Why a uPVC Door Handle Feels Stiff or Will Not Lift

A stiff or non-lifting uPVC door handle is almost always a sign that the internal mechanism, known as the multipoint lock, has shifted slightly or that the locking components no longer line up correctly. The fix is rarely a mystery once you understand how the lock works and what to look for. In most cases, the problem originates from a door that has dropped, a locking keep that has moved, or a lock cylinder that has become misaligned. The direct answer is that the handle feels stiff because the lock is binding on one of the several locking points along the door edge, and the handle will not lift because the gearbox inside the lock is obstructed. A quick check of the door's alignment and the condition of the lock cylinder can tell you whether you need a simple adjustment or a replacement part.

How a uPVC multipoint lock works

A uPVC door does not rely on a single latch. Instead, it uses a multipoint lock system that extends bolts into the top, bottom, and sometimes the middle of the door frame. When you lift the handle, you are not just engaging the main latch; you are moving a central gearbox that pushes multiple hooks or rollers outward. These locking points engage with metal plates called locking keeps that are screwed into the frame. If even one of these points is out of alignment, the gearbox will feel stiff, and the handle may refuse to lift fully. This is why a stiff handle is so common on uPVC doors: the entire door and frame are made from materials that expand, contract, and settle over time, and the locking mechanism must remain in perfect alignment to work smoothly.

The stiffness you feel is resistance from the gearbox trying to push the bolts into the keeps. If a bolt is hitting the edge of a keep instead of sliding into its hole, the gearbox cannot complete its travel, and the handle stays locked in the down position or feels heavy and unresponsive. In many cases, the problem is not with the handle itself but with the door's position relative to the frame. A door that has dropped by even a few millimetres will cause the bolts to miss their targets. This is especially common on older uPVC doors where the hinges have worn or the frame has settled. Understanding this mechanism is the first step to diagnosing the issue without calling a professional.

Common causes of a stiff or non-lifting handle

Door sag or hinge wear

The most frequent cause is that the door has dropped on its hinges. Over time, the weight of the door can cause the hinge screws to loosen or the hinge itself to wear, allowing the door to sag. When the door sags, the locking bolts no longer line up with the keeps. The handle then

feels stiff because the bolts are scraping against the metal of the keep rather than sliding into the opening. You can test this by looking at the gap between the door and the frame at the top and bottom. If the gap is larger at the top than at the bottom, the door has probably dropped. A simple check is to lift the door slightly while trying to operate the handle. If the handle moves freely when the door is lifted, the hinges are the likely culprit.



Misaligned locking keeps

The locking keeps themselves can shift. They are screwed into the uPVC frame, and those screws can work loose over time, especially if the door is used heavily. A keep that has moved even a few millimetres will cause the corresponding bolt to bind. This is often overlooked because the keep looks fine from the outside, but the screw holes may have enlarged, allowing the keep to tilt or slide. You can check the keeps for visible signs of wear or movement. If the keep has a burr or a shiny spot where the bolt has been rubbing, that is a clue. Tightening the keep screws or repositioning the keep slightly can often solve the stiffness without any other work.

Lock cylinder or gearbox wear

The lock cylinder and the internal gearbox can also wear out. A uPVC door lock is a mechanical device with moving parts that are subject to friction and dirt. Over years of use, the lubricant

inside the gearbox can dry out, or the plastic gears can chip or crack. If the handle feels stiff even when the door is open and the bolts are not engaging any keeps, the problem is inside the lock itself. This is less common than alignment issues but does happen. A worn gearbox often produces a grinding or clicking sound when the handle is operated. In that case, the lock mechanism needs to be replaced, which is a job for a professional locksmith because it involves disassembling the door and matching the new gearbox to the existing multipoint lock system.

Security escutcheon or cylinder obstruction

The security escutcheon, the metal plate that surrounds the lock cylinder on the outside of the door, can sometimes press against the cylinder and prevent it from turning freely. If the escutcheon is loose or has been fitted too tightly, it can bind against the cylinder body. This will make the key operation feel stiff, and because the cylinder is linked to the handle mechanism through the gearbox, it can also affect handle movement. A similar issue occurs if the lock cylinder itself is damaged or if the key is worn. A worn key can fail to engage the pins inside the cylinder properly, causing the cylinder to resist turning. Replacing the cylinder or adjusting the escutcheon often resolves this.

How to diagnose the problem yourself

Before you reach for tools, do a few simple checks. First, try operating the handle with the door open. If the handle moves smoothly when the door is open but stiff when the door is closed, the problem is alignment. If it is stiff in both positions, the issue is likely inside the lock mechanism. Next, look at the locking points along the door edge. Operate the handle slowly and watch the bolts. Do all of them extend fully? Does one lag behind? If a bolt does not move as far as the others, that bolt may be binding. You can also check the keeps by closing the door and marking the position of each bolt with a piece of masking tape. Then open the door and see if the bolts line up with the openings in the keeps. A gap of a few millimetres is enough to cause stiffness.



If the door has dropped, you may be able to adjust the hinges. Many uPVC door hinges have adjustment screws that allow you to lift the door slightly. This is a common feature on modern door hinges, and the adjustment is usually a hex screw on the hinge itself. Turning it clockwise will lift the door. Do not force it if it does not move; some hinges are not adjustable and require professional attention. If the keeps are misaligned, you can loosen the screws, shift the keep slightly, and retighten them. Use a screwdriver that fits the screws properly to avoid stripping the heads. If the lock cylinder is stiff, try lubricating it with a dry graphite powder. Do not use oil, as it attracts dirt and will make the problem worse over time.

When to call a locksmith

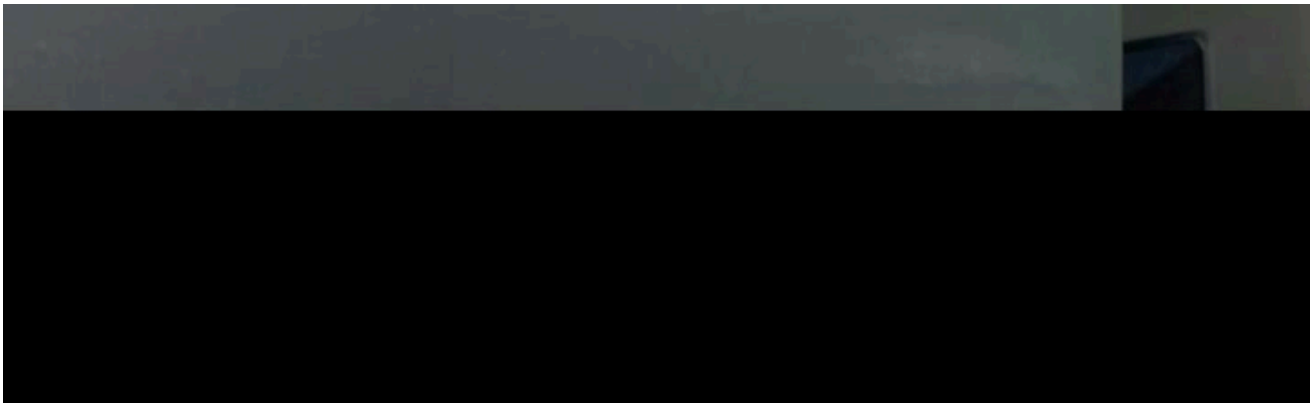
If the handle still feels stiff after checking alignment and adjusting the hinges or keeps, or if the lock itself is visibly damaged, it is time to call a professional. A uPVC door lock is a complex assembly, and forcing the handle when it is stuck can break the gearbox or snap the handle spindle. A broken gearbox will leave the door locked and inoperable, which is a security risk and an inconvenience. A qualified locksmith can assess whether the gearbox needs replacing, whether the cylinder is worn, or whether the door frame itself has shifted. They can also advise on upgrading to an anti snap cylinder for stronger protection for doors, especially if the existing cylinder is old or vulnerable to snapping attacks. Choosing the right replacement parts is important because uPVC door locks are not all the same; they vary by brand, backset, and number of locking points.

For homeowners, the key is to catch the problem early. A handle that is starting to stiffen will only get worse, and the longer you leave it, the more likely it is that the gearbox will fail. Regular maintenance, such as cleaning the locking points and lubricating the cylinder, can extend the life of the mechanism. But if the stiffness returns after a simple adjustment, the underlying issue is probably wear in the gearbox or hinge damage, both of which need a professional repair. Replacing a multipoint lock gearbox is not a DIY job for most people because it requires removing the door, disassembling the lock, and fitting a new gearbox that matches the existing system exactly. A mistake here can leave the door insecure or impossible to lock.

Preventing future stiffness

Keeping the door in good alignment is the best way to avoid stiffness. Check the hinge screws once a year and tighten them if they are loose. If the door is exposed to direct sunlight, the uPVC may expand and cause temporary stiffness on hot days; this is normal and usually resolves when the door cools. In such cases, do not force the handle. Wait for the temperature to change, or adjust the keeps slightly to allow for seasonal movement. Lubricate the lock cylinder with graphite powder every six months. Clean the locking points with a dry cloth to remove dust and grit. These simple steps will keep the mechanism working smoothly and reduce wear on the gearbox.





If you are replacing a lock or upgrading the door's security, consider an anti snap cylinder and a reinforced security escutcheon. These components provide stronger protection for doors against forced entry, and they also tend to be more robust in everyday use. A quality cylinder will resist wear better than a basic one, and a well-fitted escutcheon will not bind against the cylinder. When combined with a properly aligned door, these parts give you a handle that lifts and turns without resistance and a lock that you can rely on for years.

In summary, a stiff uPVC door handle is almost always a sign of misalignment or internal wear. Check the door drop, the keeps, and the cylinder before assuming the lock is broken. A small adjustment often restores smooth operation. If the stiffness persists, a professional locksmith can diagnose the exact cause and replace the worn parts without risking damage to the door. Keeping the mechanism clean and aligned will save you the frustration of a handle that will not lift when you need it most.