



Writing impactful responses

A workshop for Care Opinion responders



Before we start...



Today's workshop **will be recorded**. Please feel free to turn your camera off during the presentation.



We're expecting a large group today, so **please keep your microphone muted** when not speaking to help minimise distractions.



A follow-up email, including **a copy of the slides**, will be sent to all attendees after the session.



What we'll cover...

- › **Care Opinion** vs **complaints**, what's the difference for responders?
- › The **generic** vs **conversational** responder – how to **adapt your tone** to respond to public feedback
- › Going **one step further** – **coordinating responses** with colleagues, using your **organisational values** to help draft a response
- › Do you really need **more detail**?
- › Recent **research** findings – how to avoid becoming a '**defensive responder**'
- › The **value of truly listening** and demonstrating a genuine commitment to **learning from feedback**



Our mission at Care Opinion is to provide an online platform so that:

- › People can **share honest feedback** easily and without fear
- › Stories are **directed to wherever they can help make a difference**
- › **Everyone can see** how services are **listening and changing** in response

Part 1



Care Opinion & Official Complaints

Responding to both Care Opinion stories and complaints can be tricky! Should your responses differ?

Your role as a Care Opinion responder...



Listen to & acknowledge experience



Learn from what's gone well, and what's not



Show commitment to ongoing improvement through transparency

Care Opinion & official complaints



Care Opinion is a platform for public feedback about health and social care. It is **not a formal complaint process**, nor part of a complaint process.



Posting on Care Opinion is **not a way to reopen a complaint**, or reach a different complaint outcome.





If an author mentions they intend to make, or have already made an official complaint, moderation is paused




The moderator contacts the author to provide guidance on publishing stories whilst a complaints process is ongoing/imminent

Care Opinion & official complaints – key differences

Aspect	Care Opinion 	Official Complaint 
Purpose	Share experiences to help improve services	Raise concerns formally and seek resolution
Tone	Constructive and reflective	Formal and private
Process	Simple online submission; no formal investigation	Governed by official policies and procedures
Outcome	Feedback is visible publicly; services often respond	Investigation, formal response, and corrective action
Personal Details	Anonymous (details removed)	Requires personal details for follow-up
Timeframes	No set deadlines for responses	Strict timelines for acknowledgment and resolution

What does this mean for responders?...

Care Opinion & official complaints – impact on responses

Aspect	Care Opinion Stories 	Official Complaints 
Tone of Response	Warm, empathetic, conversational	Formal, structured, policy-driven
Focus	Acknowledging feelings and learning from feedback	Investigating and resolving specific issues
Flexibility	Allows openness and transparency in public replies	Requires adherence to strict procedures and timelines
Opportunity	Highlight positive feedback and celebrate good practice	Limited to addressing concerns; rarely includes praise
Pressure	Lower urgency, but talking to a wider audience	Potential regulatory consequences
Public Visibility	Responses are public, so tone must be approachable and professional	Private communication; tone is formal and precise

Shifting your mindset and approach when responding on Care Opinion

• Complaint Handler Hat



- **Focus:** Investigating, resolving, and documenting issues formally
- **Tone:** Procedural, defensive at times, focused on compliance and evidence
- **Goal:** Close the complaint and meet regulatory requirements

• Care Opinion Responder Hat



- **Focus:** Listening, acknowledging, and engaging openly with feedback
- **Tone:** Warm, human, and conversational - showing empathy and appreciation
- **Goal:** Build trust, demonstrate learning, and show the person they've been heard

Why the shift matters:

Care Opinion is a public platform designed for transparency and relationship-building, not formal dispute resolution. **Responses should feel personal and genuine**, not like a complaint letter

How was your care?



Nottinghamshire Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Tell Us About Your Care

Answer our survey

Why might you prefer this?

It's quick – it takes 5 minutes to answer some simple questions
Your answers are anonymous

Will I receive a response?

No, but all feedback is read and used to improve care

How do I do this?

- Ask a staff member for a survey form
- Online: <https://rebrand.ly/UserCarerFeedback>
- Some services will send you the survey by text message

Tell a Story on Care Opinion

It's independent of the Trust
You can write your story, long or short, in your own words.
You can also use pictures to compose your story
Your story is anonymous

Yes, every story receives a response on the Care Opinion website from a member of staff.
You will receive an email to let you know

- Online: www.careopinion.org.uk/tellyourstory
- Telephone: Care Opinion team - 0800 122 3135
- Ask a staff member for a Care Opinion story form

Talk to a Staff Member

If you are currently receiving care, and there's an urgent issue that needs sorting
If you prefer to speak than write

Yes, the member of staff will try to sort things out for you

- Talk to a staff member who is involved in yours or your loved one's care
- You could ask to speak to a manager if you prefer

Contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) & Complaints Department

If you have a serious issue with the care you or your loved one is receiving, or need some advice

Yes, staff in the PALS and Complaints Team will answer queries and liaise with staff in services to resolve problems

- Telephone: 01159 933 4542
- Email: PALSandComplaints@nottshc.nhs.uk
- More information online: www.nottinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/patient-advice-and-liaison-service

How was your care?

Scan the QR code to share
your feedback with us



Part 2



Conversational responding & altering tone

Practical examples for responders

Generic responder	Transparent, conversational responder
<p>Response lacks personalisation, yet often appears to have been purposefully designed to appear conversational.</p> <p>Responders often gave superficial thanks, ‘non-apologies’ or vague promises to pass on feedback, without specific information regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who would be involved • How this would be done • and when <p>It remained unclear if the feedback had been fully considered, understood or learnt from.</p>	<p>Involves staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outwardly engaging with patients • Valuing their feedback • Embracing the opportunity to learn publicly • Appearing compassionate and transparent, discussing barriers to any direct impact the feedback could have. <p>Staff tended to communicate the journey that the patient feedback had taken, or more often, would take.</p> <p>Feedback receiving a transparent, conversational response in the first instance was most often in receipt of multiple responses.</p>

T O P T I P S

Listen & Understand

- Look for why the author is unhappy or happy - what's the real message?
- Ask: Are they highlighting good practices or areas to improve?

Respond Like a Person

- Keep it warm and simple - avoid "official" language and standard/copy & paste responses
- Thank author's sincerely for their time and feedback
- Personalise replies; mention staff names when praised

Stay Open & Visible

- Respond online as much as possible to show transparency
- Think carefully before taking conversations offline
- Even if you invite the author to get in touch directly, still try to respond to as much of their story as you can online

Take Ownership & Improve

- Use "I" to show personal accountability
- Look for small changes that can make a big difference
- Share learning to spread good practices across the service

Generic vs conversational responding – in practice



Generic Responder

“Thank you for your feedback. We appreciate you taking the time to leave a comment. Your message has been shared with staff. We aim to provide good care to all patients and are glad your experience was satisfactory.”





Conversational Responder

“I manage the play team in the hospital and would like to take this opportunity of thanking you for taking the time to add your comments about the play specialists and in particular, Emily. I am glad she was able to make your time in hospital that little bit better. I will make sure she sees your lovely comments and I am sure that she too will be very grateful!”

Better still... could Emily herself also respond to the story?

Drafting an impactful response – Adapting your tone

Element	Care Opinion Response 	Official Complaint 
Opening	“Thank you for sharing your experience with us.”	“Thank you for your letter dated [date].”
Acknowledgment	“We’re sorry to hear about your experience and appreciate you letting us know.”	“We acknowledge your concerns regarding [issue].”
Process	“Your feedback helps us understand what’s working well and where we can improve.”	“Your complaint will be investigated in line with our policy.”
Next Steps	“We’ll share your comments with the team and consider what changes can be made.”	“We will provide a formal response within [timeframe].”



Response from Alexis Coster, Team Manager - Community Nursing - Strathaven & EK, ICST (District Nursing, Physiotherapy & Occupational Therapy), South Lanarkshire University Health and Social Care Partnership 8 months ago

Dear triangulumpj77,



Thank you so much for taking the time to provide such positive feedback on your recent experience of care given by our Community Nursing Team. We really value the feedback that is given on the care we provide.

It is so lovely to hear that your Mum was treated with compassion by our team. This is a wonderful example of the person centred care we strive to provide.

I have shared your kind words with the team who cared for your Mum. They were truly delighted to read your positive and personal feedback. I can honestly say your feedback has boosted morale as the staff work really hard and appreciate hearing the difference they have made in your Mum's care.

Thank you again for your time.

Very best wishes and warm regards to you and your family

Alexis



Warm opening & acknowledgement, thanking the author for their story



Feedback **has already been shared** with the team and **impact demonstrated**



Overall friendly, informal tone, with a sign off

Part 3



Taking your response to the 'next level'

Creative ways to write impactful responses

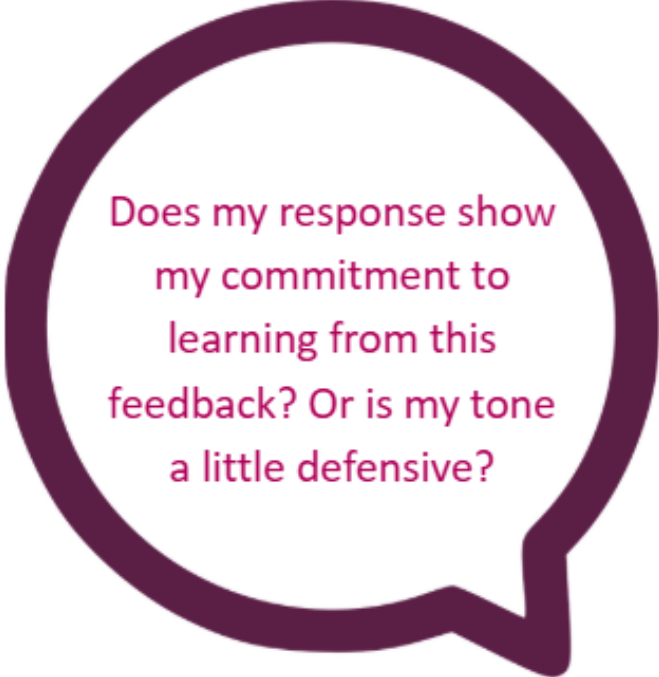


Using your organisational values to draft meaningful responses

NHS core values

VALUE	DESCRIPTION
Working together for patients	Collaboration among staff, patients, and communities to achieve best outcomes.
Respect and dignity	Treating everyone with compassion and consideration for their unique needs.
Commitment to quality of care	Maintaining high standards in safety, effectiveness, and patient experience.
Compassion	Providing care with empathy and kindness in every interaction.
Improving lives	Enhancing health and wellbeing through treatment and preventive measures.
Everyone counts	Ensuring fairness, inclusivity, and responsible resource allocation.


Response reflections – ask yourself...



Does my response show my commitment to learning from this feedback? Or is my tone a little defensive?



Was my response respectful? Do my comments reflect fairness and balance? Was my tone kind and conversational?



Is it clear that my goal is to use this feedback to improve patient outcomes? Have I demonstrated how I plan to act on their feedback to drive meaningful change?



“When things can be seen and shared, they can be improved. We encourage transparency in health/care services, and we will be open, honest and clear in all our activities.”

How can you demonstrate this in your response?

Explain why you, personally, are responding to the feedback

Keep the conversation online – address any concerns as openly and honestly as possible

Don't be afraid to apologise when things haven't gone well

“We believe that people are most open to learning and change when they feel valued and heard. We will make our activities, conversations and connections encouraging, constructive and supportive

How can you demonstrate this in your response?



If the feedback includes any positives - or if it highlights an area that's improving - call attention to that.

“I’m glad to hear you found the team helpful, and I’ll definitely look into how we can improve the wait time.”

Frame your response around progress, solutions, and your commitment to doing better.

End with an open door and a sense of shared ownership. Make it feel like their voice truly counts. Tell the author what you have/will do with their feedback

“If you have more thoughts, I’d love to hear them. It’s feedback like yours that helps us make this service better for everyone.”



Do you really need more information?

How taking the conversation offline can delegitimise concerns

“I would really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you directly **so I can better understand what happened** and ensure this is followed up appropriately. **Please feel free to contact me** at your convenience.”

“There is **a lot of information in your feedback** and as a team we would be happy to look into your mothers care **should you wish to contact...**”

“I would like to look into the delay in more detail but in order to do **so I will need some further details from you** if you are willing to provide them. If you can **please provide your father's name, date, time and address** so we can match it with the information in our system”

Why keep your response public?



- ✓ **Builds Trust** - Shows openness and honesty
 - Public replies show that **feedback is taken seriously** and **addressed openly**
 - Transparency reassures service users and stakeholders that **concerns are not being hidden**
- ✓ **Demonstrates Accountability** - Everyone sees how feedback is handled
 - **Demonstrates fairness and consistency** in how feedback is managed
 - Taking the conversation offline can give the impression that the **organisation is avoiding accountability**
- ✓ **Encourages Shared Learning** - Staff and users learn from real examples
 - Moving discussions offline can create a **perception of secrecy**
 - Staying public reinforces confidence in the organisation's **commitment to learning & change**
 - If the author doesn't provide more information, **how do you demonstrate what you've learned from their feedback?**
- ✓ **Protects Credibility** - Avoids the perception of secrecy
 - Staying public reinforces confidence in the organisation's **commitment to openness**
 - If discussions happen privately, people might wonder if certain cases get **special treatment**

“I appreciate the offer although Care Opinion is about anonymous feedback and I believe that I have given enough information in my original story.

I understand the need to want to engage with me but using this way of giving feedback gave me the opportunity to be open in a safe way.”



Remember your role as a responder!

1. Acknowledge & value their feedback
2. Show accountability & learning
3. Build trust through transparency

Example of a great response to critical feedback, without asking the author to make contact

“It is clear that you deserved far better care and support than you received, and I deeply regret that we were unable to provide the empathy and attention you needed during such a vulnerable time. Your account of being left without adequate pain relief, disregarded wishes, and the clinical delays is truly heartbreaking. No one should have to endure what you went through, and I sincerely apologise for the mistakes that were made during your care.

It is not acceptable for your needs and concerns to have been ignored, especially when it came to your comfort, the care of your newborn, and the aftercare following your C-section. Please know that your feelings of hurt and disappointment are completely understandable, and I am so sorry that we failed to live up to the standard of care that you should have received.”

Demonstrating action/change without further detail

Keep your response “forward focussed” and try to end with a commitment, for e.g.:

“I’ll continue to monitor this to make sure it delivers the improvements we have promised”

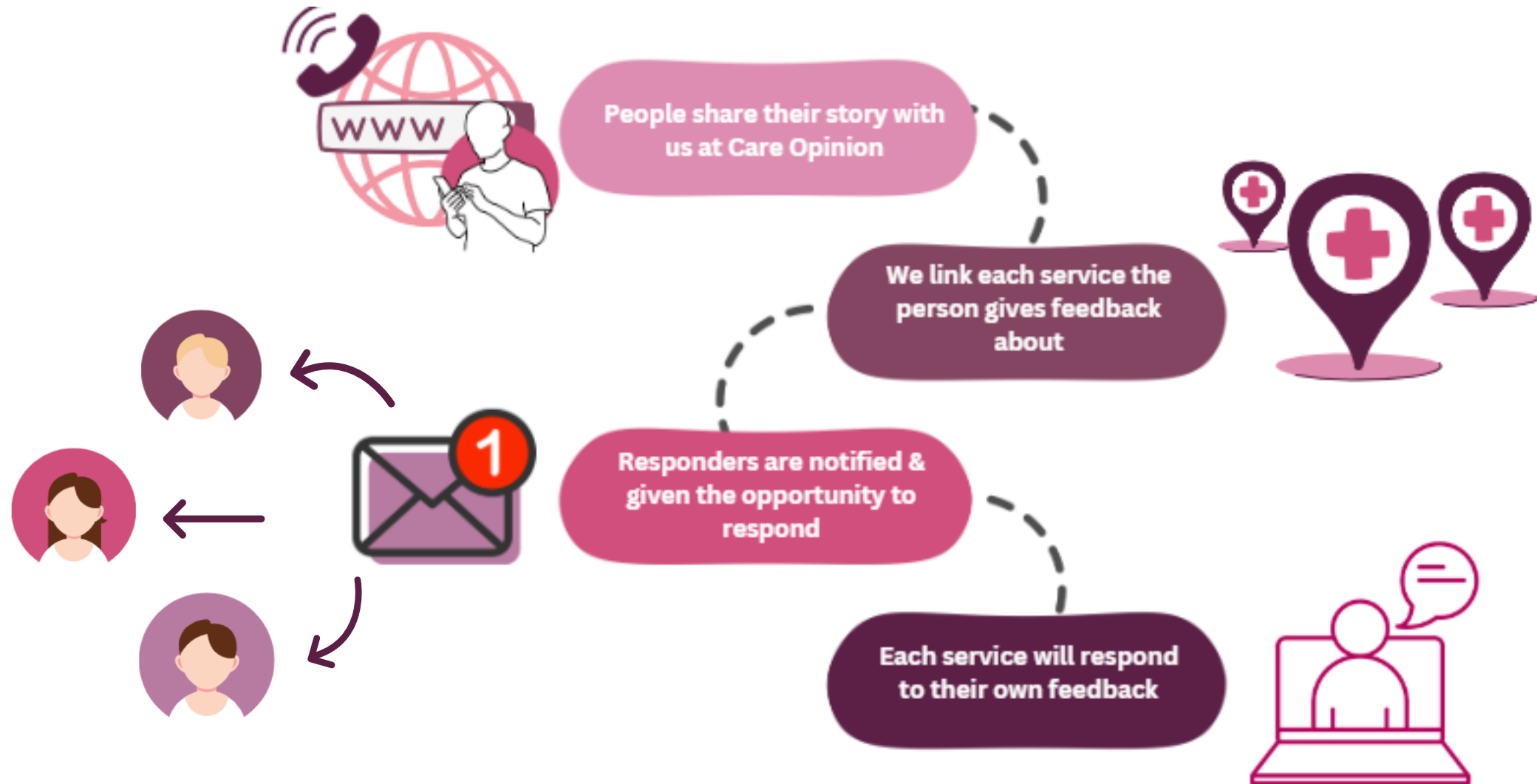


“We are currently in the process of applying for UNICEF Baby Friendly status and we are reviewing all of our policies in line with this. I will include your comments as part of our review process.”



Co-ordinating responses with colleagues

How do we respond to critical stories where **more than one service** is involved? Can we make the experience better for the author?



" The care and attention given to us was absolutely outstanding "



About:

General practices in Lothian Royal Hospital for Children and Young People (Edinburgh) / Accident & Emergency Royal Hospital for Children and Young People (Edinburgh) / Dietetics Royal Hospital for Children and Young People (Edinburgh) / Lochranza Ward Royal Hospital for Children and Young People (Edinburgh) / Physiotherapy Royal Hospital for Children and Young People (Edinburgh) / Play Services Royal Hospital for Children and Young People (Edinburgh) / Speech and Language Therapy

This normally means that:

- Authors receive **more than 1 response** to their story
- Often, when there is a critical element to the feedback, they are invited to contact **multiple people/services**

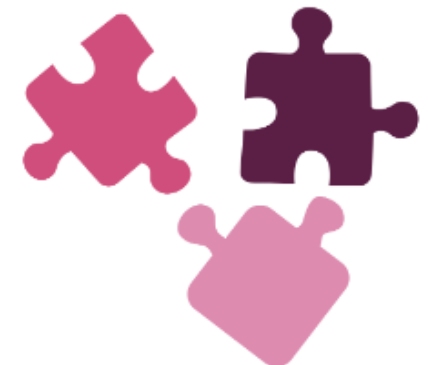
Things to consider:

- Are the other services mentioned, part **of your organisation?**
- Could you **work together** on your responses?
- Make sure you check to see if a response has already been published, **try not to repeat** what's already been said
- If the service is outside of your organisation and you can't coordinate a response, consider **referring to the other author's/responses** in your own
- There are many reasons why an author may not wish to get in touch directly with services. If an author chooses not to get in touch, then **how do you manage their feedback** as a responder?

“ Thanks for your feedback, can you please contact us on... ”

“ As Care Opinion stories are anonymous, we need more info... ”

“ To enable me to look into this further for you, can you contact... ”





What if I think I recognise the author?

What if I recognise the story/author?

You may feel confident about recognising an author, especially if the story relates to a recent experience, and **it's fine to reflect that in your response.**

However, since feedback is anonymous, **it's best to be cautious.** Consider wording like “we believe you’ve been in touch with us” to acknowledge the connection without making a definite claim, as there’s always a small chance it’s someone else.

[stories and complaints](#)



Response from Shona Lawrence, Clinical Governance Lead, Nursing and Care, NHS 24 nearly 2 years ago



Dear composermx94



Thank you for sharing your story on Care Opinion. I am very sorry to learn of your mum's fall resulting in a broken hip and collar bone. I can only imagine how much of a worrying and distressing time this has been for you all. I wish you mum a good recovery.

Similar to the Scottish Ambulance Service, I am aware that we are already reviewing your mum's care from an NHS 24 perspective. Feedback such as yours really assists us to review the care provided to patients and their families and, where appropriate, to make improvements.

We have liaised with our colleagues within the Scottish Ambulance Service which means we aim to provide one comprehensive response from both Health Boards. Following receipt of this, should you have any outstanding questions in relation to the service provided by NHS 24, I would be pleased to take these forward for you. You can contact me directly on 07814 299944 or email Patient.Experience@nhs24.scot.nhs.uk

Once again, I am sorry to learn of your mum's experience.

Best wishes to you all meantime.

Shona

Part 4



Managing responses to critical comments

Improve your response using insight from recent research



Re-cap: What is your goal as a responder?



Earlier, we described your key responsibilities as a Care Opinion responder as:

- › **Listening** to & acknowledging experience
- › **Learning** from both positive and negative experience
- › Show an ongoing **commitment to improvement**



You're **not expected to fix what has happened**, what matters most is **what you do next!**

Your goal is to start **rebuilding trust and repairing the relationship**





Understanding personal experience

- Every experience is shaped by a person's **background, expectations, and context**.
- Two people can go through the same situation and feel completely different about it - and **both perspectives are valid**.
- **You can't change someone's past experience**, but you *can* influence how they perceive you or your service going forward.
- It's very possible the author **may have raised this concern before**. Be mindful in your response, ensuring you don't **inadvertently dismiss** their experience further.
- Repairing trust starts with **listening, accepting feedback, and making meaningful changes**.

Using research to frame your response

This research chat was the third session during [Care Opinion's Autumn Conference 2025](#).

You can read the paper here




Understanding defensiveness

Learning from responses to stories on Care Opinion

James Munro in conversation with
Tom Reader, LSE and
Alex Gillespie, LSE

At the Care Opinion Autumn Conference, 23 October 2025



WATCH VIDEO



4 Key Findings...

NEXT



AVOIDING

Issues are **deflected rather than addressed**, by directing people elsewhere instead of engaging with their concern.

Example:

"To find out where you are on the waiting list, **please contact the waiting list team** on 0973..."

Why this matters...

- It can make patients feel **unheard or dismissed**
- It **shifts responsibility** rather than taking accountability & helping resolving the issue
- Over time, it **undermines trust** in the organisation's willingness to listen & learn



DELEGITIMISING

This happens when feedback is subtly undermined in responses by **framing concerns as a matter of personal feelings or expectations**, rather than acknowledging the actual issue that has been raised.

Example:

"I'm sorry to hear that you felt disappointed by your experience of our waiting times."

Why this matters...

- It **shifts the focus from the service problem** to the individual's emotions
- Patients may feel their concerns are being **dismissed or invalidated**
- Over time, this **erodes confidence** that feedback will lead to meaningful change



INVALIDATING

This occurs when feedback is dismissed on the grounds that it **lacks sufficient detail**, rather than engaging with the concern itself.

Example:

“Unfortunately, we can’t address your specific issue as Care Opinion is an anonymous platform-and **we require more detail to look into this further** for you.”

Why this matters...

- It **places the burden back on the author** instead of acknowledging the problem
- Author’s may feel their feedback is being **rejected or minimised**
- Over time, this **discourages people from sharing concerns**



LIMITING

By shutting down the conversation and **moving it offline**, instead of addressing the issue openly on Care Opinion, you reduce the opportunity for the wider audience to see that the organisation is **listening, learning, and willing to make changes**.

Example:

“It is **difficult for us to look into the specific concerns** raised as Care Opinion is completely anonymous. However, if you would like us to look into your concerns in more detail, I would be grateful if you could **provide us with your details so we can discuss your options with you.**”

Why this matters...

- It **prevents issues** from being recognised transparently in the public space
- Authors may feel their **concerns are being hidden or minimised**
- Over time, this **reduces trust in the organisation's openness and willingness to engage with feedback, making changes and improvements where needed.**



Simple, 'non-defensive' response examples

“I’m really sorry to read about your experience of our service/s.”

A straightforward acknowledgement of the author’s experience. It avoids reference to expectations or emotions, while recognising their negative experience in a neutral, non-defensive way.



Try to avoid:

“ I’m really sorry to hear that you've felt as though your care has been impersonal and fragmented”

“I am sorry that you felt you had a negative experience and felt disappointed”

More ways to phrase this example:

“I am so sorry that we failed to live up to the standard of care that you should have received.”

“I’m aware that your experience with our service hasn’t been positive, and I want to address your concerns...”

“I recognise the challenges you’ve experienced with our service and sincerely apologise on behalf of myself and the team. Your feedback has helped us identify what we can do differently next time.”

Scenario:

“I waited over an hour for someone to help me use the toilet. I pressed the buzzer multiple times and was told to be patient. I felt humiliated and ignored.”

How would you structure a response? (Acknowledgement → Empathy → Action → Closing)

Example Response Structure

Hi Author321,

My name is Danielle and **I am the ward manager** here on the Butterfly ward.

Thank you for taking the time to share your experience with us.

I'm **so sorry** of your experience in our ward, when trying to get the assistance of staff to use the toilet. As a team, that's not what we want anyone to experience whilst staying with us. At times, the ward can get very busy, and the demand for staff support may be greater than the number of staff available. However, I absolutely agree that waiting an hour for help is far too long, and I'm saddened you have been left feeling humiliated by the situation.

I've shared your feedback with the team during our weekly huddle, so we think about ways to handle situations like this better in the future. As you can appreciate, staffing numbers are difficult for us to manage, but that doesn't stop us from reviewing our current practice and try to find solutions.

Your story reminds us how important dignity and timely care are - and we're taking that seriously.

Thank you again for speaking up. It helps us do better.

Danielle



Key takeaways

- › Care Opinion vs complaints – understanding the difference for responders
- › The value of truly listening and demonstrating commitment to learning from Care Opinion stories
- › Generic vs conversational responder – adapting tone for Care Opinion responses
- › Do you really need more detail?
- › Going one step further – coordinating responses with colleagues and using your organisational values
- › Recent research findings – avoiding defensive responses

thank
★ you ★

Further resources & references

[Showing whether feedback leads to change | Care Opinion](#)

[Responding as a third sector organisation](#)

[Help with responding - including examples](#)

[Training and support webinars | Care Opinion](#)

[Why I enjoy responding to stories | Care Opinion](#)

[A glimpse behind the organisational curtain: A dramaturgical analysis exploring the ways healthcare staff engage with online patient feedback 'front' and 'backstage' at three hospital Trusts in England - Ramsey - 2023 - Sociology of Health & Illness - Wiley Online Library](#)

[Responding effectively to adult mental health patient feedback in an online environment: A coproduced framework - Baines - 2018 - Health Expectations - Wiley Online Library](#)