

How do I complain  
about the service  
I get from the Child  
Support Agency?

**child support agency**

Information and guidance

How do I complain about the service I get from the Child Support Agency?

## What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet explains how you can make a complaint about the service you have received from us. It gives details of how to make a complaint and tells you what we will do when we receive it.

This leaflet does not explain what to do if you disagree with a decision we have made about a child maintenance calculation. If you want to know more about appealing against our decisions, get a copy of *How can I appeal against a child maintenance decision? (CSL307)*. See the back page for details.

In this leaflet we use some standard terms to talk about our services and the way we work. A glossary at the end of this leaflet explains them.

## Important information about this leaflet

This leaflet is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We have done our best to make sure the leaflet is correct as of 1 November 2008, but it may not reflect changes to the law or our procedures after this date. You may wish to get independent advice before making financial decisions based on the leaflet.

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## About us

The Child Support Agency (CSA) is the Government's child maintenance service. It is provided by the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission.

Our role is to make sure that parents who live apart from their children contribute towards their children's upkeep by paying child maintenance.

We use a standard process to work out how much child maintenance should be paid in each case and to manage the payments. We can take legal action if the right amount of money is not paid at the right time.

To get help or more information, visit our website

**[www.csa.gov.uk](http://www.csa.gov.uk)** or call us on **0845 713 3133** or **0845 713 8924** (textphone). For details of call charges, opening times and our Welsh-language helpline, see page 17.

If you want to make child maintenance arrangements privately, rather than through the CSA, contact Child Maintenance Options for impartial information and support. Visit their website at **[www.cmoptions.org](http://www.cmoptions.org)** or call them on 0800 988 0988 or 0800 988 9888 (textphone).

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How do I complain about the service I get from the Child Support Agency?

## How do I complain about the service I get from the CSA?

You can usually sort out problems with our service by talking to the people dealing with your case. But if you are still not happy about the service you have received from us, you can make a complaint.

To make a complaint, you should first let the people dealing with your case know, either by phone or in writing. You can find their contact details on any letter we have sent you. Or you can e-mail your complaint to us by using the online complaints form in the 'Your case' section of our website at **[www.csa.gov.uk](http://www.csa.gov.uk)**.

If you have a complaint about the service you have received from Child Maintenance Options, you should contact them. We do not deal with any complaints about Child Maintenance Options.

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## What happens next?

The people dealing with your case at the time you make your complaint will look at the issues you have raised. If they cannot settle your complaint, they will send it to the Complaints Resolution Team at that office.

If you aren't satisfied with how the people dealing with your case have settled your complaint, you can contact the Complaints Resolution Team direct by calling the phone number or writing to the address in the top right-hand corner of the last letter we sent you.

When the Complaints Resolution Team get the complaint from you or the people dealing with your case, they will follow the procedure on the next page.

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## Stage 1

You, or the people dealing with your case, contact our Complaints Resolution Team.

The team will let you know, within 2 working days, that they have received your complaint.

Within 15 working days, they will try to sort out your complaint or agree how to sort it out.

- If you are happy that your complaint has been sorted out, we won't take further action.
- If you are **not** happy that your complaint has been sorted out, you can ask our Complaints Review Team to look at it. **Go to stage 2.**

We describe these stages in more detail in the following pages.

## Stage 2

You can ask the Complaints Resolution Team to pass your complaint to the Complaints Review Team or you can contact them direct.



They will, within 2 working days, let you know they have received your complaint.



They will, within 15 working days, try to sort out your complaint or agree how to sort it out.

- If you still don't think your complaint has been sorted out, you can contact the Independent Case Examiner. **Go to stage 3.**

## Stage 3

If you have gone through our complaints process and are still not satisfied, you can contact the Independent Case Examiner (see page 18).



You have 6 months to contact the Independent Case Examiner from the date of your final reply from the Complaints Review Team.

- You can ask your Member of Parliament (MP) to help you make a complaint to the Independent Case Examiner.
- Your MP can also ask the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman to look at your complaint if it has been through our complaints process and you are still not happy that it has been settled. See page 14 for how to do this.

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## **How will the CSA deal with my complaint?**

We will acknowledge your complaint by phone or e-mail within 2 working days of receiving it. If we don't have your phone number or e-mail address, we'll acknowledge your complaint in writing.

We will:

- deal with you in a polite and professional way
- treat your complaint seriously and keep it confidential
- put right any mistakes as quickly as possible, and
- tell you, within 15 working days, the outcome or progress of our investigations.

If we have made a mistake, we will:

- apologise
- explain what went wrong and why, and
- make any changes needed to put it right.

## What happens when the Complaints Resolution Team receives my complaint?

Our Complaints Resolution Team try to sort out the issues that the people dealing with your case couldn't settle. You can find the team's address on the letter we'll have sent you about how much child maintenance should be paid. You can either contact them direct or send an e-mail by using our online complaints form. You can find this in the 'Your case' section of our website at **[www.csa.gov.uk](http://www.csa.gov.uk)**. We'll pass your e-mail to the Complaints Resolution Team.

The Complaints Resolution Team settle most complaints within 15 working days. They will contact you to talk about the issues you have raised and agree how to sort them out. If we don't think we can sort out your complaint within 15 working days, we'll try to agree a timetable with you.

### Your suggestions

We are always pleased to receive suggestions to help us improve our services. If you have any comments or suggestions about how you think we could improve our services, please write to the Client Service Manager at the CSA office that is dealing with your case.

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## What happens if I'm not happy with the way my complaint was dealt with?

If you are not happy with the response from the Complaints Resolution Team, you can ask our **Complaints Review Team** to consider your complaint (stage 2). They will check to see if the complaint was dealt with properly and if anything else can be done to help.

You can contact our Complaints Review Team by:

- writing to the address given on the letter the Complaints Resolution Team will have sent you, or
- sending an e-mail through **[www.csa.gov.uk](http://www.csa.gov.uk)**.

After you receive a response from the Complaints Review Team, if you still feel that we have not dealt with your complaint properly, you can write to the **Independent Case Examiner** (stage 3).

The Independent Case Examiner is appointed by the Government to give an independent view on complaints about how we have handled a case. The service is free and it is not part of the CSA.

How do I complain about the service I get from the Child Support Agency?

Before the Independent Case Examiner will accept your case, it must be satisfied that we have had the opportunity to deal with your complaint and that it has been through stages 1 and 2 of our complaints process. You should contact the Independent Case Examiner within 6 months of receiving a final reply from our Complaints Review Team.

If you want to know more about the Independent Case Examiner, get a copy of its leaflet *The Independent Case Examiner's Office – our service and standards*. See page 18 for details.

## Can I get help to make my complaint?

If you would like some help in making a complaint about our service, you could do the following.

- Ask an organisation like Citizens Advice. Our website at **[www.csa.gov.uk](http://www.csa.gov.uk)** has links to several other organisations you may find useful.
- Ask a solicitor. General advice may be available free of charge. Or, if you qualify, you may be able to get specific advice under the Community Legal Fund or other legal assistance schemes. A solicitor will be able to tell you if this applies to your case. If you are not entitled, you may have to pay all of the solicitor's costs.
- Speak to your Member of Parliament (MP).

Your MP can ask the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman to look into your complaint. The Ombudsman would expect you to first raise the matter with us and allow us to sort out the problem if we can. They will not normally become involved in a complaint before you have taken your complaint through our complaints process, including, if appropriate, having the matter reviewed by the Independent Case Examiner.

If you want to know more about the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, it can send you a leaflet *How to complain to the Ombudsman*. See page 19 for details of the Ombudsman.

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## Will I get compensation?

Your complaint about our service may show that we have treated you particularly badly. For example, we may have caused very long delays, made a serious mistake or given you incorrect information. This is called '**maladministration**'.

In these situations, an apology may not be enough because you may have lost money through our action. We may be able to pay you **compensation** to make up for your loss. If appropriate, we'll treat this as part of handling your complaint.

However, there is no legal right to compensation.

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## Where can I get more help and information?

If you want to know more about child maintenance and how we work it out, visit our website at **www.csa.gov.uk**. You can download all our leaflets from there and also find out how much child maintenance might be in your situation, using our online calculator. The calculator is for guidance only, and we don't keep the information you give when using it.

If you would like to talk to someone about your case, you should call the number on the top right-hand corner of your most recent letter from us. That number will be for the office handling your case.

If you do not yet have a case with us or cannot find a recent letter, you can contact our national helpline. The person taking your call won't have your personal information so won't be able to answer questions on your case. However, they can help you with anything general to do with child maintenance. They will also be able to give you the phone number of the office handling your case if you want to ask specific questions.

You can call the national helpline on **0845 713 3133** from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm on Saturdays.

Please have your National Insurance number with you when you call.

We may record our phone calls to check our service and to train our employees.

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## Textphone services

If you have speech or hearing difficulties, a textphone service is available on **0845 713 8924**.

Textphones are for people who find it hard to speak or hear clearly. If you do not have a textphone, some libraries or citizens advice bureaux may have one. Textphones do not receive text messages from mobile phones.

## Welsh-language helpline

If you want to speak to us in Welsh, you can ring our Welsh-language helpline on **0845 713 8091**. The line is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. There is also a Welsh-language textphone service on **0845 713 8099**.

## Other languages

If English is not your first language, you can use your own interpreter or one we provide.

## Call charges

From 1 April 2008, calls to **0845** numbers from BT landlines should cost no more than 4p a minute. You may have to pay more if you use another phone company or a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad. Calls from mobile phones can cost up to 40p a minute, so check the cost of calls with your service provider.

To visit our website, go to **[www.csa.gov.uk](http://www.csa.gov.uk)**.

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## Information in other formats

This leaflet is available in other languages in Braille and on audio cassette. You can order information in these formats online or by contacting our national helpline.

We also have large-print versions of this leaflet available for you to download from our website, **[www.csa.gov.uk](http://www.csa.gov.uk)**.

You can contact the Independent Case Examiner in the following ways.

- By phone on **0845 606 0777** (lines are open 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday).
  - If you have speech or hearing difficulties, by textphone on **0151 801 8888**.
- Through the website at **[www.ind-case-exam.org.uk](http://www.ind-case-exam.org.uk)**.
- By writing to:  
Independent Case Examiner  
PO Box 155  
Chester  
CH99 9SA.

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You can contact the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman in the following ways.

- By phone on **0845 015 4033** (lines are open from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday).
- Through the website at **[www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)**.
- By writing to:  
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman  
Millbank Tower  
Millbank  
London  
SW1P 4QP.

You can contact the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman to find out more about how to complain to them and whether they will accept your complaint.

But to complain to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, you must go through your MP.

## How a child maintenance case can progress

This diagram shows you how a child maintenance case can progress. This leaflet covers part of the process at the highlighted stage.



### Information and guidance

CSA can provide information on how the process works, what parents will need to do and what might be an acceptable amount of maintenance in their case.



### Application

A case officially begins when a parent applies to us to set up child maintenance payments.

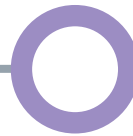
**If there is a change in either parent's life that could affect the amount of child maintenance that should be paid, we can review your case – let us know.**

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### **Gathering information and calculation**

To work out the amount of child maintenance that should be paid, we need to gather important information. We ask both parents to provide certain information. When we have this, we will work out child maintenance.



### **Payment**

The non-resident parent pays the agreed amount on the agreed dates and in the agreed way. This can be either direct to the parent with care, or to us. We then pass the payments on.

### **Enforcement**

If the payments aren't made on time, we can take action.

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## **Leaflets available from us**

### **What is child maintenance and how does it affect me?**

(Reference: CSL301) For all parents

### **How do I complain about the service I get from the Child Support Agency?**

(Reference: CSL308) For all parents

### **How do I apply for child maintenance?**

(Reference: CSL309) For children aged 12 and over in Scotland or their parents

### **How is child maintenance worked out?**

(Reference: CSL303) For all parents

### **What happens if someone denies they are the parent of a child?**

(Reference: CSL304) For all parents

### **How can I appeal against a child maintenance decision?**

(Reference: CSL307) For all parents

### **My case is moving to the child maintenance scheme introduced in 2003 – what will change?**

(Reference: CSL310) For any parent whose case is moving to the current scheme

### **How does the Child Support Agency use and store information?**

(Reference: CSL311) For all parents

### **How do I pay child maintenance?**

(Reference: CSL305) For non-resident parents

### **How will I receive child maintenance?**

(Reference: CSL314) For parents with care

### **What action can the Child Support Agency take if parents don't pay?**

(Reference: CSL306) For all parents

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## **Glossary**

### **Child maintenance**

Money the non-resident parent pays to the parent with care to help pay for their child's everyday living costs.

### **Complaints Resolution Team**

The Complaints Resolution Team try to sort out the issues the CSA team dealing with your case couldn't settle. They also look at complaints about the way someone who works for us has dealt with a case.

### **Complaints Review Team**

The Complaints Review Team look at complaints from people who are not happy about how the Complaints Resolution Team dealt with the matter. They check to see if the complaint was dealt with properly and to see if anything else can be done to help.

### **Independent Case Examiner**

This is a free service that looks into complaints about how we have handled a case.

### **Non-resident parent**

The parent who the child does not normally live with.

### **Parent with care**

The parent or carer who the child normally lives with and who therefore pays for most of the child's everyday living costs. In some cases this can be a grandparent, guardian or other family member – who is then known as the 'person with care', rather than the parent with care.

CSA leaflets are also available in other languages, in large print, in Braille and on audio cassette.

You can get any of these leaflets:

- by phone on **0845 713 3133** (the line is open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm on Saturdays)
- by textphone on **0845 713 8924**, or
- from our website at **[www.csa.gov.uk](http://www.csa.gov.uk)**.

Where textphone numbers are provided, these are for people who find it hard to speak or hear clearly. If you do not have a textphone, some libraries or citizens advice bureaus may have one. Textphones do not receive text messages from mobile phones.

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