



Complaining about a COSRT Member

Complaining about a COSRT Member

This guidance has been edited for plain English. Published August 2019
Comes into effect 5 August 2019

Upholding professional standards and conduct

COSRT is the Professional Body for psychotherapists and counsellors providing sexual and relationship therapy. We set strict professional standards that all our Members must adhere to. These standards are contained in 'Good Therapy – COSRT Code of Ethics and Practice', and 'Good Therapy – COSRT Code of Ethics and Practice for Supervisors'. We have a detailed Conduct Procedure that is used to manage any complaint made against a COSRT Member.

What to do if you have concerns

The process of therapy is normally smooth and unproblematic, but sometimes things may go wrong and leave you feeling concerned. In the first instance, and where possible, an effective way to address concerns is to raise them directly with your therapist to see if the situation can be resolved. But there are times when speaking with your therapist isn't enough or even the right thing to do. For example, a concern may be over serious misconduct, you might feel uncomfortable speaking with them, or they may not be able or willing to address your concerns in the way you would like.

So, you should always feel comfortable approaching COSRT for support. If you get in touch with us with a concern over a Member, we can speak with you in complete confidence to understand what has happened. We will be able to point you in the direction of support when needed and will make sure the COSRT Conduct Procedure is explained so you can make a complaint if you wish to.

If you would like to share concerns informally and in confidence, please email complaints@cosrt.org.uk in the first instance. This is a secure mailbox monitored by staff responsible for overseeing the complaints procedure.

How to make a complaint

If you would like to make a formal complaint against a COSRT Member, there are some steps to take. First, you should read the Good Therapy – COSRT Code of Ethics and Practice, and Good Therapy – COSRT Code of Ethics and Practice for Supervisors. These explain how COSRT Members are supposed to act. Please try and identify the ways in which the therapist has not met expectations laid out in these documents. Then send a written complaint which contains at least:

- The details of the COSRT Member
- An overall description of what your complaint is about
- The date(s) that the conduct you are complaining about happened

- An indication of which parts of the Good Therapy – COSRT Code of Ethics and Practice, and Good Therapy – COSRT Code of Ethics and Practice for Supervisors you feel have been breached by the Member
- Any evidence you must support your allegation
- Your name and contact details

Then send a signed copy of your complaint to complaints@cosrt.org.uk

Who can make a complaint?

Complaints must be made and signed by one person. That person can be:

- Someone who has had or is getting services from a COSRT Member
- Someone acting for another person who has received or is receiving a service from a COSRT Member. Remember that you must get the person's written permission, and there must be a reason that they aren't bringing the complaint themselves.
- a legal guardian, or other appropriately authorised adult representing someone under 16.
- Someone acting on behalf of an adult lacking mental capacity (within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005) to bring a complaint.
- Someone from the Police or other relevant organisations.

The type of things we investigate

The first thing to confirm is that the person you are complaining about is a Member of COSRT. When you know that, check when the conduct you are complaining about happened. COSRT only accepts complaints about things that happened within one year unless you can provide a detailed explanation of any delay in complaining. There are many different types of thing that you might have concerns about, but many complaints that we receive and deal with cover:

- The way a Member has acted when providing services, for example, how they deal with things like contracts or how they speak to you.
- The standard of therapy provided by a Member, for example, how you are listened to or whether they give appropriate therapies.
- How a Member has behaved outside their clinical work, for example, committing a crime or bringing COSRT into disrepute.

Things we do not deal with

COSRT is very careful to only accept complaints that meet set standards. Some of the complaints that we will not accept are those that are:

- Frivolous or meant to cause trouble for a Member.
- Not connected in a meaningful way to Member's professional work.
- About things being investigated by the Police, or that are part of legal proceedings.

What happens when you complain?

When you complain the CEO of COSRT will check your complaint to make sure it meets some set standards. This check decides whether it is accepted. If it is accepted, you will be told, and the complaint process will begin.

A Case Manager will look after the entire complaint process and will be a constant point of contact. They will appoint an independent person to investigate the complaint and gather evidence. This person will speak to everyone involved in the complaint when they can and will produce a full report at the end of their work.

The investigation report will contain all the information on what evidence suggests might have happened. This will be considered by a small panel which will decide what to do next. If the evidence is strong enough, they will make sure the complaint continues to the next stage.

That stage is to make a very clear written statement detailing what specific misconduct the Member is accused of. The panel will then decide how serious the concerns are and what course of action is appropriate. One choice is to propose actions that the Member engages in what is called Consensual Agreement Resolution. This is a process designed to help Members learn lessons and improve how they work. The panel can propose giving informal advice or more formal warnings or ask the Member to do things like take training or enter mediation with you. The Member must agree to engage with this process though, and if they don't then the complaint will continue.

A second option that the panel can propose is a formal Adjudicated Hearing. This is often reserved for issues where there are strong concerns over things like public protection. It involves a more formal panel meeting a bit like a court, with the Member and other people attending to give evidence and be questioned. When the hearing is finished the Panel, members work together to decide what their decision is on whether they feel the allegations are proven, and what the proper sanction is.

What we can do

If a complaint progresses to the point where action is recommended, there are a range of things that we can do. These include:

- Giving advice and guidance on how a Member can improve their practice.
- Giving a formal warning to a Member on their conduct which will be published.
- Recommending mediation to help the complainant and Member resolve the issue.

- Demanding that the Member makes specific changes or improvements to their practice, and if a Member fails or refuses to comply with those sanctions, withdraw their membership
- Suspending or ending a Member's COSRT membership.
- Publishing details of the complaint and sanctions.

What we cannot do

It is very important to understand that there are things that we cannot do as a professional body. For example, we cannot stop someone practicing therapy, or help you to pursue financial compensation.