

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. Why do you refer to people who use the Ombuds Office as visitors?**

The Ombuds Office practices in accordance with the International Ombuds Association's ethical Standards of Practice: Ombuds are confidential, informal, independent, and impartial. Practicing to these standards requires us to think about how we refer to people who reach out. Respondent or claimant implies formal processes that include disclosure to and engagement by others. Client can convey a lack of confidentiality or anonymity or that a fee may be charged. Employee can signal a lack of independence or impartiality. Visitor strikes the right balance. A visitor is someone who accesses the office voluntarily and without obligation.

**2. Speaking of the Standards of Practice, What do you mean when you say the Ombuds Office is confidential?**

We are an off-the-record resource, which means that your use of the office and everything we discuss is confidential. Maintaining confidentiality also includes how we secure any data we collect or receive, how we manage contact methods with the office, and how we work with you. We don't share information about you with your manager, supervisor, organizational leaders, or external parties. Though there are exceptions to this, including imminent threats of safety or violence to you or others. Examples of confidentiality, and exceptions to confidentiality, in practice include:

- Discussing harassment or discrimination issues:
  - We are not authorized to receive notice of claims against the Hospital or enterprise. Sharing what you are experiencing doesn't create a record, start an investigation, or inform a current investigation.
  - Because our process is confidential, you don't have to self-censor or feel that you can't share important details. Our job is to help you figure out what's happening for you and help you figure out your plan, including what complaint or other formal processes you may want to use.
- Sharing that you or someone else is in imminent danger of self-harm or another kind of threat or violence.
  - Our job is to support. In cases like this, support means contacting the appropriate authorities and leadership within the Hospital and emergency services. If such contact is necessary, we will inform you and share our rationale.

**3. What does "off-the-record" mean?**

We do not maintain any documents or permanent records that would reveal the identity of someone who contacted the office. While we collect basic contact information during the course of working with you, we do not keep this information ongoing. Off the record also means that we do not make policy or management decisions nor conduct formal investigations. We are an alternative resource, complementing and not replacing the Boston Children's formal channels.

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**4. What does it mean to be impartial?**

The Ombuds doesn't take sides or determine outcomes. We support a fair process; our goal is for each visitor to feel successful when engaging with us and the process. We do not advocate for individuals or any department or area of Boston Children's. Examples of impartiality in practice include:

- When supporting two people or groups in a facilitated conversation
  - Because we're impartial, our support can provide an outside perspective through which to consider your situation and options
- When helping you come up with options
  - We don't tell you what to do: you know yourself and your situation best; our goal is for you to feel confident and empowered in what you do next, which means you make the decisions, not the Ombuds

**5. What do you mean by informal?**

We do not initiate, investigate, arbitrate, adjudicate or participate in any internal or external formal process or action. Nor do we participate in or in any way influence the processes or timelines of other formal complaint or appeal process you may be involved with. Contact with us does not prevent you from pursuing formal resolution channels, however. In fact, working with the Ombuds can assist you in determining what formal resolution channel you might like to use and what supports you need in place to do so. Examples of informality in practice include:

- We work with you to resolve issues and concerns in the most straightforward and direct ways suitable for the issues and concerns raised
- We do not maintain or create records
- We do not participate in any adjudicative or formal administrative processes

**6. *How are you independent?***

While the office is part of the enterprise and the Ombuds is employed by the Hospital, the work of the office is independent of the Hospital and Foundation management structures. The Charter also details this independence, which includes the agreement that the Ombuds Office cannot be receive compulsory orders about how to approach a particular issue. Examples of independence in practice include:

- We are independent of management processes with respect to how our work is done and how we maintain the confidentiality, informality and impartiality of our work
- The office is part of the Hospital, but the Hospital does not dictate how we do our work, how we work with people, and does not have access to specific information about who we work with
- We will publish annual and other reports that include recommendations to management about systemic issues and ways that operations can be improved
- Independence allows us to share important, and at times hard, things with leadership without fear of retribution. This can help improve the overall experience for everyone.

**7. *You mentioned reporting. What kind of information do you report to Boston Children's?***

The Ombuds reports on usage statistics, limited demographics of visitors (which are always optional to provide), the kinds of issues that the Office is seeing, and themes that can assist in system-wide change and improvement. This allows Boston Children's leadership to be gain greater awareness and make proactive adjustments. The office also provides anonymized and aggregate case studies so that people can better understand how the office works and how it can be of assistance.

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**8. *Can you give examples of how the office could inform leadership of trends and opportunities for system-wide improvement?***

- **Awareness of available resources.** Several visitors may have come in with questions about resources that they are unwilling to ask about internally—for example, EAP or Employee Relations. The Ombuds Office can provide information about this, but more importantly, can help troubleshoot why these visitors were not aware of them and what Boston Children’s can do to make it easier for employees to find the information they need.
- **New policy needs.** Consider this scenario: several visitors from different parts of the enterprise and with different circumstances may share the same issue: no clear re-integration process for people returning to teams after long absences. This could be due to family leave, short-term or temporary assignments, or other issues. Because the Ombuds Office works across the whole enterprise, it can spot the patterns and make recommendations about creating a formal re-integration process and policy.
- **Awareness of larger issues.** Visitors from various parts of enterprise may express discomfort with Hospital culture, but feel that their individual experiences are too trivial or isolated to warrant formal complaints. The Ombuds Office can aggregate these experiences, anonymize them, and share them with Hospital leadership as an overall pattern that the organization should investigate.

**9. *What is the difference between the Ombuds Office and counselling or EAP?***

Working with the Ombuds is not a clinical process or therapy. The Ombuds focuses on resolving a discrete issue by equipping you to make decisions and decide direction for future issues you may face. The Ombuds Office is also embedded into Boston Children’s culture, with direct access to leadership, including the Chief Executive and the Board. The Office also provides regular feedback to leadership by sharing aggregated and anonymized data on recurring themes and opportunities for system-wide change and improvement.

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**10. What can I expect if I use the office?**

Although each visit is different, you can always expect a conversation. Conversations are wide-ranging but typically include discussing what happened that caused you to want to visit, what would you like to be different, and what do you need to get there. The Ombuds listens to your concern and asks questions to fully understand it. The Ombuds will work with you to identify reasonable options for addressing your concerns and may offer ones you haven't considered. The potential pros and cons of each option are discussed in detail with you, enabling you to decide which option you believe is the best.

Ways in which the Office helps include:

- **Remember:** You recognize the pathways for raising issues formally.
- **Apply:** You implement a conflict resolutions strategy, which can include being part of a facilitated conversation with the Ombuds Office or participating in a difficult conversation.
- **Analyze:** You understand the conflict, why it occurred, and your contribution to it.
- **Evaluate:** You weigh the options that may resolve a conflict and decide which options will be most effective for you and for your situation.
- **Create:** You construct a strategy for avoiding future issues.

**11. At what stage of an issue should I contact the Ombuds?**

There is never a wrong time to reach out to the Ombuds Office.

Also, there is no limitation to the number of times you use the Ombuds Office or the number of visits available to you to resolve a single issue.

**12. Who can use the Ombuds Office?**

The Ombuds Office is available enterprise-wide. If you have a working relationship with Boston Children's, you can access the office.

**13. What kinds of issues can I bring to the Ombuds?**

If it is affecting your work and/or working relationships, you can contact the Ombuds. As part of the process, we can help you figure out what resources you need or who else you may consider connecting with (i.e., your leadership, EAP, OFD, OCS, Employee Relations, the Harvard Medical School Ombuds, DOCS, GME, etc.)

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**14. *Is there a cost for using the Ombuds Office, or a limit on how often it can be used?***

The Ombuds Office is a free and confidential service for the BCH enterprise. There is no limitation to the number of times you use the Office or the number of visits you have to resolve a single issue.

**15. *I work outside of the 9-5 job and it's hard for me to leave my job to meet with you. How can I use your service?***

We will work with you and your schedule. The Ombuds can be available early in the morning, late evening, or even on the weekends, as needed—if you need to use personal time to discuss your concern or issue.

**16. *How do you meet with visitors?***

We can meet by telephone, video conference (Zoom), or face-to-face. Whatever your preference.

**17. *What if I need an interpreter?***

Interpreting services (including American Sign Language and/or relay services) are available. Let us know ahead of time what you'll need so that we can get that arranged. We also ask our interpreters to agree to keep what they hear confidential so that you can feel comfortable what you're sharing.

**18. *How can I contact the Ombuds Office?***

The Office can be contacted by telephone on (617) 355-2865 or via a secure and confidential webform found [here](#). The office's physical location is at 1 Autumn Street.

**19. *Can I email the Ombuds Office?***

We do not recommend contacting the Ombuds by email because email is not a confidential form of communication. Please contact the office by telephone, (617) 355-2865, or via a secure and confidential webform found [here](#). Additional, secure methods of contacting the office are in the works.