

COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCE POLICY FOR PARENTS / STAFF

PURPOSE:

To have a clear procedure in place for both staff and parents of the centre to utilise in the event of a grievance or complaint arising.

IMPLEMENTATION:

A grievance / complaint pertaining to any aspect of the centre's operations or care practices may be given either verbally or in written format and can be initiated by Parents to Staff, Staff to Parents or Staff to Staff. Any written complaint initiated by a parent, may be completed on either a pro-forma complaints form available on request from the office or in the complainant's own format.

The Director will assume the role of mediator unless directly involved in the grievance / complaint. In such case the mediator's role will be taken by the Licensee, Authorised Supervisor or Director.

The mediator will:

- ❖ Investigate the full history of the matter, any contributing incidents and other possible causes for the complaint
- ❖ Interview staff members and /or witnesses implicated in the matter who may have relevant information.
- ❖ Ensure investigator responses are accurately recorded, signed and dated
- ❖ Agenda formatted before calling a joint meeting at which both parties will air their feelings, discuss each party's ultimate goal and devise strategies to be put in place with a view to resolving the conflict.
- ❖ The mediator will continue to monitor and evaluate the situation to ensure the strategies remain in place.

If no agreement can be reached and the centre is clearly unable to meet the child's or families needs the family will be asked to withdraw their child from the centre.

Should the childcare position be discontinued a full report of the history of the grievance will be made available to the Department of Community Services, Children's Service Advisor and Director General.

DEALING WITH STAFF CONFLICT

The staff at Elder Street Early Childhood centre advocate team work and mutual respect in their workplace. However, with even the best of intentions and practices sometimes conflict can flare. Management aims to discuss the issues surrounding potential conflict often and works with staff individually and as a group to help promote healthy communication, group problem solving

and a feeling of empowerment by fostering autonomy in decisions regardless of job position.

It is important for all staff to understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy conflict and how our actions and many different factors of personality and styles of communication can effect our interactions at work.

Signs of Healthy Conflict

Conflict amongst staff in a centre can be constructive if it:

- Generates new ideas, new perspectives
- Provokes an evaluation of organisational structures or centre design
- Brings individuals' reservations and objections out into the open
- Heightens the debate about pending decisions or problems
- Forces the re-examination of current goals, policies, or practices
- Focuses the attention on problems inhibiting performance at the centre
- Energizes staff – gets them actively involved in the life of the centre

Signs of Unhealthy Conflict

Conflict amongst staff in a centre can be destructive if it:

- One person or faction is bound and determined to emerge victorious
- Focus of the debate changes but the adversaries remain the same
- Discussion never moves from complaints to solutions
- Staff members start taking sides
- Parents or other outside parties get drawn into the debate
- Continuing acrimony starts to erode staff morale
- Dissension continues even after a decision is hammered out
- Debate focuses on personalities, not issues

When a conflict does the Director and other parties utilise a process known as conflict mapping which is used to help identify the issues at hand in a non threatening environment with the aim to reaching a solution. The system has several steps;

1. Define the problem;
2. Identify who is involved;
3. Identify what the parties want – focusing on needs and fears.

During annual Staff Evaluation, staff complete a self and peer appraisal addressing different areas including teamwork, staff communication and interactions. From these evaluations, issues that may relate to past or potential conflict can be identified and personal and professional goals are then set.

Reviewed: 10 June 2005
Reviewed: 21 April 2006 by M Duffy-Fagan
Source: Department of Community Services
"Everyone can Win", Cornelius, H & Faire, S 1989, Simon and Schuster, Roseville, NSW
"When Friction Flares: dealing with staff conflict, Child Care Information Exchange, no. 65.