Best practice to handle ethical issues

Ethical issues are often complex and the approach will vary depending on the specific problem and the resources of the journal. In general, COPE expects that member journals will adhere to these three basic principles to resolve ethical issues and cases of alleged misconduct:

- Provide links to COPE Guidelines, flowcharts, and other materials (e.g., ICMJE authorship and conflict of interest guidelines).
- Develop guidelines for promptly responding to suspected ethical breaches by authors, reviewers, and editors: see COPE Core Practice on ‘Complaints and appeals’.
- Clearly identify contact information for the person responsible for handling allegations of misconduct.
- Establish editorial office guidelines about who responds to complaints (e.g., in what manner, within what time frame, and what parameters require involvement of legal staff and the publisher). Some journals have an ethics committee; others rely on a sole editor to handle these issues.
- Know when and how to liaise with other editors and institutions.

Further reading