

Mitcham Preschool Centre

Parent Concern & Complaint Policy

At Mitcham Preschool Centre we believe parents are partners in the education of children. Regular two-way communication between parents/carers and the Preschool is essential in helping children achieve their potential.

The Preschool is committed to ensuring that anyone with parental responsibilities for a child attending the Preschool can raise a concern or complaint, with confidence that it will be heard and responded to in an appropriate and timely fashion.

Everyone has a right to learn and work in a safe, supportive environment.

Statement of Intent:

Occasionally conflicts may arise where grievance procedures are necessary for resolution of those conflicts. These conflicts may involve your own child at Preschool, educators, other parents or the Director.

This policy provides a process for parents and educators at the Preschool to raise and resolve grievances that may arise.

All grievances should be raised with a member of the teaching staff or the Director. The Educators at the Preschool strongly discourage:

- **Parents/carers raising an issue that relates to another child at the Preschool, directly with the child or parents/carers of the child or other parents/carers. The issue should be raised with one of the teaching staff or the Director.**
- **Parents/carers raising an issue that relates to another parent/carer at Preschool directly with that parent/carer or other parents/carers. The issue should be raised with one of the teaching staff or the Director.**

All grievances will be handled in the strictest confidence.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Safety of children is always the first priority. Our procedures are underpinned by the following principles:

1. All persons in the Preschool community including children, parents/carers, staff and volunteers have the right to be treated with respect and courtesy in accordance with the Preschool's values.
2. Parents have the right to raise concerns and make enquiries or complaints about any aspect of Preschool life.
3. Information about how, where and to whom complaints can be made should be visible and accessible through the Preschool's procedures.
4. Complaints will be acknowledged and addressed promptly
5. Individual complaints will be assessed objectively and without bias using principles of natural justice.
6. The rights and responsibilities of all parties will be considered and balanced in attempting to find a mutually acceptable outcome to complaints.
7. The confidentiality of all parties will be maintained wherever possible.

The following section outlines the steps that you need to take should you have a concern or complaint, and outline the process for how the Preschool and the Department for Education, will handle your complaint.

1. Talk to Us

If your concern or complaint relates to an issue concerning your child's education or experiences you should talk to one of the teaching staff or the Director as soon as possible.

You may prefer to organise a mutually convenient time to meet one of the teaching staff or the Director rather than discuss the issue via a telephone conversation. You are welcome to bring a support person with you. The role of the support person is to provide advice and support during the process and not to answer questions on behalf of any of the parties or interfere with the discussion.

The Preschool staff will, following receipt of a direct complaint:

- 1.1. Listen to the complaint.
- 1.2. Record what you say.
- 1.3. Identify actions to resolve the concern.
- 1.4. Let you know what will or has been done.
- 1.5. Get back to you to see how things are going.
- 1.6. If appropriate, refer the matter to the Director. If your concern has not been resolved following discussions with the staff member, you should contact the Director. The Director will:
 - 1.6.1. Acknowledge receipt of the complaint as soon as reasonably possible (within 5 school days).
 - 1.6.2. Listen to you.
 - 1.6.3. Provide support to you if necessary while the complaint is being considered.
 - 1.6.4. Investigate, consider and determine the most appropriate way to resolve the issue fairly and promptly.
 - 1.6.5. Consider relevant legislation, The Department for Education policy and guidelines, the Preschool's procedures.
 - 1.6.6. Inform you if there is a delay in the process.
 - 1.6.7. Ensure your complaint and the outcome is documented.
 - 1.6.8. Ensure that the outcome of the process is communicated to you verbally and, if appropriate, in writing including the right to refer the matter to the Mount Barker Education Office.

Please note:

Interpreters and Aboriginal Education Coordinators are available to assist parents in communicating with us. Please contact the Southern Adelaide Regional Office (Ph 82073700) or the Mount Barker Education Office (Ph 83914705) for assistance.

1.7. Approaches that may be used to resolve a parent complaint

The Preschool may take one of the following approaches to resolve a parent's concern or complaint:

- 1.7.1. An acknowledgement that the complaint is valid and is worthy of investigation (overall or in part).
- 1.7.2. Identification of areas of agreement between the parties involved.
- 1.7.3. Opportunities for all the parties involved to express their concerns, explain their point of view and clarify any misunderstandings.
- 1.7.4. Acknowledgement that the situation could have been better handled (this does not constitute an admission of negligence or guilt).
- 1.7.5. An opportunity for an apology.
- 1.7.6. Recognition that the situation presents an opportunity for changes or alternate arrangements to be made to resolve the complaint.
- 1.7.7. Discussion with the parties about the steps that will be taken to ensure that the event complained about will not reoccur.
- 1.7.8. An undertaking to review the Preschool's policy, procedures or practices.

2. Contact our local Department for Education Office

If the complaint is about the Director or you are not satisfied with the outcome you may contact the Mount Barker Education Office (which forms part of the Mitcham Plains Partnership) on 8391 4705.

The Mount Barker Education Office will:

- 2.1. Provide written acknowledgement of receipt of your complaint within five working days.
- 2.2. Clarify and record the nature of the complaint, including what expectations you have in relation to outcomes.
- 2.3. Investigate, consider and determine the most appropriate way to resolve the issue fairly and promptly.
- 2.4. Refer, where appropriate, any complaint that has not been raised at the Preschool level back to the Preschool.
- 2.5. Inform you if there is a delay in the process.
- 2.6. Ensure your complaint and the outcome is documented.
- 2.7. Ensure that the outcome of the process is communicated to you verbally and, if appropriate, in writing.

3. Contact the Parent Complaint Unit – Department for Education

If your complaint remains unresolved after working together with the Preschool, or Mount Barker Education Office, you should submit in writing, your complaint to:

Manager, Parent Complaint Unit
Level 6 / 31 Flinders Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000
Ph: 1800 677 435
Or by email to decd.parentcomplaint@sa.gov.au

Please note:

You should include information about the complaint, including why it remains unresolved and an outline of what actions have been taken to resolve the complaint. You should also outline what you think a reasonable solution would be.

The Parent Complaint Unit, on behalf of the Department's Chief Executive, will:

- 3.1. Acknowledge receipt of the complaint.
- 3.2. Assess and make a recommendation to the Department's Head of Schools or the Department's Head of Child Development that:
 - A review is not warranted and that you should be advised that no further action is considered necessary and that the complaint is now concluded
 - OR;** A review is necessary
 - OR;** The complaint should be referred to an external agency for investigation or review.
- 3.3. The Department's Head of Schools or the Department's Head of Child Development will review the advice and decide that the complaint (in full or in part):
 - Can be resolved (all parties agree on an appropriate response)
 - OR;** Should be dismissed (complaint is either unsubstantiated, vexatious, outside of reasonable expectations in relation to confidentiality, cooperation, courtesy and respect or is orientated towards conflict)
 - OR;** Remains unresolved and that an independent review by an external agency is required

Please Note:

Any written or verbal complaints that contain personal abuse, inflammatory statements, and comments of a threatening nature or intended to intimidate will not be addressed and the parent will be advised accordingly.

Parents can call the Parent Complaint Unit hotline at any stage on 1800 677 435 for information, advice and support.

4. Process exceptions

In some circumstances it may be appropriate that a concern or complaint is escalated directly to the Parent Complaint Unit. In these instances the parent will be advised of the process to be adopted and why.

Parents can also contact:

Education and Early Childhood Services Registration and Standards Board of South Australia (EECSB)
Ph: 1800 882 413

Or

The State Ombudsman: www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au for information, advice, support and in circumstances where the complaint remains unresolved.

5. Requesting your identity to remain confidential

Parents may request that their identity remain confidential when making a complaint. In this situation, every effort will be made to keep the Parent's identity confidential but this may limit options for negotiating a resolution. (For example, an apology is unlikely to be forthcoming if the identity of the complainant is not known.) These circumstances also raise issues in relation to procedural fairness for those who have a complaint made about them as they have a right to know the particulars of the complaint.

While every effort will be made to comply with a request to keep the Parent's identity confidential, Freedom of Information requirements may result in a parent's identity becoming known.

6. Anonymous complaints

The Preschool will assess every complaint that is made. The extent to which an anonymous complaint can be investigated will be limited, as Preschool staff cannot liaise with the Parent about the complaint.

Anonymous complaints also raise issues in relation to natural justice for those who have a complaint made about them as they have a right to know the particulars of the complaint.

The Director will determine, upon receipt of an anonymous complaint, to what extent the complaint will be investigated. Where the complaint is in relation to the Director, the Assistant Regional Director will make the determination and for complaints concerning the Regional Director, the Department's Head of Schools or the Department's Head of Child Development will make the final decision.

7. Additional Information

These procedures apply to parent/carer concerns and complaints in relation to the Preschool. These procedures do not apply to matters where there are legislated requirements or existing policies and processes of appeal, such as:

- 7.1. Concerns and allegations of misconduct by educators, volunteers and service providers (criminal matters, child protection, corruption, etc).
- 7.2. Employee disputes and grievances (Employees should refer to the Department's HR17 Complaints Resolution Policy for these types of complaints).
- 7.3. Complaints or appeals relating to student suspension and expulsion.
- 7.4. Duty of care or mandatory reporting responsibilities.
- 7.5. Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare related issues.
- 7.6. Health support planning.

The Parent Concern and Complaint Policy procedures will be reviewed every two years and policy issues will be discussed at Governing Council and educator meetings

For more information

www.decd.sa.gov.au/parentcomplaint

Approved: Governing Council Chairperson

Approved: Mitcham Preschool Director