Raising a Concern or Complaint

Children’s learning is at the heart of everything we do. Good relationships between home and the centre give our children a better chance of success. Our learning, teaching and care programs are underpinned by our commitment to the following principles:

- A constant focus on quality and standards
- Equity and access for all children and staff
- Accountability
- Partnership

This policy provides information about avenues of communication, which strengthen the partnership between parent/care providers and the children’s centre. It acknowledges the importance of the relationship between caregivers/parents and staff.

Your concerns or complaint may relate to:

- Your child’s progress and development
- Your child’s behaviour
- Centre policies and practices
- Facilities
- Another child/parent
- Other centre related issue

Process for raising a concern or complaint

The usual procedure to be followed:

- In the first instance arrange to talk to the person who knows about the situation.
- It will always help the situation if you are calm and honest in your approach. You should not approach the children directly.
- Your concern or complaint deserves time in order to be resolved. Let the person know about your concern/complaint with a note or telephone call. This means they will be prepared and have all of the necessary information. A time can then be set up which suits you both.
- All personal matters such as those about children, parents or staff relationships should be raised directly with the centre through the Director or another staff member, in a confidential manner.
- There will be times when you feel, for a variety of reasons that you are unable to speak to the person described as the first point of call. If this is the case, let the Director know. Where possible it is best if you speak
directly to the person concerned.

- If at the end of this meeting the concern/complaint still is not able to be resolved you may contact the Regional Office. The Regional Officer will need to be sure that attempts have been made to sort out the issues, using the process described above.

**Roles And Expectations**

**Parents/Children Can Expect:**
- A safe learning environment
- A balanced curriculum
- Information about all aspects of children's education
- Information about Centre policies and procedures
- Opportunities to put their point of view and express opinions and concern
- To be treated fairly and equitably
- Opportunities to be involved and to participate in activities in the Centre
- Confidentiality

**The Centre Expects:**
- Support for Centre policies and procedures such as Behaviour Guidance, Sun Smart and Health Policies
- Parents to treat staff with respect and listen to their point of view
- Concerns/complaints will be raised at the Centre through the agreed channels including the Centre’s documented Raising a Concern or Complaint (this policy)
- Confidentiality will be maintained

**Mediators**
Mediators are available in some communities to assist in the resolution of some concerns, such as counsellors or social workers.

**Advocates**
Support might be enlisted in specific areas about particular concerns, such as students with disabilities.

**Support People**
At times support people might be enlisted to assist in the resolution of concerns, debrief with the person or attend a meeting with another person.

**Confidentiality Statement**
It is important that your concerns are kept confidential, and although at times you may wish to seek support from friends or an advocate, it is important to do
this wisely.
When the matter is discussed in the child’s hearing, it is important that the child understands that you have confidence that the issue will be resolved confidentially, at the Centre level. Criticism of the Centre or staff does not support the child’s education as it can undermine trust and confidence.

Similarly, staff are expected to keep concerns that have been raised confidential and must not discuss the issue/s in front of children. Staff would also expect the matters to be resolved with parents and caregivers appropriately.

**Making a complaint** (sourced from DECD Parent Guide to raising a concern or complaint)

There are some simple points to keep in mind if you have a complaint about public education and care:

- Clearly identify the issue and let us know what you would like us to do about it.
- Write down key points to refer to when you report the problem.
- A friend or representative from a support organisation can attend any meeting with you. This person is not there to speak for you or to answer questions on your behalf. It’s important that it’s your opinions and feelings that are voiced and heard by all parties.
- If an interpreter is required, please let us know prior to any meeting.
- Written or verbal complaints should focus on the facts or details of what happened – avoid personal insults, inflammatory statements and threatening or intimidating comments.
- It’s best to only discuss your complaint with people directly involved in the complaint or resolution process. This will help limit damage that can be caused by rumours.
- When a lawyer is engaged by one of the parties, the issue becomes a legal matter and will be referred to the Legal and Legislation Unit of the department.

**Stage 1 - tell the centre/preschool first**

Contact the centre/preschool to arrange a time to meet with the staff member or have a discussion with them on the phone. They will look into your concerns and get back to you as soon as possible.

If the matter is not resolved, or if your complaint is about a staff member, you may want to meet with, or write to, the director. They will work with you and the
staff member to resolve the issue.
If the complaint is about the director, contact your local regional office of the Department for Education and Child Development.

The centre/preschool will aim to resolve your concern or complaint as soon as possible - ideally within 15 working days.

**Stage 2 - contact your regional office**

You may choose to contact your regional office for help if:

- you are not satisfied that your complaint has been resolved by the centre/preschool
- the director is the subject of your complaint.

The regional office will review your complaint and work with you and the centre/preschool to resolve the matter as soon as possible - within 20 working days.

**Stage 3 - refer your matter to the Parent Complaint Unit**

If you are still not satisfied you can refer your feedback or complaint to the Parent Complaint Unit by completing the online form or calling us on 1800 677 435.

The complaint unit will:

- assess your complaint
- decide what action is needed
- let you know what has been done and when you can expect to hear about the outcome.

The department’s Head of Schools or the Head of Early Childhood Development and the Chief Executive’s office will be advised by the Parent Complaint Unit of the outcome of the review. One of these senior leaders will make a decision about your complaint.

In most cases you can expect to hear of a decision within 35 days.

**Advice and support**

You can contact the unit on 1800 677 435 to discuss your concern or complaint, or to seek advice about resolving centre/preschool problems. Staff will follow up with you to check about progress.
Will I be treated fairly?

You will not be discriminated against if you make a complaint. All staff are bound by the Code of Ethics for South Australian Public Sector which requires staff to act impartially, fairly and equitably.

You can ask for your identity to be confidential when making a complaint. However, keep in mind:

- this may limit options for investigating and negotiating a resolution
- while every effort will be made to comply with your request, freedom of information requirements may result in your identity becoming known.

You can make an anonymous complaint. However:

- the extent to which it can be investigated is limited as staff cannot liaise with the parent about the complaint
- anonymous complaints raise issues in relation to natural justice - those who have allegations made about them have a right to know the particulars of the allegation.

Contacts
Director Gale Hansen 8586 6063
Assistant Director Gay White 8586 6063
Murray & Mallee Regional Office (Berri) 8595 2305

Also refer to the brochure: Parent guide to raising a concern or complaint

References:
Parent complaint policy: A guide to raising a concern or complaint
www.decd.sa.gov.au

Parent concerns and complaints procedure: Solving concerns in public education schools and preschools
www.decd.sa.gov.au

Date Reviewed: March 2012
Review Due: March 2014