

Links to QA 8.6 "Management ensures that grievance and complaints procedures are adhered to."

What happens when someone makes a complaint about your service? Is this met with absolute horror where people become defensive, or is a positive approach taken as this offers the opportunity to improve?

Everyone has a right to feel they have a voice, to be able to complain about an issue they are unhappy with and do so without judgement or repercussions. In our role as a service for the community we should think about turning the negatives into positives when dealing with complaints.

The benefits gained by taking a positive approach to complaints can be many; here are some to think about:

- Saves management and staff time and money
- Sustains staff morale
- Minimises damaging 'word of mouth' adverse publicity
- Opportunity to improve relations with services users
- Can enhance reputation/image of service
- Provides feedback about service users' needs and priorities
- Gives us information about organisational weakness (can be an early warning device)

To be able to deal with complaints effectively it is important to have a grievance procedure in place. Outlined below are steps to developing a grievance procedure:

1. Form a working party - consult with families and staff asking them how they think the process could work. Research existing policies, contact resource agencies, the NSW Ombudsman.
2. Establish policy - outline the process for complaints. How do people make their complaints? What happens after a complaint has been made? Remember to take a fair and consistent approach.
3. Publicise your complaints procedure once established.
4. Accept all complaints - people should be able to complain about anything they feel is unfair. Good communication and active listening will help resolve many complaints

5. Keep people informed - give people regular updates on the progress of their complaint
6. Keep a record of all complaints and comments - set up a system to record details, comments or suggestions
7. Accept verbal complaints - if you can deal with a complaint face-to-face it can often be resolved at this initial stage
8. Make the best use of staff - staff should be given opportunity to hear complaints and deal with them quickly. If they can't be dealt with at this level the Management Committee or sponsors need to handle the issue
9. Monitor and review your complaints procedure - how has it been operating? If there have been no complaints, what does this mean? If there have been complaints, what do they tell you about the service?
10. Maintain confidentiality - if the complaint is a confidential issue this can be discussed at a meeting without the personal details of the individual involved. It is important to remember that once the meeting is closed, details of the meeting should not be discussed with other people outside the committee.

Important Points to Remember

- Welcome complaints – it's better they tell you and not just everyone else
- Be flexible
- Good communication will reduce complaints
- Be responsive
- Learn from complaints
- Publicise your complaints procedure in handbooks, information packages, policy manuals
- Record all complaints and document steps taken to resolve the issue
- Consult before changes are made to procedures.

An example of a Grievance Procedure to be included in a family information package:

Grievance Procedure

Please feel free to discuss with the Coordinator or staff any issues you may have regarding your child. Sometimes, discussion can make things seem a whole lot less serious and lead to an eventual resolution.

Please be assured that any discussion will remain confidential.

If you feel your rights are not being respected, or if you have any other complaint or concerns about the Centre please:

1. Talk to the OOSH Coordinator in person or phone (insert phone contact details)
2. Talk with the OOSH management Committee Chairperson (insert phone numbers or where to access available phone numbers)
3. Talk to the Sponsor Body/Organisation Supervisor on (insert phone contact details)
4. If you are not satisfied with the outcome or felt your rights were not respected then contact member of the Sponsor Body/Organisation Manager/Management Committee on (insert phone details) or place your complaint in writing and forward to: (insert address details)
5. If your are not satisfied after using the above steps you can contact the NSW Ombudsman

www.nswombudsman.nsw.gov.au
Phone: 9286 1000 or 1800 451 524

or write to:
NSW Ombudsman
Level 24
580 George St
Sydney NSW 2000