



# STAYING CALM UNDER PRESSURE

At some stage in their career OOSH workers will have to deal a complaint from an angry parent. It makes no difference whether the complaint is real or imagined; no one likes to be the target of a complaint. But let's face it... sometimes parents get upset, frustrated, and angry (don't we all?).

When parents get upset, the best way to handle a complaint is by not being defensive, being open to discussion and hearing what the parents' issues are. Try to meet the concern head on and win back their trust.

**These 10 steps may help you manage the situation when dealing with a dissatisfied or angry parent.**

### 1. KEEP CALM AND AVOID DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM IN FRONT OF OTHERS

The first thing to do is keep calm. Most angry people say things they don't really mean. The centre is not the place for confrontations, so try to avoid discussing the problem in front of everyone else at the centre.

### 2. TALK TO THEM IN PRIVATE

Move them to a more private area or agree to meet or telephone the parent at a mutually convenient time to discuss the complaint. By doing this, you avoid giving the parent an audience, it allows the parent to 'cool off' and gives you time to prepare an appropriate response to the complaint.

### 3. LISTEN

During the meeting or telephone call with the parent, one of the most important things you can do is listen. Repeat back to them what you heard them say and clarify your understanding of their complaint.

### 4. AVOID INTERRUPTING

Even if parents raise their voices or their complaint has only half the facts, you should avoid interrupting. Let them get it all out. Never try to interrupt or dismiss them. By interrupting a parent, you risk inflaming the situation.

### 5. DON'T BECOME DEFENSIVE OR ARGUE

Avoid defending or justifying your actions (or the actions of other staff members). Don't make excuses or argue – this does nothing toward resolving the problem and, in fact, can delay progress toward a solution.

### 6. SHOW EMPATHY

Statements like "I am sorry that you feel....." are appropriate at this time. By doing this, parents are more likely to feel that their problem is being taken seriously.

### 7. CLARIFY THE PROBLEM

It is important to find out exactly what the problem is. Ask questions to gather information that uncovers the real issue. This helps both parties to focus on the problem (not personalities), stick to the facts, and avoid being caught up in unrelated issues. One very effective strategy is to ask parents to put their concerns in writing. Taking time to sit and write down one's concerns often helps to clarify exactly what the problem is.

### 8. OFFER A RANGE OF SOLUTIONS

After you have identified the real concern, try to offer a range of solutions, but don't offer solutions that are impossible to deliver. Encourage the parent's input to show a willingness to work together to solve the problem.

### 9. OBTAIN CLOSURE

In the ideal case you will have outlined the options available to the parent and agreed on a mutual course of action. At this point it is appropriate to end the meeting. It should conclude with three things:

- Leave the parent with a closing action statement - for example, "I'll get on to that now".
- Thank the parent for their time (no matter how unpleasant the meeting).
- If follow-up is required, tell them when you will contact them – for example, "I'll ring you tomorrow".

### 10. LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN

It is important that you leave the door open for the parent – e.g. "If there is ever anything else, please come to me". By saying this, the parent will at least feel that his/her complaint has been taken seriously, and your relationship, however strained, will remain intact.

*NOTE: Staff should not be subjected to verbal or physical abuse by angry parents. Parents should be made aware that the centre has a zero tolerance policy in these matters.*

**THIS FACTSHEET LINKS TO QA3 'PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY LINKS' AND QA8 'MANAGING TO SUPPORT QUALITY'**



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