

How do I know if it's a complaint or a concern?

The early years foundation stage (EYFS) lists complaints and safeguarding concerns as two distinct processes, although they can overlap. Below explains the difference (as per the EYFS), but the key thing to remember is: if in doubt, speak out!

Complaint

A complaint is when a parent, carer, staff member, or member of the public expresses' **dissatisfaction about the service or practice of a setting.**

It can relate to:

- Communication
- Care routines
- Behaviour management
- Staffing
- Environments

It does not automatically mean a child is at risk of harm, but the provider must record and investigate all complaints.

Concern

A concern is any worry that a child is at **risk of harm, abuse, neglect, or exploitation,** or that an adult may be unsuitable to work with children.

This includes concerns about:

- A child's safety or welfare
- Possible abuse or neglect
- Unsafe practices or staff behaviour

There is potential that the child could be at risk of harm, so provider must take immediate action to protect the child. Concerns must be referred to local safeguarding parents and agencies as appropriate.

Feature	Complaint	Concern
Nature	Dissatisfaction	Risk of harm to a child
Urgency	Standard process	Immediate action required
Who handles it	Setting initially	Settings Designated Safeguarding Lead and external agencies
Investigation	Internal (could be escalated externally if required)	Internal and external

Sometimes, a complaint becomes a concern. For example, a parent complains about seeing a staff member shouting at children – this was raised as a complaint, but is a safeguarding concern and will be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and external agencies. The key thing is to speak out – the staff will escalate if required.

Find out more by visiting:

<https://help-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/>