



Complaints and How to Survive Them

Workbook, CPD and Reflection Log

Feeling overwhelmed? Worrying about making a mistake and a patient claim being made against you? It's enough to give you restless nights.

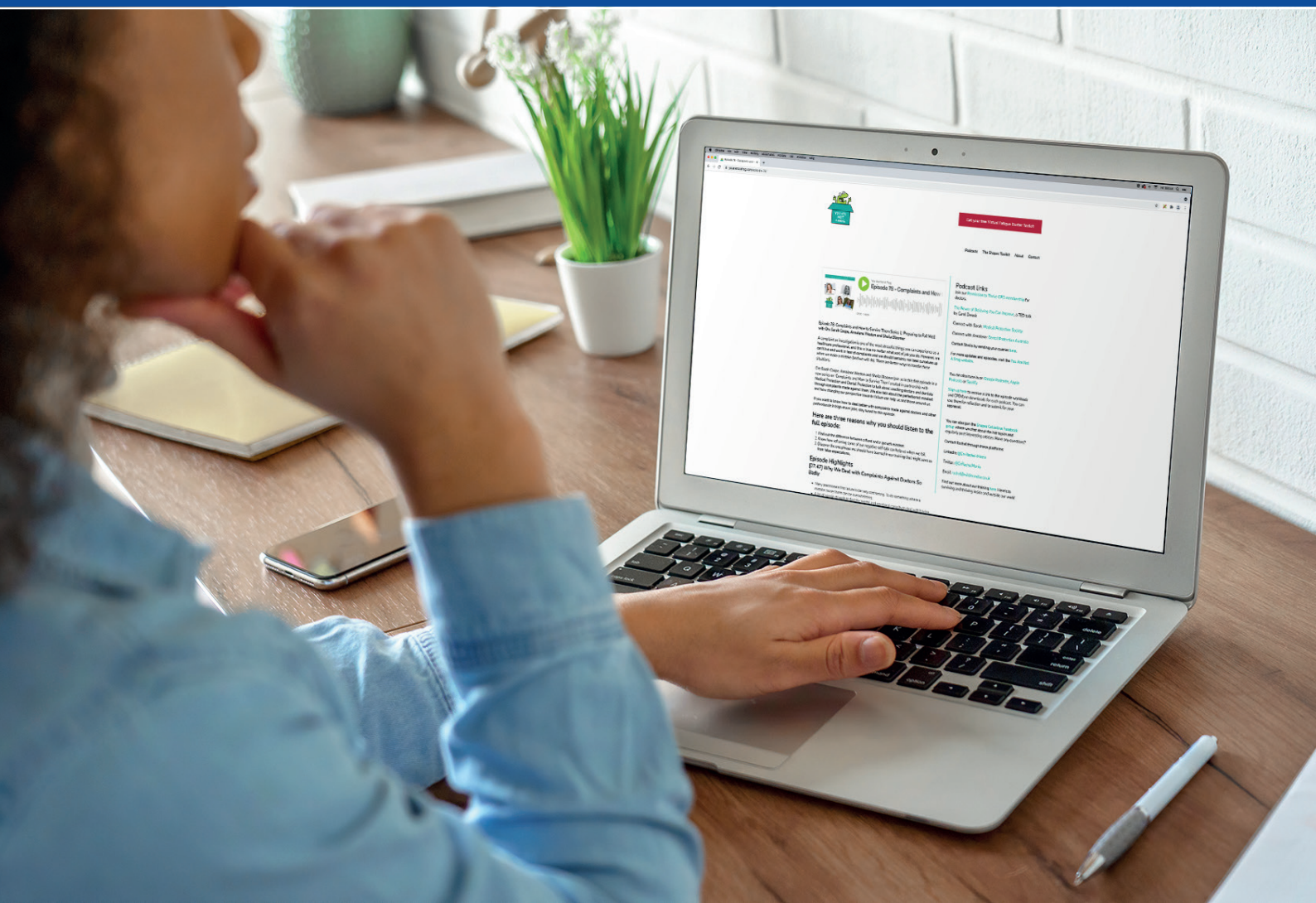
To help you face the fear, we've partnered with **You Are Not A Frog** podcast to bring you a special series called **Complaints and How to Survive Them**.

The podcast shares life hacks for doctors, dentists and busy professionals who want to beat burnout and work happier.

Hosted by Dr Rachel Morris, a GP, Speaker, Executive Coach, and specialist in resilience in the workplace, it features interviews with colleagues and experts.

It's a highly recommended tool to have in your wellbeing toolbox.

For more episodes of You Are Not A Frog, you can visit youarenotafrog.com, follow Rachel on Twitter @DrRachelMorris and find out more about her online and face to face courses on surviving and thriving at work at shapestoolkit.com.



Welcome to the **Complaints and how to survive them** workbook. Each episode has a supporting worksheet and CPD form. You can use them for reflection and to submit towards your appraisal.

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Complaints and how to survive them

Episode 1: Preparing to fail well

With Drs Sarah Coope, Annalene Weston and Sheila Bloomer

'Really, a mistake is a way to learn and grow and move forward not just for ourselves, but — as Sarah, Rachel and Annalene have been saying — it's a way of helping others as well. Because unless you've been in the shoes of someone who's made a mistake, it's difficult to give them guidance about how to get through it.'

Listen and podcast links

youarenotafrog.com/episode-78 - In this episode, Rachel is joined by Drs Sarah Coope, Annalene Weston and Sheila Bloomer. They share their experiences with coaching doctors on complaints made against them. They also discuss the difficulties of dealing with failures and share valuable advice on how to cope with its effects.

Shifting from a perfectionist mindset with high expectations is vital to handle complaints and mistakes in the workplace better. It's normal for mistakes to happen, and it's important to acknowledge that you're only human. You can always learn to handle difficult situations with more empathy and kindness for yourself and the people around you.

Learn

It is common and normal to make mistakes. It's also very common for us to process and react to them in ways that don't help us. When we're confronted by our mistakes, it's easy to berate ourselves and become preoccupied with what we've done wrong. This is especially true when our mindset, as well as our environment, is clouded by perfectionism which can then affect our physical, mental and emotional well-being.

But mistakes happen no matter how careful we are, or how much training we've had, or how much we put others first. Sometimes we have to accept that these things simply occur. We can choose to lose ourselves in our mistakes, believing that we can never change, or we have the option to learn and grow from them.

The following activity centres on self-inquiry where you are reminded to allow time and space for yourself to reflect on what went wrong. Doing so can help you examine what happened in a much clearer light. You can learn to acknowledge failures and mistakes and move on by learning from them.

This activity reminds you that there is always room for improvement. Nobody's perfect, and mistakes are always bound to happen, but mistakes don't make you a bad person. So be kind to yourself just as you would be to others.

Activity: How to shift your mindset to handle complaints and mistakes in the workplace

What significant thoughts come up when I'm faced with failure?

What are my biggest fears in my workplace? Do most of them relate to failure?

What powerful emotions come up when I make a mistake (eg shame, anger)? Is there anything that underlies these emotions?

Do my emotions help or hinder me from going through my day? Have I experienced situations where I was too preoccupied with my mistake?

How can I reframe my thoughts so that I don't dwell on my failures or on feelings of doubt and fear among others?

How can I release my emotions so that I don't dwell on them? What activities help me de-stress?

When I feel like a failure, what are three things I can do immediately to calm down or to feel less alone?

Who can I approach to talk about what I'm going through?

What would I say to a colleague or good friend who has made a mistake? Write at least three things you would say to that person. For example, *It's okay, mistakes are a normal part of life...*

Using what you wrote above, tell this to yourself whenever you make a mistake.

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Episode 2: What to do when you make a mistake

With Drs Clare Devlin and John Powell

'Reflection isn't just a word. It's an important professional attribute where we understand what we're doing and what has happened when things go wrong.'

Listen and podcast links

youarenotafrog.com/episode-80 - Joining us in this episode of You Are Not A Frog are Drs Clare Devlin and John Powell. Clare is a medicolegal consultant at MPS with a background as a paediatric doctor. Meanwhile, John is an employer liaison officer with GMC. He also has a background as a GP partner and trainer. They have both supported multiple doctors in dealing with complaints.

Clare and John share what you should and shouldn't do when facing a complaint from a patient and dealing with a mistake. They guide us through the steps and process of facing these complaints and moving forward as a better doctor. How can we do what's best for the patient and ourselves? This is the question we answer in the episode.

Learn

Working in the medical or dental field, you do your best to help the people who come to you as patients. You work hard, long hours and do your best so that they can leave the room healthier, happier and on the road to recovery. You've done all this to help them — so what do you do when you realise you've made a mistake?

In the following activity, you can create a comprehensive guide and roadmap that you can use when you find yourself in a difficult situation. From your immediate reaction to the long-term struggle of worrying about the resolution, you can learn to actively apply the helpful advice Clare and John imparted in the episode.

With the help of your colleagues, friends and medical/dental defence organisations, you can find ways to minimise negative consequences, get good outcomes and become a better doctor or dentist moving forward.

Activity: Mapping mistakes

It's okay to be scared to make mistakes. Step by step, you can face and overcome these hurdles and grow from them to become a better person and doctor or dentist.

Step 1: Take a step back and breathe.

Panic can cloud our mind. Do you have your own calming techniques or exercises? If not, ask a friend or check trusted websites for calming techniques to help you in this kind of situation. Write the steps of your chosen technique down below:

Step 2: Find support.

Speak to a medical/dental defence organisation or a trusted colleague for advice and guidance as soon as possible. List down different people and organisations who could give support and advice, including their contact details.

Name	Contact Number	E-mail Address	Notes

Step 3: Write it down.

Writing it down can keep everything as accurate as possible for future use. This can help you organise your thoughts and reflect on what you can do better. Do you remember a mistake you've made or complaint you received? Write down what happened in the space below. How did you address the issue then?

Step 4: Communicate with the patient.

The problem is not one-sided. Your patient has also been affected. Clare and John reiterate multiple times the importance of a carefully worded, sincere apology and reassurance. List down some tips for apologising shared by Clare and John.

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In the space below, write a draft of an apology to a patient who might have been affected by the mistake you reflected on in Step 3. Don't forget the tips you listed above.

Step 5: Reflect, analyse, learn and apply.

Remember the mistake you've reflected on in Step 3? Take a moment to reflect a little more. What did you personally do which contributed to the mistake? What could you do differently next time?

What did you do which may have contributed to the mistake?	What could you do differently next time?

Are there any other learning points for you about how you handled the mistake or complaint?

Now, let's put it all together. From steps one to five, create a roadmap for what you will do the next time you make a mistake or get a complaint. You can note essential things to consider under each step, such as the calming technique to use or how your apology should go. Illustrate your map in the box below so that you could remember them better.



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Episode 3: Surviving the process

With Drs Jessica Harland, Caroline Walker and Heidi Mounsey

'So I think it's just remembering those basic human needs — to feel that we're not a terrible person, this isn't the end of the world, and there are things that can be done to help us through it.'

Listen and podcast links

youarenotafrog.com/episode-82 - Drs Jess Harland, Caroline Walker and Heidi Mounsey join Rachel in this episode to discuss how to look out for yourself when you're facing a work complaint.

Receiving a complaint can be a worrying and isolating experience. Emotions such as shame, anger, frustration, embarrassment and even grief can paralyse us and keep us from caring for ourselves. But we should understand that we are not alone in this experience — everyone makes a mistake or receives a complaint about their work at some point.

There are practical ways to overcome the stress that accompanies mistakes. We should allow ourselves to process our thoughts and emotions in the right way. No one is alone: reach out to others if we need a listening ear or helping hand.

Learn

Dealing with a complaint can undoubtedly be stressful and time-consuming. While it's helpful to feel all the emotions that come with it, dwelling on the negative feelings won't benefit you.

Before responding, as much as possible, pause and assess if you're in the right headspace to respond. Ask for an objective lens on the matter from a colleague or another professional, and definitely get advice from your medical/dental defence organisation. They can help you unpack the elements of the complaint and your response. Getting another opinion will help you see the issue from a fresh perspective. This enables you to avoid the extremes of lashing out at the person on the other end and yourself.

You need to give yourself enough time to process the experience of handling a complaint. If you feel stuck, reach out to someone to help you deal with the emotional impact. These aren't always easy conversations but talking with someone about what you're going through may help ease some of the burden. You can then process and manage the complaint better.

Remember that receiving a complaint happens more commonly than you think. Hopefully, you will recognise the importance of looking out for yourself by reaching out to others and allowing yourself the time and space to cope.

Activity: Surviving the process

What expectations do you have of yourself in the workplace? Are these realistic? Do you think you need to adjust any expectations?

Expectations for myself	Can I make this more realistic?

When you receive a complaint, do you feel it's an attack on your professionalism? From where or from whom could you get an objective take on the matter?

What does it mean to internalise your problems? How would it benefit you to share what you're going through?

What boundaries will you set for yourself when you receive a complaint or make a mistake at work? (for example, blocking off enough time to deal with it, not taking on too much extra work, creating time to reflect on the complaint with your colleagues)

What thoughts (stories in your head) do you commonly have when you've made a mistake which aren't helpful to you? Write these down. Then write down a more helpful re-framed thought (what is actually true), eg Unhelpful thought: Why on earth did I make that mistake? I must be dreadful at my job. Thought re-framed: Everyone makes mistakes, it's how we learn - what can I learn from this?

You may benefit from talking these through with a trusted colleague.

Thoughts that do not help	Thoughts re-framed

Are you practising enough self-care? Write a list of things you could do to stop you ruminating and look after yourself better.

Where can you comfortably and safely reach out to for support? This might be a community, a person, or a group of people.

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Complaints and how to survive them

Episode 4: Creating a workplace where it's okay to fail

With Prof Susan Fairlie and Dr Jane Sturgess

'Let's demonstrate that it is okay to speak up. So, I think the trust will come from when people see that they're being taken seriously.'

Listen and podcast links

youarenotafrog.com/episode-84 - In this episode, Prof Susan Fairlie and Dr Jane Sturgess join us to share their thoughts on speaking up in the workplace.

They give us valuable insights on changing a workplace culture that does not allow us to fail and prevents us from having difficult conversations. They shed light on the numerous challenges we face regarding speaking up at work. Crucially, they talk about the importance of having an environment that encourages failing fast instead of failing big. We also touch on the topic of incident reports and why we need to submit them.

It's okay to speak up. Learn how feedback and having honest conversations are valuable to you, your organisation, and your patients.

Learn

Everyone makes mistakes, even healthcare professionals. While they are common, they shouldn't be concealed or ignored. Instead, they should be addressed and become grounds for improvement.

The following activity will help you realise the importance of incident reporting and difficult conversations by reflecting on their profound impact on workplace culture and patient safety.

We also go through the negative connotations we often associate with terms like mistakes, near misses, near hits, and incident reporting. In addition, this activity aims to help you change your mindset when it comes to filing incident reports, as well as gain valuable insights on how you can make tricky yet vital conversations with your team more bearable.

It's better to fail fast and early than to fail later with more significant consequences.

Activity: Speaking up at work

Think about the culture at your workplace. Do you feel that you're in an environment where you can speak up? Are you allowed to challenge your colleagues and superiors? If not, what could you do about it?

Toxic workplaces have higher staff turnover and more errors. How do you think your work environment is affecting your performance?

Recall instances where you were afraid or anxious to have a difficult conversation with a colleague. What would you do differently next time?

Are there any models discussed in the podcast which would help you give and receive feedback better? Describe the model and reflect on how you could apply it in your workplace interactions.

Are there any other ways in which you could improve how you give feedback to your colleagues?

List down the ways you could address any transparency and honesty barriers due to hierarchy. What did Susan and Jane do so that their juniors would speak up? Which of these can you do, and which can you not?

1.
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4.
5.

How do you differentiate between niceness and kindness? How can you become more kind in your workplace?

Many organisations forego or even weaponise incident reports. However, these can be powerful sources of information and learning. Do you have fears and anxieties about incident reporting? How can you overcome these?

What could your organisation do differently so that incidents and 'near hits' become a crucial way of learning?

Lack of trust is one of the barriers to transparency within a team. How could you build trust among your team?

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Episode 5: What should I do when I think a complaint is unfair? And other questions...

With Drs Sarah Coope, George Wright, Samantha White, and Andrew Tressider

'We're not here to win complaints. That's not the aim of the game; the aim of the game is to resolve complaints.'

Listen

No one goes to work expecting to fail. Yet, making mistakes in your job is pretty normal. After all, no one has a perfect success rate. As a healthcare professional, you will likely encounter complaints from patients throughout your career. And going through them can be one of the most stressful things you can experience.

In this episode, Rachel invites a panel of medical professionals to talk about how to deal with complaint processes. We will discuss the skills and mindset you should develop to manage yourselves and your patients. We also tackle how to recognise malicious complaints and handle our own response when we think it's grossly unfair. Finally, we examine how we can have a constructive conversation to support a trainee or colleague.

If you want to understand why complaints are mostly about emotions rather than facts, listen to the full episode. Even when it can be an overwhelming process, complaints will pass eventually, and they can be good opportunities for you to grow.

Learn

The goal of this workbook is to help you develop the mindset you need to handle complaints well. Specifically, it aims to teach you how to seek a resolution rather than a win. The following questions ask you to reflect on your experiences as a healthcare professional, and some items focus on the takeaways you have learned in dealing with complaints.

For example, one of the discussions emphasises recognising your emotions first before addressing the issue at hand. You will learn why this is key in handling complaints. When you are threatened, you are more likely to go on the defensive. Being in this state can be counterintuitive to finding a solution.

By the end of this activity, you will also identify strategies and approaches to handling and coping with complaints. Ultimately, you will appreciate the importance of building rapport, providing assurance, and agreeing to disagree in certain situations.

Activity: Reflecting on emotions in complaints

Complaints are often not about facts but feelings. Think back to a complaint you've received (either 'official' or just someone talking to you) How did listening to the patient and acknowledging their feelings contribute to handling their complaint?

How do policies and procedures help in preventing the escalation of complaints? How easy is it for patients to access the complaints procedure in your workplace? Is there anything you need to do about this?

When you feel threatened, you tend to lose yourself in the fight or flight response. In this case, you often cannot hear what your patient is really trying to say. What strategies have you learned to recognise your feelings and control your emotions?

What are some other strategies or techniques that you can use to manage yourself when faced with a complaint that you feel is unfair or unwarranted?

Perspective is crucial when faced with malicious complaints. How can you depersonalise issues?


Your goal is not to win against the complainants but to resolve the issue. Why do you think many healthcare professionals still fall into the trap of wanting to win? How can you stop yourself from falling into this trap?

There will be instances where you need to agree to disagree with your complainant. Recall a time you and your patient didn't meet eye-to-eye. What have you learned from that experience?

How can you provide assurance, support, and a safe space for your trainees and/or colleagues who are dealing with a complaint?

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