



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

SECOND EDITION · 2026

Complaint Handling Guidelines for MenEngage Networks

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Background and Purpose of this Document

This document consolidates and integrates the following five documents to create streamlined guidelines for handling complaints within the MenEngage Alliance:

1. MenEngage Code of Conduct
2. MenEngage Accountability Standards
3. MenEngage Sexual Harassment Policy
4. MenEngage Webpage on How to Report Concerns
5. Global Board Governance Committee agreement regarding vetting and handling of complaints

Additionally, we consulted the internal document *"Lessons Learned from Handling Complaints within the MenEngage Alliance"* (Feb. 2024) and the publication *"Best Practices for Handling an Ethics Hotline Report: Developing Policies and Procedures for Conducting an Effective Ethics Investigation"* (LightHouse, 2010).

This document aims to provide a **supportive framework**, rather than rigid rules, for complaint handling. It is adaptable to different regional and situational contexts, ensuring flexibility while upholding the MenEngage Alliance's principles and values.

The primary audience for this document is MenEngage accountability focal points and network coordinators. By balancing detailed information with conciseness, we aimed to create a user-friendly resource with clear and simple language. The framework provides sufficient structure for handling complaints while allowing flexibility to address the nuances of specific situations.

The development of this document was a collective effort, led by the MenEngage **Accountability Team**, with active engagement from representatives of MenEngage regional networks to ensure inclusivity and contextual relevance. Their dedication and collaborative spirit were instrumental in shaping these comprehensive guidelines.

About this Second Edition

This second edition reflects MenEngage Alliance's commitment to continuous learning and improvement in how we promote accountable practices and respond to concerns and complaints. During the year following the adoption of the first edition, the Global Secretariat invited all MenEngage regional networks to review the Guidelines and provide feedback on their implementation. Regional leaders identified strengths, gaps, and areas requiring further clarification, and shared practical recommendations.

We are deeply grateful to the regional network leaders and members of the Accountability Team whose thoughtful feedback, critical reflections, and practical insights made this revised edition possible.

As a result of this collaborative review process, this second edition introduces several important improvements, including:

- A new section on assessing organizational capacity and readiness before taking on specific cases.
- Clearer guidance for receiving and documenting oral complaints during MenEngage meetings and events, whether online or in person.
- A more detailed step-by-step complaint-handling process, from initial intake through case closure.
- A practical Complaint Handling Workflow included as an annex for quick reference.
- Clearer definitions of the different roles and responsibilities involved throughout the complaint-handling process.
- Additional guidance to strengthen survivor-centered practice, due process, documentation, communication, organizational learning, and continuous improvement.

As with the first edition, these Guidelines are intended to remain a living document. MenEngage Alliance will continue learning from experience, listening to members and partners, and periodically updating this resource to reflect emerging good practices and the evolving needs of the Alliance.

If you believe content in this edition should be revised or if you have feedback based on applying these guidelines in your context, please share it with the MenEngage Global Secretariat. Your input will inform the next edition.

Core Values Guiding the Complaint Handling Process

The complaint-handling process is guided by the following core values, which must be upheld by all MenEngage networks when addressing complaints:

1	Fairness Ensure a thorough and objective review, treating all parties with empathy and considering their perspectives, emotions, and needs. Neutral parties may assist in these processes to uphold fairness.
2	Due Process Provide clear procedures and opportunities for both the complainant and the respondent to present their case.
3	Respect Respect the dignity, privacy, and safety of all parties involved.
4	Timeliness Act promptly and commit to addressing all complaints and concerns without undue delay.
5	Restorative Justice Focus on repairing harm and fostering healing for all parties. This collaborative approach holds offenders accountable while restoring relationships and promoting a sense of justice. A restorative justice process is followed where possible.
6	Survivor-Centered Approach Implement a survivor-centered approach at every stage of the process, ensuring that responses prioritize the complainant's safety, well-being, and dignity. Decisions and interventions must be guided by the needs and preferences of the complainant while maintaining fairness for all parties.
7	Accountability Take action to address personal or institutional practices that go against MenEngage principles. Acknowledge harm caused and work toward making amends.
8	Transparency Maintain open communication throughout the process, providing clear explanations for decisions.

9 Confidentiality

Safeguard the privacy of all parties, ensuring sensitive information is accessible only to those directly handling complaints. Preserve whistleblowers' anonymity when requested. *Note: Confidentiality may be limited where disclosure is required by law or to prevent imminent harm.*

10 Provision for Children

When addressing complaints involving children, the process must reflect the unique vulnerabilities and rights of children as outlined in the MenEngage Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy. Prioritize their safety, dignity, and right to participate meaningfully without undue burden.

While the protocol allows flexibility to adapt to regional and contextual needs, all MenEngage networks must adhere to the core values listed above when handling complaints. These values are non-negotiable and serve as the foundation for creating a supportive, accountable, and ethical complaint-handling process.

Responsibilities for Complaint Handling

MenEngage Regional Networks are primarily responsible for handling complaints. However, if the person denounced is part of the Global Secretariat, the Global Board of Directors, if they are a regional coordinator, or a consultant reporting to these global-level bodies, the complaint will be handled by the appropriate global-level authority.

If a complaint is received by a global-level body but does not fall under their scope of responsibility, it will be promptly forwarded to the relevant regional network for handling. In cases where a complaint involves a person from a member organization, and the organization commits to addressing the complaint in alignment with MenEngage values, the national or regional network may take on a supportive role rather than leading the process.

When a case is too complex for a national committee to handle, it must be referred to both regional and global levels for appropriate support and resolution. Additionally, if a regional or national level fails to address a complaint effectively, there is a mandate for higher levels of the Alliance to intervene and take action to ensure accountability.

MenEngage Alliance operates on a decentralized model, granting autonomy to regional networks. However, when addressing Code of Conduct breaches, it is essential to maintain a balance between network autonomy and organizational accountability. MenEngage Global Alliance provides oversight and support to ensure consistent handling of complaints across the network.

If a complaint has already been filed with another body – legal, institutional, or community-based – MenEngage Alliance will assess whether its internal process should proceed in parallel, complement it, or wait for the external resolution, taking into account the wellbeing of the individuals involved.

Assessing Organizational Capacity and Readiness

Not all cases can or should be handled directly by MenEngage structures. Regional networks and the Alliance may not always have the capacity, expertise, or legal standing to responsibly handle complex cases (e.g., sexual exploitation, cross-jurisdictional cases, or cases involving minors).

Therefore, we provide below a quick capacity and readiness assessment guidance to support early decision-making:

Suggested guiding questions:

- Do we have trained personnel to handle this type of case?
- Does the case involve minors or potentially criminal conduct? (Where mandatory reporting laws apply, the Alliance will comply with legal obligations.)
- Are there legal risks or jurisdictional issues beyond our competence?
- Is MenEngage best positioned to lead, monitor, or refer this case?

Parameters to consider:

- **Severity of the harm** – type of violation and one-time vs. pattern
- **Parties involved** and where it occurred (e.g. Board member, vendor, client, minors; external venue)
- **Legal and compliance obligations**
- **Risk of recurrence**
- **Organizational impact** – culture, reputational impact, etc.

Based on this assessment, MenEngage may decide to:

- Lead the case internally;
- Co-handle the case with regional or global support;
- Refer the matter to an external body (e.g., external reviewer, employer, law enforcement, safeguarding authority);
- Monitor and follow up without leading the process directly.

External Expertise

If resources allow, consider involving external mediators or facilitators. Their expertise can contribute to a fair and equitable resolution, providing an impartial perspective that ensures fairness and unbiased treatment of complaints. Additionally, involving external parties can bring valuable skill sets, knowledge, and experience in handling complaints, significantly increasing the likelihood of achieving a successful outcome.

To facilitate timely engagement, it is recommended to pre-identify such organizations and individuals at national, regional, and global levels. This proactive approach ensures that suitable experts are readily available to be contacted when needed, minimizing delays in addressing complex or sensitive cases.

Reporting Complaints

Anyone and/or groups who believe they have been affected by wrongdoing within MenEngage Alliance, including its country and regional networks, and member organizations, can report complaints via our reporting channels.

Types of Issues

Complaint: A formal expression of grievance that requires a response and resolution.

Concern: A matter of importance or worry, which may or may not escalate into a formal complaint.

Rumor: Unsubstantiated information circulating informally, which MenEngage Alliance must treat as a potential complaint requiring attention and action.

Creating an organizational culture that encourages individuals and organizations to openly express concerns and complaints is essential. By providing clear mechanisms for reporting issues and addressing them promptly, we can effectively reduce rumors, foster trust, and safeguard the organization, its members, and rights holders.

Ways to Report Complaints

There are two primary ways to report complaints:

Identified Report: Complaints where the complainants include their name and contact information for potential follow-up.

Anonymous Report: Complaints submitted without any identifying information.

Available Reporting Channels

It is imperative to disseminate multiple channels by which anyone can file complaints or provide critical feedback about the work of the Alliance and its members. These channels include:

1 Global Reporting Page

The MenEngage Global reporting page provides a central mechanism for submitting complaints. The page provides clear guidelines for anyone who wants to file a complaint, including links to an Incident Report Form (see Annex I).

2 Direct Communication with Reporting Channels

Channels include: focal points in regional networks; a designated member of the Global Board of Directors; the Alliance Global Co-Chairs; Co-Directors of the Global Secretariat; and Staff of the Global Secretariat. The complainant also has the option to report the incident via another person in the Alliance that they trust.

3 Anonymous Reporting via Independent Reviewer

If complainants are not comfortable reporting to the regional focal points or the Global Secretariat, they can use an external, independent reviewer who is not part of MenEngage Alliance (to avoid possible conflicts of interest). This option should be chosen only when complainants have reasonable concerns about impartiality or safety with the regional or global channels.

4 Oral Complaints

Complaints may also be submitted verbally — in person, by phone, or through an online meeting. In such cases, the designated focal point or trusted person who receives the complaint is responsible for documenting it in writing, using the standard complaint form, and confirming the accuracy of the record with the complainant.

Handle Complaints with Care and Integrity

Step by Step Process

For a summarized version of the process described below, see Annex III: Complaint Handling Workflow (Step-by-Step).

1 Acknowledge receipt promptly

Inform the complainant of receipt within two business days and outline the next steps (case by case) for a timely response and resolution. The process should start immediately after receiving the complaint.

2 Securely store the complaint

Enter the details in a secure case management system accessible only to those responsible for processing complaints. *(Target: within 2 business days.)*

3 Prepare an initial written record and assessment

Document the complaint in a written case summary and share it with the people who need to be involved in the response. Categorize according to the MenEngage Code of Conduct: abusive behavior; sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation; discrimination; conflict of interest; fraud and corruption; conduct impacting workplace integrity and safety (including digital abuse). Include a preliminary, non-judgmental assessment focused only on whether there may be a potential ethical violation. *(Target: within 2 business days.)*

4 Convene a coordination meeting

Bring together the people who need to be part of the response to confirm roles, clarify scope of responsibility, and plan next steps. *(Target: within 3 business days.)*

5 Invite the complainant for an initial conversation (if identified)

Offer a meeting to further explain the complaint and share expectations. Participation is entirely voluntary. Explain who will be present (only the individual(s) formally appointed to receive the complaint). *(Target: invitation within 7 business days.)*

6 Decide the preliminary pathway: restorative or disciplinary

Make a documented, preliminary decision on the pathway, recognizing it may be revised if new information emerges. Consider: the complainant's wishes and safety (including any immediate risk); severity and potential ongoing harm; power dynamics/conflicts of interest; patterns or prior incidents; and any legal/jurisdictional constraints. *Rule of thumb: where there is significant risk or power/control concerns, lean toward a disciplinary process; where safe, a restorative process may be pursued. (Target: decision within 10 business days of receipt.)*

7 Invite the respondent for an initial conversation (when appropriate and safe)

Offer an opportunity to understand the nature of the complaint and share their perspective. This must be conducted respectfully and without premature judgment, as part of due process.

8 Document thoroughly

Use the complainant's own words where possible; allow them to review notes for accuracy. Keep secure records of all discussions (dates, times, facts) in the case management system, ensuring confidentiality.

9 Offer information about support services

As part of a survivor-centered approach, provide the complainant with information about available supports (counseling, legal aid, social services, health care) at an appropriate stage to maintain neutrality and avoid perceived bias. Clarify whether the organization or network can facilitate access to these services.

1 Implement the chosen pathway

0 Restorative approach: Facilitate dialogue, mediation, and mutually agreed actions; document agreements and follow-up. **Disciplinary approach:** Conduct a formal investigation, convene the Review Committee, and produce findings per protocol. *The pathway may be revised if new information or safety considerations arise.*

1 Conclusions and corrective measures

1 Determine whether there was a violation of the Code of Conduct and recommend appropriate measures (disciplinary, restorative, preventive, supportive). The final determination rests with the designated authority at the appropriate level.

1 Close the case

2 Communicate the outcome to the complainant; offer a confidential feedback opportunity; ensure secure documentation.

1 Follow-up and learning

- 3 Record lessons learned and adjust policies/practices to strengthen the system.

Essential Practices When Working with Complainants

- **Listen actively:** Encourage the individual(s) to share what happened in their own words. Ask for the full story if they are ready, but do not pressure them for details.
- **Treat with respect and empathy:** Use supportive language, avoid unnecessary or accusatory questioning, and prioritize the complainant's safety, well-being, and dignity in line with a survivor-centered approach.
- **Guarantee confidentiality:** Explain clearly who will have access to the information, how it will be protected, and reassure the complainant that their privacy will be respected to the fullest extent possible. Ensure informed consent by explaining how information may be used or shared, including any legal exceptions.
- **Allow support persons:** Enable the complainant to be accompanied by a trusted support person during meetings or interviews. Consider psychosocial well-being and address potential language barriers.
- **Respect their timeline:** Do not question or challenge delays in reporting. Recognize that there are many valid reasons why reporting may take time and allow the complainant to share at their own pace.
- **Explore desired outcomes:** Discuss the complainant's expectations for resolution. Explore whether they prefer restorative justice, disciplinary action, or referral to external authorities, while clarifying their right to pursue additional avenues if dissatisfied.
- **Assure protection from retaliation:** Explain the measures in place to prevent and address retaliation, and affirm the Alliance's commitment to safeguarding the complainant.

Safeguarding of Whistleblowers

Whistleblowing is the courageous act of reporting any malpractice, breach of the Code of Conduct, or illegal behavior. MenEngage Alliance is committed to fostering a safe and supportive environment for individuals who report misconduct. We will:

- **Protect against retaliation:** Implement robust measures to prevent retaliation against whistleblowers, including clear policies, training, and confidential reporting channels.
- **Presume good faith:** Refrain from questioning the motives or credibility of whistleblowers unless there is clear evidence of malicious intent or false reporting.
- **Respect anonymity:** Offer options for anonymous reporting when appropriate and feasible.
- **Provide support:** Offer support and resources to whistleblowers, depending on the organization's capacity.

Whistleblowers are not required to provide evidence to prove their claims if they have reason to suspect something is wrong and consider it deserves further investigation by the organization or authorities.

Roles in Complaint Handling

To ensure clarity and transparency in the implementation of this process, different roles and responsibilities are identified. These may be carried out by different individuals, or, in some contexts, by the same person if team capacity requires it.

Reception and acknowledgment	The person who receives the complaint and informs the complainant about the next steps.
Interview and initial assessment	The person responsible for listening to the complainant, documenting the case, and categorizing it according to the Code of Conduct.
Information on support services	Ideally a different person, to avoid conflicts of interest, who provides guidance on available resources.
Facilitation of restorative or disciplinary processes	Can be trained internal staff or external mediators with experience in restorative justice or ethical processes.
Secure documentation	Someone responsible for maintaining secure records of the process.
Review Committee (disciplinary process)	An impartial group with technical expertise and diversity of perspectives.
Designated authority for final decisions	Depending on the level (national, regional, global), this is the person or body that makes final decisions on corrective measures.
Follow-up and evaluation	Persons responsible for documenting lessons learned and ensuring continuous improvement.

Regional and global leadership are responsible for ensuring that individuals assigned to complaint-handling roles receive appropriate training and periodic refreshers on trauma-informed interviewing, ethical documentation, confidentiality, conflict-of-interest management, power dynamics, and relevant legal frameworks.

Leadership Accountability

In cases where a MenEngage Alliance leader is alleged to have violated the Code of Conduct, they are strongly encouraged to voluntarily and temporarily step aside from their leadership role pending resolution of the complaint. This measure aims to create a neutral environment conducive to a fair and unbiased investigation while emphasizing that it is a recommendation, not a mandatory action.

It is important to clarify that stepping aside is a temporary measure and does not imply guilt. The respondent's perspective will always be heard before any action is taken, ensuring fairness throughout the process.

MenEngage Alliance leaders include Co-Chairs, Board of Director members, national and regional network coordinators, regional Steering Committee members, members of regional secretariats, Co-Directors, and Global Secretariat staff. Leadership accountability also includes directors or coordinators of member organizations even if they are not formal representatives of MenEngage networks.

If the leader chooses not to step aside, the network may need to consider implementing appropriate measures to ensure the integrity of the investigation and uphold the Alliance's values.

Enhanced Communication and Documentation

Communication guidelines

Effective complaint handling relies on clear and consistent communication with all involved parties. Key elements include:

- **Consistent and Timely Communication:** Maintain regular updates with all relevant parties to ensure transparency and trust throughout the process.
- **Message Comprehension Verification:** Confirm that messages are received and understood as intended, minimizing the risk of differing interpretations.
- **Defined Communication Channels and Protocols:** Establish clear guidelines on who communicates with whom, through which channels, at what times, and with what level of openness.

Documentation guidelines

Meticulous documentation is critical for accountability and fairness in complaint handling. Key elements include:

- **Secure and Confidential Record-Keeping:** Maintain secure, confidential records of all interactions, agreements, and decisions to protect sensitive information.
- **Standardized Templates:** Use standardized templates for meeting minutes and other key documentation to ensure consistency and clarity.
- **Sharing Agreements:** Share meeting minutes and other relevant documentation with authorized participants to ensure clear agreements are understood and followed.

Restorative vs. Disciplinary Approaches

Restorative Justice	Disciplinary Process
Focuses on repairing harm through dialogue and accountability involving all affected parties.	Emphasizes punishment and deterrence through formal investigations and penalties.
Goal: rebuild relationships and restore a sense of justice by addressing the needs of both the harmed and the responsible parties.	Goal: establish proof or evidence of wrongdoing and impose appropriate sanctions on the respondent if found guilty.
MenEngage Alliance prioritizes this approach , aligning it with a feminist, survivor-centered perspective.	Used for serious violations, repeated harmful behaviors, or when the complainant explicitly requests it.

- **Nature and severity of the violation** – Serious violations or repeated harmful behaviors may require disciplinary action.
- **Complainant's preferences** – If the complainant explicitly requests a disciplinary process, this will be given due consideration.
- **Potential for harm repair and accountability** – If a restorative process can effectively address harm, rebuild trust, and ensure non-repetition, it will be prioritized.
- **Legal and policy considerations** – Any response must align with local laws, policies, and MenEngage's survivor-centered principles.

Regardless of the approach taken, both restorative and disciplinary processes are guided by the principles of fairness, respect, and accountability.

MenEngage Alliance will make every effort to process and close complaints within a maximum of **six months**. If a case cannot be closed in that timeframe, the complainant will be informed and given an updated expected timeline.

Processing the Complaint Based on a Restorative Justice Process

Purpose: Design and facilitate a restorative process that allows understanding of the harm caused and, through meetings and restorative circles, supports awareness, accountability, reparation, non-repetition, and care for the relationships among MenEngage members.

Preparation

- **Assess the situation:** Determine if restorative justice is suitable for the complaint.
- **Involve stakeholders:** Get voluntary consent from parties and any others significantly affected. If some of the parties do not accept a restorative justice process, respect their decision and

assess if a restorative approach is still valid for the remaining parties.

- Train the facilitator: Ensure the facilitator is neutral and understands restorative practices. Consider hiring an external restorative justice facilitator, if resources allow.

Gathering Information

- Hold separate meetings with each party involved to understand their perspectives, needs, and the impact of the incident. Be prepared to conduct more than one meeting if necessary. Ensure that all parties are listened to and understood equally, avoiding any favoritism or premature judgments.

Restorative Meeting

- Establish ground rules: Create a safe space for open communication and respect.
- Facilitate dialogue: Encourage both parties to share their experiences and feelings.
- Encourage empathy building: Help each party understand the other's perspective.

Reaching an Agreement

- Develop a solution: Work collaboratively to address the harm caused and prevent future issues.
- Formalize the agreement: Document the agreed-upon steps for moving forward.

Following Up

- Monitor progress: Ensure the agreed-upon actions are being implemented.
- Evaluate the process: Assess the effectiveness of the restorative justice approach.

Important Consideration: Power Imbalances

Be mindful of power dynamics among participants and take steps to level the playing field throughout the restorative process.

Processing the Complaint Based on a Disciplinary Process

Purpose: To address serious violations of the MenEngage Code of Conduct through a formal investigation, determination of responsibility, and imposition of appropriate sanctions.

1. Review Committee

- Upon receiving a complaint, determine if a formal disciplinary process is warranted based on the severity of the alleged violation and the wishes of the affected individuals.
- Establish a Review Committee composed of impartial individuals with relevant expertise.
- The Review Committee will consist of two to five people with relevant technical expertise (e.g. gender-based violence, human rights, human resource management, women's rights). Ideally, they should represent diversity and balance in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and other relevant identity markers. Committee members should not have a conflict of interest, including close relationships with the people involved in the complaint.
- The people in charge of handling the complaint (with the support of the regional or global leadership, depending on the case) will appoint and select members for the Review Committee.
- Different types of cases may require different committee compositions to ensure appropriate expertise and impartiality.

2. Investigation

Conduct a thorough and impartial investigation, collecting evidence and interviewing relevant parties separately.

- Determine the most appropriate moment to inform the respondent that a complaint has been received and that an investigation will be or is being conducted.
- Examine any documentation provided and lead research to clarify, expand, or verify the information received.
- Ensure the protection of witnesses and the complainant from retaliation.
- If the complaint has legal implications, it may be necessary to seek legal advice.
- Request a temporary removal (leave) from the organization of the respondent, if considered necessary to continue with the investigation or to prevent potential harm.
- Assess the level of harm, the degree of threat, and the level of responsibility accepted by the respondent.
- Keep a record of all actions taken and ensure that all these records are kept confidential.

Standard of Proof: MenEngage Alliance applies the **balance of probabilities** standard in all internal investigations. This means that a finding will be made where it is more likely than not that the alleged conduct occurred (greater than 50% certainty). The seriousness of potential corrective measures does not change the evidentiary standard but may affect how carefully the evidence is weighed.

3. How to Conduct Interviews During an Ethics Investigation

- Generally, it is advisable to interview the complainant first, then the witnesses, and then the respondent.
- When conducting interviews, they must take place in a discreet location to protect privacy and avoid rumors.
- The tone of the interview should be professional instead of interrogative. Questions should be open-ended where applicable to allow subjects the opportunity to elaborate on their answers.
- At no time should the interviewer become confrontational or try to make the subject uncomfortable. The goal is to gather as much relevant information as possible, not to badger.

Questions to Complainant

- The five "W's" of journalism – "Who, What, When, Where and Why" – should be used to help set the scene and sequence of events.
- How did the events affect you personally?
- How would you like to see the situation resolved?
- Did the conduct occur at other times that you are aware of?
- Do you have any other relevant information?
- Would you like to make a final statement?

Questions to Respondent

- What is your response to the allegations?
- What is your version of the events?
- You have stated that the allegations are untrue. Is there a reason you can think of as to why the complainant would make them?

Questions for the Witnesses

- Can you describe what you saw/heard?
- Are there others who may have witnessed the event?
- Are you aware of any other relevant information?

4. Review Committee Findings

- The Review Committee analyzes the gathered evidence and determines whether a violation of the MenEngage Code of Conduct occurred.
- Prepare a detailed report outlining the findings, evidence, and conclusions. See Annex II for an outline of this report.

5. Disciplinary Action

If a violation is substantiated, the Review Committee recommends appropriate disciplinary actions based on the severity of the offense. The final decision on disciplinary action depends on the level of the case and rests with the designated authority:

- At the **national level**, the designated authority is the leadership of the respective member organization, or the national Steering Committee, or the national network secretariat.
- At the **regional level**, the designated authority is the regional Steering Committee or Secretariat.
- At the **global level**, the designated authority is the Global Secretariat or Global Board of Directors.

The determination of the appropriate level depends on the nature and scope of the case, including who is involved and the jurisdiction under which the complaint falls.

Possible disciplinary actions include: written warnings; suspension; termination of membership or employment; and referral to external authorities (if applicable).

Some complaints may imply criminal behavior that demands a report to the local authorities. The complainant is always entitled to file a criminal complaint if considered pertinent to do so, and MenEngage Alliance should collaborate in this effort.

6. Notification and Appeal

- Inform both the complainant and the respondent, in writing, of the investigation findings and any corrective or disciplinary actions taken.
- Provide clear information about appeal rights and procedures to both parties.
- Either party may submit a written appeal within 15 business days of receiving the final decision. Appeals must be based on one or more of the following grounds: procedural irregularity that may have affected the outcome; new evidence that was not reasonably available during the review; disproportionate corrective measures.
- Appeals will be reviewed by a committee not previously involved in the case. The appeal decision will be final.

7. Monitoring

- Follow up to ensure that the consequences for those found responsible for the wrongdoing and the reparation are implemented, especially that the harmful behavior has stopped and that the targets are satisfied with the outcome.
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, the Review Committee will collaborate with the complainant to find solutions to such concerns. This also applies to the respondent to the extent this is reasonably possible.
- If it cannot be determined that the incident or wrongdoing took place, the Review Committee, in consultation with the complainant, may still make recommendations to ensure the proper functioning of the organization in order to prevent such incidents.

Reaching Conclusions

Implementing Corrective Actions

Upon completion of the process of handling the complaint, appropriate corrective actions will be implemented. These actions may include restorative measures, disciplinary sanctions, or a combination of both. Other measures of civil and penal responsibility may also be taken, according to the law of the land.

In general, the Alliance seeks to reach conclusions and close cases within six months. Where this is not possible, the complainant will be informed of the reasons for the delay and given an updated expected timeline.

Key considerations for corrective actions:

- **The severity of the violation:** The nature and extent of the misconduct will influence the level of response.
- **Impact on individuals and the organization:** Consider the harm caused to the complainant, the respondent, and the overall organizational climate.
- **The expectations of those most affected:** The wishes of the victims or target of abuse should influence the decision of what correction actions are appropriate.
- **Accountability:** The degree of responsibility accepted by the respondent.
- **Prevention:** Implement measures to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

Potential Corrective Actions

The following list of corrective actions is not intended to be a fixed sequence or an exhaustive list. Actions may be applied in different orders, combined, or adapted based on the specifics of each case.

- A dialogue with the respondent, to help him/her take responsibility for their mistake, be accountable, apologize for the harm caused, make amends, and commit to not repeat.
- A written warning.
- Educational intervention with the respondent on how to practice the values included in our Code of Conduct (Respect and kindness; Affirmative consent; Fairness and equality; Ethical decision-making; Transparency and honesty; Self-reflection and growth; Speaking up for justice) and on how to take full responsibility for harmful behaviors, apologize and make amends.
- Referrals to receive psycho-educational treatment offered by external providers.
- Disciplinary actions for more serious wrongdoing may include removal from leadership positions or relieving of responsibilities within the organization, withholding of increments or promotion, fine, suspension from services from two to six months without pay, removal of membership from

the MenEngage Alliance and from his/her organization, termination, or reporting the respondent to local authorities.

- In cases of dismissal of staff or board members, or expulsion from the Alliance due to a serious breach of the Code of Conduct, MenEngage Alliance may inform relevant organizations within the sector to prevent potential harm elsewhere. Such communication should only occur after a thorough investigation has substantiated the violation and appropriate legal advice has been obtained.
- Organizational changes: Review and revise policies, procedures, or structures to address systemic issues that may have contributed to the incident.

Reparation and Support

Victims of misconduct deserve support and reparation. The organization or network handling the case may assist in accessing counseling, mental health care, and other support services, to the extent this is possible. They also deserve:

- An apology from the perpetrator (verbal and/or written) that includes a recognition of the harm caused, regardless of intent, and a commitment to no repetition.
- If mistakes were committed by the organization in the handling of the case, the leaders of the organization should also issue an apology.
- Commitment that the harmful or inappropriate behavior will cease.
- Re-credit of any leave taken due to the abuse or violence.
- Information, referrals, or guidance to access external resources and services.
- Support with legal, medical, and counseling expenses, if financially feasible.
- Transfer, with no job disadvantage (if possible and in case the complainant does not wish to work in the same premises as the respondent).
- A promotion if the target was demoted as a result of the abuse or violence.
- Those who perpetrate abuse or violence also harm the organization. Therefore, an apology to the collective who form the organization may also be necessary.

The resolution of an internal grievance procedure and transformative justice is not binding in most cases, which means that a complainant who is dissatisfied with the final determination of the Alliance's internal grievance-handling procedure can seek other recourse, including filing a lawsuit. The Alliance commits to respecting the complainant's right to pursue further action and will not obstruct or retaliate in any way.

Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement

Each complaint-handling process presents an opportunity for learning and growth. We need to engage in reflection on our experiences addressing complaints related to breaches of the Code of Conduct and other accountability matters to enhance future responses:

- **Document lessons learned:** Create a detailed record of the process, including challenges, mistakes, successes, and areas for improvement.
- **Share knowledge:** Observing confidentiality, share lessons learned with relevant stakeholders through training and documentation.
- **Give account:** Consider sharing a public statement about the results of a complaint without revealing the parties involved. This is a practice that demonstrates accountability to all stakeholders and helps to discourage future breaches of our Code of Conduct.
- **Review and update policies:** Regularly assess and update complaint-handling policies and procedures to reflect best practices and address emerging issues.
- **Monitor and evaluate:** Track complaint trends and outcomes to identify patterns and areas for improvement. At the close of the process, the person who filed the complaint will be offered the opportunity to share their perception of how the case was handled through brief, confidential feedback.
- **Prepare an annual, anonymized report** summarizing complaint metrics (e.g., number of complaints received, types of violations, regions involved, pathway adopted — restorative or disciplinary — and corrective measures implemented). This report should protect the confidentiality of all parties while strengthening institutional transparency and accountability.

ANNEXES

Practical Tools

Annex I: Incident Reporting Questions

Thank you for trusting us by reporting issues that have affected you or others. We know this can take courage, and we are committed to handling your complaint with care, respect, and confidentiality.

Be reassured that your privacy will be protected. Only the people responsible for handling complaints will see your information, and all records are kept secure and confidential.

What type of incident would you like to report?

Choose the options that best match your concern. If you're unsure, or if your issue doesn't fit the categories, you can explain later in the "Description of the Incident" section.

- Abusive behavior
- Sexual harassment, abuse, or exploitation
- Discrimination
- Conflict of interest
- Fraud or corruption
- Conduct affecting workplace integrity and safety
- I'm not sure which category this issue belongs to
- My issue does not fit in the above categories

Context of the Incident

- Name of the MenEngage member organization or network where the incident occurred
- Do you work for the organization? (Yes/No)
- What is your relationship to the organization or network?
- Who are the individuals involved, and what are their roles?
- When and where did the incident occur?
- Did the incident occur more than once? (Yes/No) — If yes: How many times?

Description of the Incident

- Please describe what happened (open text – narrative).

- Was someone from organizational or network leadership/management involved? (Yes/No) — If yes: Who?
- Has the incident been reported to anyone in the organization or MenEngage network? (Yes/No) — If yes: Who?
- Has the incident been reported to anyone outside the organization or MenEngage network? (Yes/No)
- Were there any witnesses? (Yes/No) — If yes: Who?

Confidentiality and Contact Preferences

- Do you want to remain anonymous, or are you comfortable sharing your identity?
- If you are willing to share your identity, please provide: First Name, Last Name, Phone Number, Email Address, Best time to contact you.

Supporting Information

- Do you have any files or documents to upload in support of your report? (Yes/No) — If yes, submit here.

Thank you for coming forward. Your report has been submitted successfully. If you included your contact information, you will receive confirmation within 3 business days. Please remember your report will be handled confidentially and only by those responsible for processing complaints.

Annex II: Suggested Outline for the Final Report of the Review Committee (Disciplinary Process)

1. Basic Case Information

- Case number or code (to preserve confidentiality, do not use names in the title).
- Start date of the process and key dates.
- Level leading the case (national, regional, or global).

2. Scope and Purpose of the Report

- Brief note explaining the purpose of the report (e.g., "to present findings, evidence, and conclusions regarding the complaint received on...").

3. Summary of the Complaint

- Type of incident according to the Code of Conduct.
- Brief description of what was reported (neutral language, no judgments).

4. Methodology of the Review/Investigation

- Interviews conducted (no names, only roles).
- Documents reviewed.
- Other sources of information.
- Principles applied (confidentiality, impartiality, respect).

5. Key Findings

- Facts corroborated.
- Evidence supporting them (without revealing unnecessary sensitive information).
- Aspects not corroborated or contradictory.

6. Analysis

- Assessment against the Code of Conduct and Accountability Standards.
- Consideration of seriousness, impact, and context.
- Standard of proof applied ("balance of probabilities").

7. Conclusions

- Clear determination: whether or not there was a violation of the Code of Conduct.
- Brief justification for the conclusion.

8. Recommendations

- Suggested disciplinary measures (if applicable).
- Other actions (restorative, preventive, organizational).

- Measures of support and reparation for the affected person.

9. Signature and Date

- Review Committee members validating the report.

Annex III: Complaint Handling Workflow (Step-by-Step)

This workflow provides a summarized version of the steps outlined in the section "Handle Complaints with Care and Integrity" of this document. It is intended as a practical quick-reference tool for focal points, staff, and others involved in handling complaints.

Phase 1: Intake and Initial Assessment		(Led by Focal Point / Designated Case Handler)
1. Receive Complaint	Channels: web form, email, focal points, independent reviewer, etc. Can be anonymous or identified.	
2. Acknowledge & Initial Review	Confirm receipt (within 2 business days). Preliminary check: relevance, category, immediate risk. Store securely in case management system.	
3. Prepare Initial Written Record and Assessment	Document the complaint in a case summary and share with those who need to be involved. Categorize according to the Code of Conduct. Make a non-judgmental preliminary assessment. (Target: within 2 business days.)	
4. Convene Coordination Meeting	Confirm roles, clarify jurisdiction, and plan next steps. (Target: within 3 business days.)	
5. Invite Complainant (if identified)	Offer an initial meeting to share more about the complaint and expectations. Participation voluntary; only designated receiver(s) present. (Target: invitation within 7 business days.)	
6. Decide Preliminary Pathway	Document decision on whether to pursue a restorative or disciplinary process (revisable). Consider the complainant's wishes and safety, severity, risk, power dynamics, and any external processes. (Target: within 10 business days of receipt.)	
Phase 2: Review and Process		(Led by Review Committee, Investigator, or Restorative Justice Facilitator)
7. Invite Respondent (when appropriate & safe)	Provide an opportunity to understand the complaint and share their perspective. Respectful, no premature judgment; part of due process.	
8. Document Meetings	Maintain secure, confidential records of all conversations.	

9. Provide Information on Support Services

Share available resources (counseling, legal aid, health services, etc.). Ideally delivered by a person separate from the case handler to ensure fairness.

10. Implement Chosen Pathway

Restorative approach: Dialogue, mediation, agreements.
Disciplinary approach: Investigation, review committee, findings. Pathway may be revised if safety or new information requires.

Phase 3: Determination, Closure, and Oversight

(Designated Authority with coordination by Focal Point)

11. Conclusions & Corrective Measures

Determine if Code of Conduct violation occurred. Recommend measures: disciplinary, restorative, preventive, supportive.

12. Close Case

Communicate outcome to complainant. Offer confidential feedback opportunity. Securely document all records.

13. Follow-up & Learning

Record lessons learned. Adjust policies and practices to strengthen the system.

These Guidelines in Context

The Complaint Handling Guidelines are one component of the MenEngage Alliance **Accountability Framework**, which supports members, organizations, and networks in putting the principle of accountability into practice across all aspects of our work.

The Accountability Framework promotes accountable leadership, governance, programming, advocacy, fundraising, partnerships, organizational culture, and meaningful engagement with feminist women's rights, LGBTIQ+, youth, and other social justice movements. It also includes opportunities for learning, self-reflection, mutual accountability, dialogue, and continuous improvement, helping to foster a culture of prevention, integrity, shared responsibility, and respectful relationships.

The Complaint Handling Guidelines specifically provide guidance for responding to concerns and complaints in a manner that is fair, transparent, survivor-centered, and consistent with the Alliance's Core Principles, Code of Conduct, Accountability Standards, and commitment to due process.

Learn More

To learn more about the broader accountability work of MenEngage Alliance, visit:

<https://menengage.org/approaches/accountability/about>