

Talking to your employer about a problem

1 . How to raise a problem

If you have a problem at work you can raise it formally or informally with your employer. It's usually best to try raising it informally first.

Dealing with a problem informally means taking steps to resolve it without using a formal procedure like a grievance.

You might feel nervous about raising a problem. But employers are often open to resolving problems quickly without going through a formal procedure.

Raising a problem informally can often:

- resolve it more quickly
- help maintain positive relationships at work

You can [raise the problem formally](#) if:

- you cannot resolve it through informal steps
- you feel it is too serious to raise informally

Check your organisation's policy

Before raising a problem with your employer, it's a good idea to check any policy they have that's relevant to your situation.

For example, you could check your employer's absence policy, if your problem is about taking leave.

The policy might:

- give you some information that resolves your problem
- say how to raise a problem and who you can speak to

Talk with your employer

You should talk to someone you feel comfortable with where possible, for example your line manager, another manager or someone in HR.

An informal conversation with your manager or employer can range from a quiet word to a more structured meeting.

Get support

If you need more support with resolving your problem, you could speak to:

- a fair treatment ambassador, if your organisation has one

- a trade union representative, if you're a member
- your employer's HR department, if they have one

If you need emotional support, your work might have:

- mental health first aiders
- health and wellbeing representatives
- an employee assistance programme (EAP)

What your employer should do

When you talk to your employer about a problem, they should take it seriously and look into it as soon as possible.

They might be able to resolve the problem straight away, for example if it's a misunderstanding about pay.

If they cannot resolve the problem straight away, your employer should arrange an informal meeting with you. This is an opportunity for them to:

- find out more about the issue
- talk to you about the best way to resolve the problem

[Find out more about informal meetings](#)

If the problem is about someone you work with

If you have a problem with someone you work with, your employer has different options to deal with the situation. They should discuss these with you and, if possible, agree with you what they will do.

They could start by having a quiet word with the other person to discuss the problem. Often this is enough to resolve matters, especially if someone has upset you without meaning to.

If your employer finds the problem is more complicated, they might talk with you again to try to agree what to do next.

Your employer might suggest holding an informal meeting with you and the other person. They should agree this with you in advance so you know what to expect and can prepare for it.

Using mediation

Mediation is used to resolve disagreements around workplace relationships rather than other disputes, such as pay or issues related to dismissal or conduct.

It involves an independent, impartial person helping both sides to try to find a solution to a problem.

Employers can use mediation to resolve:

- bullying and harassment
- communication problems
- personality clashes
- relationship breakdowns

[Find out more about mediation](#)

Raising the problem formally

You can raise the problem formally if:

- you've already tried to resolve things informally but it did not work
- you feel the situation is too serious to be resolved informally

Your employer might want to deal with the problem formally if they feel it is very serious. They cannot insist that you raise it formally but they can still investigate it and take appropriate action.

Raising a problem formally is known as 'raising a grievance'.

If you decide to go straight to raising a grievance, your employer might encourage you to try informal resolution first. However, they should allow you to raise a problem formally if that's what you want.

If you cannot agree on an approach together, your employer should deal with it formally.

[Find out more about raising a grievance](#)

If the problem is not resolved

If your problem is not resolved by trying informal or formal steps, you might be able to [make a claim to an employment tribunal](#).

Contact the Acas helpline

If you have any questions about raising a problem at work, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).

2. Informal meetings

Once you've raised an issue with your employer, they might arrange an informal meeting to:

- find out more about the problem
- discuss the best way to resolve it

A meeting might seem quite formal. However this is still an informal step, if it's not part of a formal procedure like a grievance.

Preparing for an informal meeting

To help you prepare for an informal meeting, you can:

- check the Acas website for information about the type of problem you have
- prepare what you want to say, for example how to explain what you're unhappy about
- gather any evidence you might need, for example payslips if your problem is about pay
- think about what your employer could do to fix the problem

Taking someone with you

You can ask someone to go with you to an informal meeting. For example:

- someone you work with
- a trade union representative, if you're a member
- an official employed by a trade union

You can ask to bring someone else for extra assistance or support, for example an interpreter or care worker.

It's usually up to your employer to agree if you can bring someone else to the meeting.

If you're disabled, your employer must make [reasonable adjustments](#) if you need them. This might include allowing someone to come with you to an informal meeting.

For example, your employer might allow a support or care worker to attend to provide support. This could be considered a reasonable adjustment if it would reduce any disadvantage you might have in raising your problem.

At the meeting

At the meeting you can:

- explain what the problem is and what you think should happen
- show evidence if necessary, for example your payslips and contract if you think your holiday pay was wrong
- take notes

Resolving the problem should be a two-way process. Your manager should allow you to explain the problem. You should also listen to what they have to say.

You and your manager might have different ideas about how to solve the problem. You should be open to ideas and try to find an outcome that works for everyone.

Putting things in writing

Even though the meeting is informal, it's still good practice for your employer to record in writing what you agree. They could give this to you in a letter or an email so you have a record.

This is so:

- everyone is clear about what the next steps are
- you can refer back to it if the problem is not resolved or happens again

If the problem is not resolved

If your problem is not resolved by trying informal steps, you can make a formal complaint to your employer. This is known as [raising a grievance](#).

If raising a formal grievance does not resolve the problem, you might be able to [make a claim to an employment tribunal](#).

Contact the Acas helpline

If you have any questions about informal meetings, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).