



Guide to handling complaints



Supporting the hair, beauty
and barbering industries



Introduction








How you manage and deal with complaints is important.

In our 24/7 social-media-led world, an unhappy customer is dangerous for your reputation as a salon or barbershop.

If you handle a complaint well, you can often turn things around and even transform your unhappy client back into a loyal 'champion' for your business.

Complaints are an opportunity to learn and improve, identify training needs and raise standards. This will also help to reduce complaints in the future.

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What is a complaint?

Some complaints are clear-cut. For example, if your client's hair or skin has been physically damaged, or they have been injured in some way. Complaints of this type are rare.

Other types of complaint include not receiving the service or treatment your client asked for, or poor-quality service. These types of complaint can be trickier to deal with as they are often influenced by the client's personal opinion about whether or not a cut or colour suits them.

Even with the best consultation, it can be difficult for a client to describe exactly what they want or for the stylist/therapist to explain what a style, colour or beauty treatment will look like when it's finished.

A complaint doesn't have to be in writing. It will often be made face-to-face in the salon/barbershop, over the phone, by email or via a negative comment on social media.

Complaints and the law

The Consumer Rights Act 2015 for England and Wales says:

- If a service was not provided with reasonable care and skill or as agreed, you must put things right within a reasonable time and at your own cost.
- If this isn't practical, you must give some or all of the money back within 14 days of agreeing to a refund.

Important

You should take all complaints seriously. You must also decide quickly if you need to contact your insurer (for example, a personal injury claim) or need legal advice, for example, from our 24/7 legal helpline, which is free to our Members.





Complaints and the self-employed

If you rent space out to self-employed chair renters or beauty room renters, they will be responsible for dealing with any client complaint made against them. If they're sued by a client, they will also be responsible for dealing with any legal action against them.

Bear in mind that your clients may not realise the difference between your employees and self-employed stylists/therapists. Always try to make sure that clients fully understand the difference when they come in for their appointments.

If a self-employed person's client complains to you, you will need to tactfully explain that the chair or room renter must sort out their complaint.

You may wish to advise any self-employed chair or room renters working in your salon that they should have their own complaints policy and access to a certified alternative dispute resolution provider for complaints that can't be resolved. (See [page 9](#) for more on alternative dispute resolution.)





Practical ways to handle complaints

HAVE SOMEONE WHO CAN TAKE CHARGE

It makes good business sense for complaints to be taken seriously and dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Make sure your employees know who to refer complaints to. This will normally be you as the business owner, or a senior member of the team if you are away.

HAVE A CLEAR COMPLAINTS POLICY:

A complaints policy will give your team members and clients clear procedures to follow.

You can show you have a complaints policy and have followed it if legal action is taken against you.

A complaints policy template can be found at the end of this guide. You can tailor it to your salon or barbershop.

You can also download an [electronic copy of the template](#) from the shop (or call 01234 831965). This can be printed out on your branded notepaper and given to a client who has complained. You can also publish it on your website.

Download an electronic copy of the [template complaints policy](#)





TAKE TIME TO LISTEN PROPERLY

Letting the customer talk gives them a chance to get things off their chest and feel less angry. It also sends a clear signal that you are taking them seriously. Invite them into your office or a quiet area of your salon or barbershop where you can speak more privately. Listen carefully, don't interrupt and don't get angry.

Make sure you understand why your client is upset.

- Was it the price?
- Did the service or treatment take too long?
- Was the stylist or therapist running late?
- Were they unhappy with the service or treatment provided?
- Was there a communication problem?

Use phrases such as: "Do you mind if I ask a few questions about what happened?" Repeat back what they say to ensure there are no misunderstandings and to show you are listening carefully.

You should not accept aggressive, intimidating or abusive behaviour towards you or your employees. Encourage your client to calm down by using calming body language such as open palms, frequent nodding and friendly eye contact. Make sure you give them physical space.

If this doesn't work, stay calm and firmly explain that you understand they are upset and you want to help, but you cannot tolerate abusive language or behaviour in your salon or barbershop. You could try arranging to meet the next day to sort things out. By then, your client will hopefully be calmer.

DON'T ASSUME YOUR CLIENT IS TRYING TO RIP YOU OFF

This is very unlikely if one of your regular clients makes a complaint. If this happens, your priority should be to sort out the problem and keep them as a client.

However, if a new client complains you may feel they are 'trying it on' to get a refund or free service. In such cases your simplest option may be to offer a refund and make it clear they should choose another salon or barbershop in future.



DO APOLOGISE

Saying things such as: "I'm so sorry you're not happy with your colour/cut/massage" or "I can see why you're upset" or "I'm sorry for the inconvenience" show you are taking the complaint seriously and being sympathetic. But unless it is completely clear-cut, it's important not to accept liability until you have got both sides of the story from your client and your employee.

This is especially important if the complaint is made by phone and you can't see what's happened. Invite them back into your salon or barbershop so you can assess the situation and decide what to do. Advise them not to go elsewhere to have things put right as you need to see how they looked when they left your salon or barbershop.

If the complaint has been made via social media try to contact them privately in a constructive, non-confrontational way. Never engage in a public online argument. Invite them into your salon or barbershop at a time of their choosing to see if you can resolve the problem between you.

MAKE THEM AN OFFER

If you think their complaint is reasonable, explain how you'll sort things out. This could be redoing all or part of the service free of charge. If the client is a regular, you may want to offer something extra such as a free product or a voucher.

Agree a plan and timescale with the client. Give them the option of having someone else do the work, but be careful not to criticise the original stylist, barber or therapist in front of your client or other employees. If your employee did a poor job, deal with it privately as a performance or training issue.

Take the complaint seriously, act quickly and efficiently to sort it out and offer your client something above and beyond what they might have expected. They will hopefully share their positive experience instead of complaining about their negative one.

Only offer a full or partial refund if you can't fix the problem. Your client is then entitled to claim any extra costs of having the problem put right somewhere else. But they must be reasonable about where they go and what treatment or service they have.

It can be easier to offer a refund and write off the complaint as a bad experience. But if you genuinely believe your client is being unreasonable or does not have a case, you can offer alternative dispute resolution ([see page 9](#)).



LEARN FROM THE COMPLAINT

Your priority is to sort out the complaint as quickly as possible. But longer term, it's important for you and your team to learn from it. Ask yourself:

- Could the initial consultation have been improved?
- Were we following the NHBF guidelines for allergy alert testing or sensitivity testing?
- Was there a workload or time management issue?
- Was it a training or performance issue?
- Was it a pricing issue? Is your pricing information clear enough?
- Was enough information about after-care given to the client?
- Should we monitor client satisfaction to find out if other clients are unhappy too?
- Would a mystery shopper help? Find a **mystery shopper service** in our Trade Member Directory.
- Is our policy on social media effective enough or do we need to revisit it? For example, make sure it's clear that online complaints should be taken offline and that staff should encourage clients to follow your accounts and leave positive reviews. The NHBF employment contracts and staff handbook cover the importance of having a clear and well-communicated social media policy in place.





Alternative dispute resolution

You will usually be able to sort out a complaint well before it becomes a 'dispute'.

However, if you cannot resolve a complaint using the steps outlined in this guide, the law says you must provide your client with details of an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) service and confirm if you are willing to take part. We provide a template 'deadlock' letter/email for you to use for this purpose.

You should try to resolve complaints within eight weeks. However, clients can apply for ADR up to 12 months from when you issue the 'deadlock' letter. These rules are set out in the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes Regulations 2015 and apply to salons and barbershops throughout the UK.

The government set up ADR to help avoid expensive, stressful and time-consuming court cases.

Courts look less favourably on cases where there has been no attempt to use ADR. So it's in your interests to try ADR first.

ADR providers must be certified by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute.

HOW DOES ADR WORK?

ADR aims to resolve a dispute by proposing a fair and reasonable solution which is acceptable to both parties. Either party can withdraw from the ADR process at any time.

The outcome is not binding on you or your client unless you both accept the proposed solution, in which case it becomes binding.

If you don't agree to the proposed solution, you or your client can still take legal action through the courts. The outcome of mediation may be different





NHBF HAIR & BEAUTY MEDIATION



HAIR & BEAUTY MEDIATION

Hair & Beauty Mediation is operated by the NHBF and is fully certified as an ADR provider. It offers a quick and inexpensive solution to disputes about hairdressing, barbering and beauty services or treatments provided by a Member. For more information visit www.nhbf.co.uk/complaints

The cost is **£12 including VAT** for the client and **£30 including VAT** for the salon/barbershop.

This is significantly less than the fees charged by other ADR providers.

Alternative certified ADR providers are listed on the Chartered Trading Standards Institute website: tradingstandards.uk



Chartered Trading
Standards Institute
ADR Competent Authority

Hair and Beauty Mediation is approved by Government under the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015



Checklist

- The Consumer Rights Act 2015 gives clients more rights when making complaints.
- It's vital to have a complaints policy that all the team understand, including who to refer complaints to and who is in charge of dealing with them.
- When someone complains, get the facts, apologise and try to sort things out, especially for a regular client.
- Learn from the complaint.
- If a complaint can't be resolved, the law says you must refer your client to a certified ADR provider. You must confirm if you are willing to take part in ADR.
- Your self-employed chair/room renters must handle complaints themselves.

How we can help

Members can:

- Access our free 24/7 legal helpline.
- Use our ready-made salon/barbershop complaints policy.
- Use our template letter/email for clients whose complaint remains unresolved.
- Take advantage of our competitively priced Hair & Beauty Mediation service.
- Download our ['Guide to delivering a great client experience'](#).
- Download our [free chair and room renting agreements](#).



Customer complaints policy

Our priority is for you to be completely satisfied with the service you receive from us. We run a professional business, so we aim for the highest standards in everything we do. Complaints are rare, but we take them seriously, so we have a complaints policy and process we follow to make sure things are put right where needed and we learn from your feedback.

PROCESS

Tell someone you're not happy with the service you've received, either while you're in the salon/barbershop or as soon as possible after leaving. Calmly and clearly explain the problem.

We will listen to your feedback and ask questions as necessary to understand why you are making a complaint. We aim to resolve all complaints within eight weeks.

If you have already left the salon/ barbershop, don't go to another salon/ barbershop as we have the right to see exactly what the service or treatment you received from us looks like. We will arrange a suitable time for you to come back and discuss your complaint in private.

Where we think your complaint is reasonable, we will redo a part or all of the service or treatment again as soon as possible, free of charge. The work will be done by a different stylist, barber or beauty therapist if you prefer, although this may not be possible if the individual is self-employed.

If we can't fix the problem, we may offer a partial or full refund depending on how reasonable we consider your complaint to be.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

If, after following our complaints policy, we still can't agree on how to resolve the complaint to your satisfaction, as required by the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes Regulations 2015, we will refer you to a certified alternative dispute resolution provider, Hair & Beauty Mediation. As mediators, they listen to both sides and help us work towards a fair and reasonable compromise which is acceptable to both parties. It is not legally binding unless both parties agree on an outcome, but it is a cheaper and quicker alternative than taking legal action.

Please note there is a charge of £12 including VAT for the client and £30 including VAT for the salon and barbershops.

Hair & Beauty Mediation can be contacted by:

Phone: 01234 831965

Email: mediation@nhbf.co.uk

Web: www.nhbf.co.uk/complaints

Give this customer complaints policy to your clients. **Download it** or call us on 1234 831965. You can add your logo or print it onto your letterhead.

How the NHBF can help

Check out our other guides on all aspects of running a hair, barbering or beauty business at www.nhbf.co.uk/guides

Guides

- Absence management
- Advertising law
- Allergy alert testing
- Allergy alert testing & sensitivity checks
- Apprenticeships
- Becoming a training provider
- Business finance
- Card payment processing
- Chair renting
- Client experience
- Complaints
- Consumer law
- Franchising
- Health and safety (part of kit)
- Hiring a manager
- Managing performance
- Marketing your salon or barbershop
- National Minimum Wages
- No-shows and late cancellations
- Pensions
- Prices, wages and profit
- Recruiting and employing people
- Salon fit-out
- Salon software
- Self-employment
- Selling your business
- Start-up guides





**THE NHBF IS HERE
FOR YOU:**

As a Member you'll always have someone to turn to for help, information and advice. This includes free practical support and guidance for managing people and running your business, crucial 24/7 legal lifeline, free chair/space/room renting agreements, valuable discounts on business essentials including insurance and free 24/7 commercial law support.

Find out more: www.nhbf.co.uk

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