immediately if this does not happen.
- 3.2 You should at all times be approached by our administrators in a friendly but respectful manner.
- 3.3 If you do not find this to be the case then please put your complaint in writing to the clinical director marking your letter 'private and confidential'. Alternatively, you can do so via email. The office can provide a suitable confidential email address.

4. Assessment

- 4.1 Unless you have a lot of limitations upon your time, assessment should be offered to you within two weeks of contacting us.

- 4.2 The purpose of assessment is to check that counselling or other type of psychological therapy provided by MCS is appropriate for you at the present time. If we do not feel that this is the case, we will endeavour to refer you on or signpost you to more appropriate support.
- 4.3 If you are accepted for counselling the assessor will inform you of what happens next. Our assessment process may indicate to you where changes might be made and our expectation of how long it might be for you to see benefits.
- 4.4 If you are not offered counselling then the reasons why should be clearly explained to you. If you are not comfortable with the assessment process then please let us know in writing as soon as possible.

5. Counselling

- 5.1 After assessment you will be allocated to a counsellor who should contact you. We have every confidence in the counsellors who work with us, however there is always the possibility of mistakes being made and so this document outlines what you should expect from the counselling relationship, and what to do about it if you feel that any of these standards are being ignored.
- 5.2 MCS can provide you with detailed statements in the appropriate policies, but in essence you should expect the following:
- a written counselling agreement
 - confidentiality
 - time to explain your situation fully
 - be listened to with respect
 - have understandings checked out
 - an openness to your perspectives
 - shared recognition of practicalities and limitations
 - agreed goals
 - support with difficult emotions
 - help with coping strategies
 - adequate discussion of ending.
- 5.3 If possible, please discuss any dissatisfaction with your therapist. If issues cannot be resolved here, please contact our administrator who will put you in contact with the counsellor's supervisor. If you are still unhappy, please write to the clinical director who should respond to you within 14 days and indicate how the matter will be dealt with.
- 5.4 In the event of the complaint not being heard within the organisation to your satisfaction, you can contact the professional organisation with which the counsellor is registered and follow their complaints process. Information as to which organisation this is will be given to you by the administrator.

6. Organisation

- 6.1 Any complaints about the running of the organisation as a whole should in the first instance be addressed to the trustees. As a registered charity, further complaints may be directed to the Charity Commission and to the BACP who have accredited the service.

7. Contact Addresses

7.1 Addresses of the people and organisations mentioned above can be found below:

- The Trustees, Marches Counselling Service, 57 St Owen Street, Hereford HR1 2JQ
- BACP, BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth, LE17 4HB
- The Charity Commission, 1 Drummond Gate, London, SW1V 2QQ

8. Monitoring

8.1 This procedure is subject to joint review by the Clinical Director and the Board of Trustees upon request.