
Process for Dealing with *Grievances Against Leaders (and other figures of authority within YWAM)

**Grievance - an official statement of complaint over something believed to be wrong, unjust or unfair.*

Begin with the concise overview, and for a more detailed explanation, click on each link provided or go directly to the full version from page 4.

This document particularly addresses situations and conflicts where there is no evidence of criminal offence or activity. Where there is accusation of serious criminal offence, we are obligated to contact the police.

OVERVIEW

STEPS TO TAKE IN DEALING WITH GRIEVANCES AGAINST LEADERS

CONTEXT

STEP 1

When someone has a grievance against another person, they should go and share their concern as Matthew 18 encourages. If your concerns are not heard, Matthew 18 advises taking a friend with you as a follow-up to assist, and to provide feedback in the dialogue. This may be difficult because of differences in position and influence, but attempts should be made to keep the issue and situation as personable (low key) and relational as possible. It is our hope that most cases will be resolved here in step 1 and kept within the local context.

STEP 2

If a resolution hasn't been successful in step 1, a mediation process is encouraged with one or two impartial mediators bringing each side together. The mediator/s are selected people agreed upon by both parties, and might be elders, not necessarily in line leadership, who have basic understanding and experience in mediation. This will enable both parties to share their perspectives, seek to bring understanding and with a hopeful outcome of reconciliation and a memorandum of understanding (guidelines for an ongoing relationship).

INVESTIGATION PROCESS

STEP 3

In more complex situations, a point person should be brought into the dialogue to ensure the process moves forward in a timely manner. The point person is someone appointed by a base, nation, Area or Field to handle more serious conflict or grievance issues. They should have a working knowledge of relevant national laws, as well as the formal steps to take.

The point person should draw together a process team to decide on the next steps and to determine if there have been other similar complaints from more staff or leaders.

STEP 4

The process team identifies and determines the severity of the complaints.

STEP 5

If evidence emerges of serious abuse in the full investigation process, formal steps must be taken and the relevant authorities involved. An independent non-YWAM agency may also be consulted.

We are subject to the laws of each individual country, and the process team should respond appropriately to all criminal activity.

DECISION PROCESS

STEP 6

The process team, with reports now completed, have three possible courses of action:

1. The ideal would be both sides meeting again with two people from the process team and the mediator/s. The purpose of this is to bring factual clarity, highlight misunderstandings, identify wrong attitudes, behaviour and communication, encourage forgiveness if necessary, repentance where there is wrongdoing, and reconciliation of relationships.
2. In cases of serious abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, coercive, spiritual), a complainant should not be forced to meet with an alleged abuser. Although Matthew 18 is a core biblical principle for resolving general inter-personal conflict, it is not right to insist on this in cases of abuse. If there is a clear allegation of the law being broken through criminal activity or abuse, it has to be reported to the police.

3. Should there be resistance from the complainants to enter a mediation process after encouragement from the process team, then this creates a difficulty in bringing resolution. However, an open conversation with the accused is important as soon as possible, especially when there are multiple complaints, to bring awareness and understanding of weaknesses and sin.

Whatever option is chosen, communication of the outcome to all parties involved is required. The outcome of the process should also be communicated to the staff community by the process team.

A [*memorandum of understanding*](#) should be created which also can be accessed by future board and leadership teams.

STEP 7

Disciplinary action is taken where needed.

APPEAL PROCESS

STEP 8

Outline the appeals process for ongoing investigation.

DURING & AFTERCARE PROCESS

STEP 9

Ongoing care for the leader and the staff and all those affected is extremely important throughout and after the process.

FULL VERSION

Steps to take in dealing with grievances against leaders

OBJECTIVE

In the Kingdom of God, relational objectives during conflict involve the reconciliation and restoration of relationship. It is the responsibility and the obligation of both parties to work towards this end and to apologise or ask for forgiveness for any wrongdoing for which they are responsible.

A reconciliation process must emphasise the concepts of truth, justice, mercy, forgiveness and repentance in the hope that trust can be established and built on once again.

A helpful resource is 'Journey toward Reconciliation.' by John Paul Lederach - Herald Press 1999, with the theme of justice, mercy, peace and truth from Psalm 85:10.

Quote from Dr. Tom Bloomer, Int. UofN Provost Emeritus: *"Jesus shed his blood on the cross, not only to reconcile us to God, but to reconcile us to each other. Therefore, any process that does not have reconciliation as its ultimate goal is simply not biblical."*

Matt 5:23-24, 1 Jn 2:9-10, 1 Jn 4:7-8, Matt 18:33-35

PROCEDURE

A five-phase process including, **Context, Investigation, Decision, Appeal** and **Aftercare** is suggested below.

A clear timeline of events (as short as possible and as long as necessary) should be communicated to avoid added uncertainty and stress for everyone. This can be modified with clear communication as needed.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict resolution and mediation should be processed at the level and within the environment where grievance first was identified or expressed. In a local situation, the local elders and leaders should take responsibility. Support from national or international circles may be requested and needed, but the responsibility rests with the local leaders and elders.

If the complaints require national or international attention and involvement, it is important that the national leadership team/convener (NLT) has developed a crisis management strategy & policy, including dealing with media attention. The national strategy & policy must also have

a local expression and connection. The national board is responsible to establish documents that are aligned with YWAM values.

In YWAM Europe, the NLT's role is to support local situations, the Area Circle Teams (ACT's) oversee the NLT's and the Field Circle Team (FCT) role is supporting the Area conveners. This guideline also expresses the accountability structure within YWAM.

A. CONTEXT

STEP 1: Sharing a grievance

When a staff member has a grievance against a leader, they should go to the leader concerned and share their grievance as Matthew 18 encourages. This may be difficult because of the differences in position and influence, but should be attempted, to keep the issue and situation as low key and relational as possible.

We expect that most cases will be resolved here in STEP 1 and kept in the local situation.

If your concerns are not heard, Matthew 18 advises taking a friend with you as a follow-up to help in the dialogue.

Examples of grievances could be around unjust decision-making, personality clashes, perception of unfair treatment, hurtful or controlling leadership styles, unreasonable work expectations or a disregard for YWAM values.

If there are claims of illegal activity you need to immediately involve a more senior leader and the appropriate authorities, refer to STEP 5. For lesser concerns that are not resolved move to STEP 2.

STEP 2: Mediation process

A mediation process is encouraged with one or two impartial mediators bringing together the two parties. The mediator/s should be people who are agreed upon by both sides wherever possible, and could be elders, not necessarily in line leadership, who have understanding and experience of mediation. This will enable both parties to share their perspectives and seek to bring understanding and a hopeful outcome of reconciliation and a memorandum of understanding (guidelines for an ongoing relationship).

NB. In mediation, both mediators should go together to meet each person involved in the conflict, so they each hear the same story together. Then they gather all parties concerned to facilitate a conversation. This prevents one side playing the mediators off against each other because of different stories being told. Ensure that both sexes are present whenever necessary (in situations which may be delicate).

Note to clarify confidentiality:

The mediator is required to hear the complaint with a face to face or zoom interview if they want to continue with their allegation. They are normally expected to meet face to face with the person with whom they have a grievance, together with a mediator or mediators. This conversation can be held in confidentiality with the parties concerned.

There is a distinction between a counselling conversation and a grievance process. Counsellors seek to help a person deal with their past issues. The person seeking counsel desires to work on themselves and such a conversation in most instances should be confidential.

A debriefing or counselling conversation might develop into a need for a grievance process if areas of injustice emerge. If this happens, the confidential conversation moves to a reporting stage where ideally the individual is willing to put their name to it. Those who are the subject of a complaint have the right to hear the content and be given the opportunity to defend themselves, as further investigation may be needed.

Where there is a genuine fear for an individual to go to their brother or sister with the issue as outlined in Matt 18, they are advised to take a trusted person with them and sit together with the mediator. Biblically, this model for resolving issues of conflict should not be overlooked – whether in friendships, marriages or between peers and leaders.

In a case where the complainant chooses not to meet or be named in the process with the leader(s), their testimony cannot be used. If the situation cannot be talked about with the leader(s) involved, the complainant must understand that (little can be done with) their testimony lacks substance without a further, deeper investigation into the facts involved.

Proceed prayerfully and impartially, with caution. Operate with love towards everyone involved, with an ear bent towards listening and understanding the situation from all perspectives.

Prov 18:13, Prov 18:17

B. INVESTIGATION PROCESS

STEP 3: Formation of a process team

POINT PERSON: In complex situations, a point person should be brought into the dialogue to ensure the process moves forward in a timely manner. The point person is someone who has been appointed by the base, nation, Area or Field to handle serious conflict or grievance issues. They should have a working knowledge of relevant national laws, the mediation process, as well as the formal steps to take.

PROCESS TEAM: The point person should draw together a process team to decide on the next steps and to determine if there have been other similar complaints from more staff or leaders.

Local leaders and elders need to be brought into the process. They understand the context and history of the actual situation, as well as the spiritual dynamic in the location. National and Area elders can be approached where there is no possibility of involving elders from the location.

The number of leaders/elders involved should be appropriate to the severity of the situation. A straightforward allegation by one person may be solved with the local leaders if that is appropriate. A more complex allegation from several people requires an involvement of multiple elders.

At this point, mediation will turn into investigation. Each person with a complaint will be interviewed separately, with written reports produced. The leader being investigated will also be interviewed separately, with a written report produced.

A leave of absence should be proposed to parties while an investigation takes place, but they should be contactable and available for meetings if called upon. It should be communicated that a leave of absence does not imply guilt, but allows for a full investigation.

STEP 4: The process team determines the nature and severity of the complaints

If the disagreement is vehement and serious in content, an independent (non-YWAM) investigation may be needed. Peacemaker ministries offer help in navigating conflict; a resource link is below.

- a. The process team should be prayerfully seeking the Lord for guidance and revelation. We need the Holy Spirit to bring clarity and God's light into situations.
- b. The process team needs a good understanding of what actually happened before they focus on a person's interpretation of what happened. Scripture is clear that we need two or three reliable witnesses to any given event. Witnesses are essential to establish the difference between fact and opinion. Where there are no witnesses, however, discernment of the truth will take even more prayer, wisdom, and time.
1 Timothy 5:19, Deut 17:6, Deut 19:15, 1 Jn 5:7-9, Deut 30:19
- c. Both those making the allegations and those the allegations are against should receive a fair hearing. The process team must listen and respond well. Both parties have the right to be heard and [protected](#).

Hushing victims or perpetuating unsubstantiated allegations is deeply destructive to all parties.

Prov 18:17, Prov 12:15, Prov 14:12, Prov 28:26

- d. The process team needs to listen carefully to see what wrongdoings, if any, surround common themes of domineering behaviour, manipulation, power play or control. Patterns can be a sign that a line is being crossed repeatedly and needs addressing.

Godly leaders take responsibility for their actions, admit fault, repent and strive for growth. No leader is perfect, and we learn from failure where we can be humble in spirit.

- e. The process team must determine whether scripture or spiritual gifts have been misused to control and support unreasonable requests.

1 Cor 14:29, 1 Thes 5:21, 1 Jn 4:1, Rev 2:2

- f. The process team must determine if the authority exerted has extended into the individual domain which exceeds that given to leaders in any given time and space.

As individuals we are responsible for how we deal with our finances, how we raise our families, how we spend our personal time. The Bible teaches that leaders have limits to their authority.

Mark 10:42-44

- g. The process team needs to discover what the complainant hopes for as an outcome to the process. They may want the leader dismissed, where in fact it is a one-off offence that is a learning process for the leader involved, who is fully repentant. On the other hand, the complainant may simply want to be heard, and to help bring change in a potentially good leader who needs some feedback and mentoring.

- h. The process team takes into account how the complainants rate the severity of the issues. Many people fall into binary thinking that it's either "no big deal" or "abuse". Ask instead if these issues fall under or are similar to any of the categories below. This is not a comprehensive list, but indicates a growing severity:

- Cultural and personality differences, affecting community life e.g. work, holidays.
- Disagreements and complaints about how a leader makes decisions about vision, ministry, priorities or focus of the base/team.
- Incompetent leadership: lacking management, communication and relational skills.

- Absence of leadership, passive control through lack of decision making or motivation around a shared vision.
- Controlling or manipulating personal decisions and choices of staff, e.g. what they wear, how they spend their free time or their money.
- Consistent disregard for YWAM values.
- Financial mismanagement.
- Deep hurt caused to individuals, through domineering, threats, favouritism, injustice or abusive behaviour such as erratic outbursts of anger, trying to take the place of God in the individuals' life.
- Immoral lifestyle choices, substance abuse and addiction.
- Sexual or physical harassment, bullying or intimidation.

It is easy to jump into labelling a situation as 'spiritual abuse', and so it's wise to bring a clear definition to the person bringing the allegation. *See the definitions of spiritual abuse in the appendix on [Spiritual Abuse](#).*

- i. The process team should make a written report outlining the severity of the allegations for their own clarity. The report should include who is making the allegations and the details of what is alleged. This report should be agreed upon by the process team.

STEP 5: Appropriate Intervention

If evidence emerges of abuse in the full investigation process, formal steps must be taken and appropriate experts and authorities involved. An independent non-YWAM agency may also be consulted.

We are subject to the laws of each individual country, and the process team should respond appropriately to all illegal activity.

C. DECISION PROCESS

STEP 6: The process team, with reports available, have three potential courses of action

1. The ideal would be for both sides to meet again with two people from the process team and the mediator(s). The purpose of this is to bring factual clarity, highlight misunderstandings, identify wrong attitudes, behaviour and communication, encourage forgiveness if necessary, repentance where there is wrongdoing and reconciliation of relationships.

It is not assumed that the people concerned will be able to work together in the future, but a good outcome would be repentance, forgiveness, plus a willingness to learn and grow. Humility as an attitude is a key to look out for, the willingness to say sorry.

2. In cases of serious evidence of abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, coercive, spiritual), a complainant should not be forced to meet with an alleged abuser. Although Matthew 18 is a core biblical principle for resolving general inter-personal conflict, it is not right to insist on this in cases of abuse. If there is clear serious evidence of the law being broken through criminal activity or abuse, it has to be reported to the police.
3. Should there be resistance from the complainants to enter a mediation process after encouragement from the process team, then this creates a difficulty in bringing resolution. However, an open conversation with the accused is important as soon as possible, especially when there are multiple complaints, to bring awareness and understanding of weaknesses and sin.

Whatever option is chosen, communication of the outcome is needed to all parties involved. The outcome of the process should also be communicated to the staff community.

A [memorandum of understanding](#) should be created which also can be accessed by future board and leadership teams.

STEP 7: Disciplinary action taken where needed

If there are grievances raised against a leader in one level, this has an impact on leadership roles held in other levels. For instance, if a leader is asked to step down from their base leadership role, this will impact any higher roles held. Those higher circles would need to process the consequences for the leader..

In any serious allegations of money, sex and power, that are not of a criminal nature and aren't required to be referred to national authorities, the leader should immediately be suspended from their leadership role until the investigation and conclusions have been made.

Where the leader(s) is found to be leading in a dysfunctional way and where people are being hurt, then the process team needs to bring disciplinary action.

The disciplinary process should include at least one verbal warning, a written warning so that the individual has a specific time frame in which to make changes.

Eventually the process may result in the leader stepping down from their role, attending counselling and receiving mentoring before being released back into ministry/leadership.

In an extreme case where the leader is not responsive to accountability and unwilling to change, he or she should be dismissed from any leadership responsibility in YWAM. They may

not use the YWAM name in starting another ministry. A decision like this should not be taken lightly, and must involve an eldership's prayerful consideration.

Quote from Lynn Green: 'We do not quickly resort to legal action, but on rare occasions it may be necessary. The name of YWAM is precious and is to be protected.' (Prov 22:1 "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favour is better than silver or gold."). Ministries that don't adhere to the values of YWAM have no right to be called by that name.

The name of Youth With A Mission/YWAM was first legally owned by the non-profit organisation set up by Loren in California in the early 1960s and it still is owned by that legal entity.

Where the staff person is found to have been judgmental or unreasonable, or unjust in their criticism of the leader, they also may need ongoing support and mentoring to help them play a positive part in a YWAM team. Where they are unwilling to repent of these attitudes and behaviours it may not be possible for them to continue working within YWAM.

If a team or ministry is engaged in illegal activities, then they must be accountable to their board and the appropriate legal authorities in their nation.

D. APPEAL PROCESS

STEP 8: Outline the appeals process for ongoing investigation

The expectation should be that this decision is final, having had an unbiased team working through it. In the case of a very complex situation, where the complainants continue to struggle, there can be a process of appeal for a wider group of leadership to be involved.

Where Area elders have not been included in an initial investigation – they can be brought in for further process. Where Area elders have been brought in already – another Area within YWAM or the field team can be contacted to consult.

E. AFTERCARE PROCESS

STEP 9: Ongoing care for all parties involved should be offered

Whatever the outcome of the investigation, care and support can and should be offered to all parties involved.

Debriefing by trained debriefers in the nation or outside can be offered to all those who need such a process. This could also be a group debrief of a team. Ongoing counselling or psychological therapy may be suggested if necessary for individuals to help them process and heal.

Although the process involves forgiveness, admission of wrongdoing and reconciling the relationship, it may be that the parties concerned can no longer work together. This is unfortunate and in this case the leader or the staff may need to find a new location to work from and may indeed thrive in another context.

As followers of Jesus, we know that the key to healing is forgiveness whether the offense is great or small. Paul encourages us to forgive each other as Christ forgave us (Col 3:13). Barbara M. Orlowski writes that forgiveness is the central factor in emotional healing and crucial to recovery.

In line with the “warning notice culture” we need to develop and maintain regular evaluation, written reports and interviews with our base, national, area and field leaders. These interviews should bring encouragement for a job well done but also outline improvements needed, weaknesses to be strengthened and skills to be learned.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Safeguarding / protected

Safeguarding means protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. (Care quality commission UK.)

Memorandum of understanding

A memorandum of understanding, or MOU, is a nonbinding agreement that states each party's intentions to take action, conduct a business transaction, or form a new partnership.

REFERENCES & EXTENDED READING

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6. Lederach, John Paul, Journey Toward Reconciliation, Herald Press 1999
7. Oakley Dr Lisa, & Humphries Justin, Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse, SPCK, 2019
8. www.dwellcc.org/learning/essays/spiritual-abuse-avoiding-two-extremes
9. www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/safeguarding-children-young-people-and-vulnerable-adults/42
10. <https://www.peacemakerministries.org/>

APPENDIX 1

FULL BIBLE REFERENCES - NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

Matt 5:23-24 – So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

1 Jn 2:9-10 If anyone claims “I am living in the light” but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness. Anyone who loves another brother or sister is living in the light and doesn’t cause others to stumble.

1 Jn 4:7 – 8 – Dear friends, let us love one another because love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Matt 18:33 – 35 – Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you? Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.

Prov 18:13 – spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish

Prov 18:17 – the first to speak in court sounds right – until the cross examination begins

Matt 18:15 – 17 – If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

1 Timothy 5:19 – Do not listen to an accusation against an elder unless it is confirmed by two or three witnesses.

Deut 17:6 – Never put a person to death on the testimony of only one witness. There must always be two or three witnesses

Deut 19:15 – You must not convict anyone of a crime on the testimony of only one witness. The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

1 Jn 5:7-9 - So we have these three witnesses – the Spirit, the water and the blood and all three agree. Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the greater testimony that comes from God

Deut 30:19 – Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live.

Prov 18:17 – the first to speak in court sounds right – until the cross examination begins

Prov 12:15 – fools think their own way is right but the wise listen to others

Prov 14:12 – there is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death

Prov 28:26 – those who trust their own insight are foolish, but anyone who walks in wisdom is safe

1 Cor 14:29 – Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said.

1 Thes 5:21 – but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.

1 Jn 4:1 – Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God.

Rev 2:2 – I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are prophets but are not. You have discovered they are liars.

Mark 10:42-44 – So Jesus called them together and said, You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.

APPENDIX 2

SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Definitions of Spiritual Abuse:

“Spiritual abuse, a pattern of serious, objective and sinful behaviours that centre around control and coercion whereby a spiritual authority exploits their position and scripture for the purpose of selfish gain.”

Objective – Spiritual abuse must be based on objective, observable sinful behaviour, not subjective intuitions, perceptions or emotions.

The Church of England outlines key characteristics of spiritual abuse:

- Misusing scripture to coerce behaviour
- Coercing through censorship (asking for secrecy and silence)
- Requiring unquestioning obedience
- Using a sense of divine position to exert pressure to conform and suggesting this position is unchallengeable
- Enforced accountability
- Exclusion or isolation of individuals as a punishment for non-compliance
- Coercing behaviour through exploitation and manipulation
- Publicly shaming and humiliating individuals in order to control their behaviour
- Threats of spiritual consequences
- Inappropriate mentoring relationships

www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/safeguarding-children-young-people-and-vulnerable-adults/42

“Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is characterised by a systematic pattern or coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context. Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it.

This abuse may include: manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability, censorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, coercion to confirm, controlled through the use of sacred texts or teaching, requirement of obedience to the abuser, the suggestion that the abuser has a ‘divine’ position, isolation as a means of punishment, and superiority and elitism”

Dr. Lisa Oakley, ‘Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse,’ Dr. Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphries, SPCK 2019, p.31.

It is important to note that the complexity of this subject is increased in situations of cross-cultural communication.

Spiritual abuse can overlap and include emotional, coercive and psychological abuse. However, it is unique because of its religious context and control used through the misuse of scripture. It is the role of every Christian to discern scripture carefully and test the teachings they hear.

3 John 10 – When I come, I will report some of the evil things he is doing and the evil accusations against us. Not only does he refuse to welcome the travelling teachers, he also tells others not to help them. And when they do help, he puts them out of the church.

Titus 1:16 – Such people claim they know God but they deny Him by the way they live. They are detestable and disobedient, worthless for doing anything good.

2 Cor 11:15 – So it is no wonder his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get what their wicked deeds deserve.