



Writing impactful responses

A workshop for Care Opinion responders



Today's workshop **won't be** recorded to ensure everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences openly.



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.



Padlet posts are anonymous, so feel free to share your experiences honestly - it really helps get a good discussion going!

Before we start...

We'll be sharing some real-life examples - **not to shame anyone**, but to help you learn and grow your responding skills.

There's **no 'one-size-fits-all'** with responding. We're all bringing our own experiences to the table.

As responders, **you're not expected to fix everything.**

What matters most is what you do next. If something hasn't gone well, the goal is to start **rebuilding trust and repairing the relationship.** Part of that **means being open to feedback and adapting how you respond to each story.**



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**, and
- **Everyone can see** how and where services are **listening and changing** in response



1. Making sure that authors feel heard

When patients share feedback online, it's important they feel genuinely heard. **A warm, human response** - rather than something that sounds overly "official" can make a big difference. **A simple acknowledgment** shows you're listening, and **responding in a natural, empathetic way** helps build trust. Whether the feedback is positive or highlights areas to improve, it's a chance to show you care and are committed to making things better.



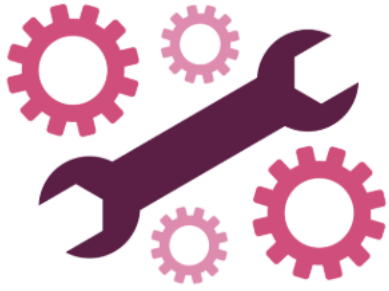
2. Making sure that authors feel their comments are valued

Always take a moment to **sincerely thank people** for sharing their feedback - it really does mean a lot. **Go beyond the basics when you can**, and don't be afraid to **personalise your response**. A thoughtful, human reply feels much more genuine than one filled with formal or "official" language. If someone has mentioned a staff member in a positive way, name them! **It shows you're really paying attention** and that the feedback is valued.



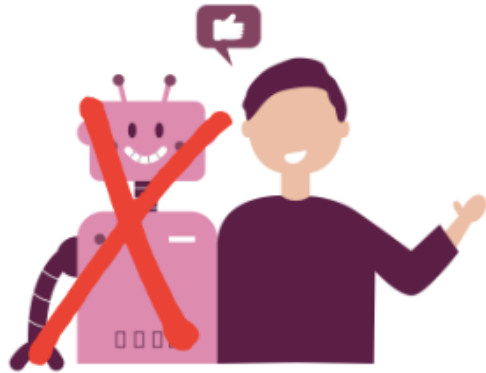
3. Take ownership of the feedback

Take ownership of the feedback you receive - especially when something hasn't gone quite right. **Using "I" instead of "we"** can make your response feel more personal and accountable. It shows that you're genuinely committed to making things better. This kind of response builds trust and **helps patients feel their voice really matters**.



4. Start mending the relationship (if things haven't gone well)

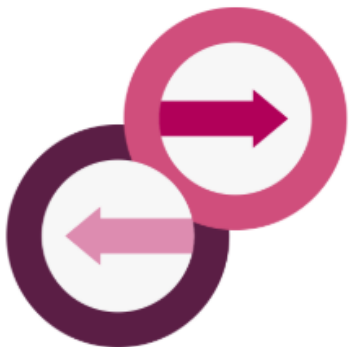
Think about the **motivations of the author**. Are there clear indications from their story **why they are unhappy**? What can you do to help with that? If you're taking action or passing their feedback on, let them know - **keeping them updated shows you value their input** and are taking it seriously.



5. Encourage authentic, online conversation

Try to **respond to as much of the feedback online** as possible. Sometimes you'll feel the urge to take the conversation "offline" - but ask yourself, **do you really need to?**

You can invite authors to reach out to you directly, but keep in mind that some may choose not to. If that happens, how will you handle their story? **And how will you show that your organisation is really listening?**



6. Identify opportunities to improve/change practice

Changes don't have to be big or time-consuming - **small improvements can make a real difference!** When reading feedback, ask yourself: *What is the author really telling me?* Are they **highlighting something we're doing well** that we could build on or share more widely across the service?

Or if something didn't go so well, **is there a small change I could make to improve things?**

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 responder	Transparent, conversational responder
<p>Response lacks personalisation, yet often appears to have been purposefully designed to appear conversational. 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>

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?



Response from Alexis Coster, Team Manager - ICST - Strathaven & EK, ICST (District Nursing, Physiotherapy & Occupational Therapy), South Lanarkshire University Health and Social Care Partnership 3 months ago

▶ Response is **public**

Hi andymac99



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 dignity and respect by our team and that you felt supported. 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 on this cold Thursday!

Thank you again for your time.

Very best wishes and warm regards to you and your mum.

Alexis

2 people think this response is helpful

Was this response helpful? **Yes** | **No**

Using your organisational values to draft meaningful responses



“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

“Everyone’s story matters. We will treat everyone as equals and will nurture trust and respect in all our relationships. We will work to make our service accessible and helpful to the widest range of people we can.”



How can you demonstrate this in your response?

Acknowledge and thank the author for their feedback - Begin by showing appreciation for their comments - this encourages open communication and shows that all voices are valued.

Keep language accessible – avoid using jargon and abbreviations. Choose words that are respectful, clear, and accessible

Avoid jumping to conclusions or becoming defensive. Read or listen to the feedback carefully to understand the concern behind it.

If appropriate, outline how the feedback will influence changes or how you’ll engage further with communities.

“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.”

Co-ordinating responses with colleagues

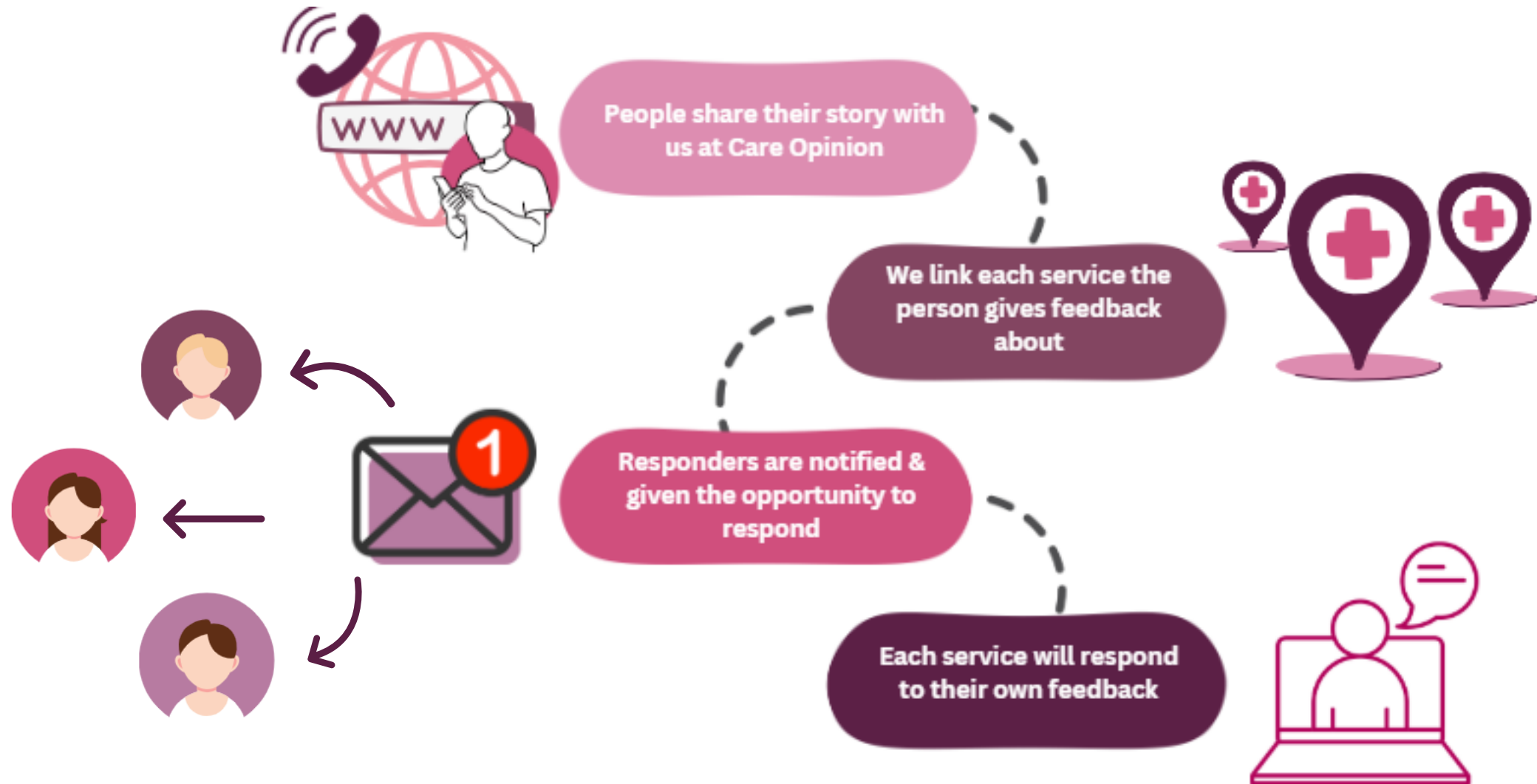
How do we respond to critical stories where **more than one service** is involved? Can we make the experience better for the author?

" 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**

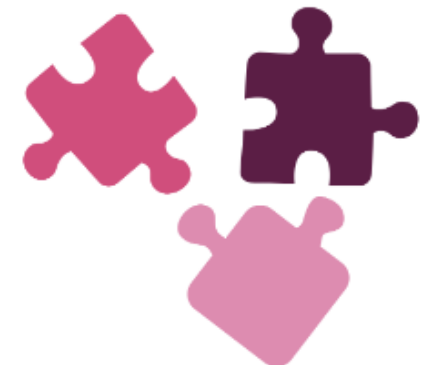
Things to consider:

- 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... ”





Do you really need more information?

“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.”



Managing responses to critical comments

How do we respond well to critical comments? What if the author has/is planning to make an official complaint?

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.
- Repairing trust starts with **listening, accepting feedback, and making meaningful changes**.

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

— Maya Angelou



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** you were left feeling ignored and distressed, when trying to get the assistance of staff to use the toilet. As a team, that's not the level of care we want anyone to experience here on our ward. At times, the ward can get very busy, and the demand for staff support may be greater than the number of staff available. However, waiting an hour 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 can look into what happened and think about how to handle situations like this better in the future.

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

Case study

Feedback Title: “Left Feeling Invisible in My Own Home”

“I receive regular homecare support to help with daily tasks like washing, medication, and mobility. While I appreciate the help, I’ve found the overall experience quite frustrating and, at times, disheartening.

Visits often feel rushed and inconsistent. I rarely know who’s coming or when. Sometimes carers are late, other times early, and occasionally I’ve been left waiting - unsure if anyone will come at all. I’ve tried to raise these concerns, but it’s hard to get a straight answer or to know who’s actually listening.

The attitude of some carers has also been disappointing. I understand it's a difficult job, and many carers are kind, but a few make me feel like I'm just a task to tick off a list. There’s very little conversation or warmth - just in and out. When you're living alone, that small interaction means a lot. It can be the only face you see all day. Being treated with kindness and respect should be a basic part of care, not a bonus.

Once, I wasn’t given my medication on time. That left me feeling unsafe and unsure who to trust.

I don’t expect perfect care, but I do expect to feel like a person - not just another name on a schedule.”

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

How Care Opinion manages stories when official complaints are ongoing

An example of the advice we give to authors (actual email may vary)

“Thank you for using Care Opinion.

My name is Sarah and I am one of the moderators. I was sorry to read about the experiences your family is having.

We can publish your comments on the Care Opinion website, however you mention you also plan to make an official complaint to the service. Could I ask you to please read our guidance here: <https://www.careopinion.org.uk/info/stories-and-complaints>.

The first section applies to your situation “If you are planning to make a complaint, or have an ongoing complaint, about your care”.

Then can you let me know if you would like me to publish your comments or hold onto them until the complaint is complete?

*Thank you in advance,
Sarah”*

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

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](#)

