



Complaining about a stop and search

You can complain when you believe you've been treated badly during a stop and search or when you believe the search was illegal or unnecessary. Your complaint identifies and targets the police officer who stopped and searched you. Your complaint will be put on that officer's record.

Is complaining worth it?

Complaining can improve how the police treats you and others, how the police behaves, and how they do stop and searches.

If you complain, police officers that have done an illegal stop and search or mistreated someone during a stop and search may face some sort of punishment. This would happen through what is called 'disciplinary action'. But this is **not guaranteed**.

Your complaint may take a long time to be dealt with (more than a year) and there is no guarantee it will lead to the officer being punished (through disciplinary action). Complaints are usually investigated by the police station of the officer who stopped and searched you.

The police officer who stopped and searched you may say that they behaved and treated you as they did because of how you behaved and acted. You may be blamed for how the stop and search happened. Being aware of this can help you prepare your complaint well.

Is there a time limit?

Yes, the time limit to make a complaint is **12 months**. This means that the stop and search must have happened in the past 12 months.

To meet the time limit, you can submit your complaint first. Then give all the information and documents to support your complaint afterwards (what is called the 'evidence').

What documents and evidence do I need?

- Search record or the officer's details
- Your written account of what happened
- The written accounts of any witnesses
- Videos and photos that you took or that witnesses took
- Copy of video footage taken by police
- Copy of any CCTV footage

If you don't have all these documents and evidence, don't worry, you can still make a complaint. But the more you have, the stronger your complaint.

Police and CCTV video footage

The police can have video footage of the stop and search. It may have been filmed on a camera that the officer was wearing, on cameras inside the police van and at the police station. Ask for a copy of this footage as soon as possible.

CCTV footage may be used by the police, a local council, or a private organisation. It's usually deleted very quickly, so if you want to ask for a copy do it as soon as possible.

When writing to request a copy of the CCTV footage, tell them where and when the stop and search happened, that you're on the footage, and give information to allow the owner of the CCTV footage to identify you (eg. a description of yourself). See more information on the GOV.UK website ([click here](#)).

What should I include in my written account?

- Date, time, location of search
- How the search happened
- How the search was justified
- Which officer(s) searched you
- Anybody else who was there (eg. witnesses)

- What you were told by police and if you were given the search record
- Why you're unhappy with the search

Your written account can be used as your statement by those dealing with your complaint or they may want to record their own statement.

For more detailed guidance, please see page 12 in this guide made by StopWatch: [click here](#).

Steps to make a complaint

1. Obtain the search record or the details of the police officer who stopped and searched you
2. Gather any evidence you can about what happened (for example videos, witnesses, photos) to add to your complaint
3. Write down your account of the stop and search
4. Submit your complaint (online form, contacting your MP, or going to the police station) with the evidence you've gathered
5. Wait for 2-3 weeks for your complaint to be received
6. Wait for about 4 weeks to receive a record of your complaint. Check to see it's correct and contact the person in charge of your complaint (the 'investigating officer') if isn't or if something's missing.
7. Respond to any questions asked or information requested by the investigating officer and follow the steps they give you. You can ask for legal advice for this (see the link below).
8. Wait 6-12 months for the outcome of your complaint and a report
9. If you're not happy with the outcome, you can ask for the decision to be looked at again (this is called an 'appeal').



Where can I submit my complaint?

- Fill the online form of the of Independent Office for Police Conduct. Click [here](#).
- If you're in London, fill the online complaints form, call or write to the London Metropolitan Police [here](#).
- Go to the police station of the officer who stopped and searched you in person. (Please make sure to check Covid-19 guidelines and restrictions first)
- Contact your MP who may help you make a complaint. Find your MP [here](#).
- Make an informal complaint on the Y-Stop app ([click here](#)). The organisations Release and StopWatch get a copy of your complaint and the police are aware of this

What if I can't get the search record or the police officer's details?

If you don't have the details of the police officer or the search record and you can't obtain it, consider making a complaint with the Y-Stop app ([click here](#)). If you don't want to make a formal complaint, you can still register what happened on the Y-Stop app.

What is a search record?

A search record is a document that includes information on a stop and search:

- the officer's details
- date, time and place of the stop and search
- reason for the stop and search
- outcome of the stop and search
- your self-defined ethnicity
- vehicle registration number (if relevant)
- what the officer was looking for and anything they found
- your name or a description if you refuse to give your name.



Checklist

Follow this checklist to prepare your complaint

Step No.	Task	Done?
1.	Check you still have time to make a complaint (12-month time limit)	
2.	Get the search record or a copy of it, or the police officer's details	
3.	Ask for a copy of any video footage the police may have as soon as you can	
4.	Ask for a copy of any relevant CCTV footage as soon as you can	
5.	Write your account of the stop and search and why you are complaining.	
6.	Ask any witnesses to write their account of what happened and to email it you	
7.	Get any videos and photos you took on your phone or that witnesses took	
8.	Submit your complaint with all these documents or submit your complaint and email these documents to the investigating officer	



More information

- Please read this detailed guide by StopWatch: [click here to download](#) and [click here to go to website](#)
- Making complaints to Met police: [click here](#)
- Find the Y-Stop app: [click here](#)
- For hate crimes, report it on the True Vision website ([click here](#))
- Learn more about accessing CCTV footage data on the GOV.UK website ([click here](#)) and on the ICO website ([click here](#))

What is a stop and search?

- Read our blog post here: [INSERT LINK](#)
- Information by Met police on stop and search: [click here](#)
- Information by Gov UK on your rights during a stop and search: [click here](#)
- Information by the charity Release: [click here](#)

Get legal advice

If you need free one-off legal advice, you can fill in this form by Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC) of Toynbee Hall: <https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/free-advice/legal-advice/#online-flac-ia-form> or you can email FLAC here: flac@toynbeehall.org.uk

Please know that we do not offer representation or do case work. We provide advice on housing, employment, immigration, consumer, civil matters and more.

If you want to find other free legal clinics or you need representation, please look at LawWorks here: <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/legal-advice-individuals>