

# Let's Discuss - *Managing Complaints*

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Parents come to you with queries, concerns and complaints. They look to you for advice, explanations, information, apologies and changes in your behaviour. How you respond to these approaches will determine your on-going relationship with them.

## Personal/Professional qualities required of staff when dealing with complaints

No one likes dealing with complaints, but when you do:

- ◆ Show genuine interest and concern—take the complaint seriously
- ◆ Display understanding and empathy towards the parent
- ◆ Listen without interrupting and respect people's feelings
- ◆ Ask relevant questions and clarify issues
- ◆ Read non-verbal communications
- ◆ Be honest and willing to share relevant information
- ◆ Work with the parent to find mutually agreeable solutions
- ◆ Be willing to implement agreed solutions, assess their effectiveness and provide on-going feedback to the parent
- ◆ Know when to refer the parent to a more senior staff member or professional service for a resolution

## When managing complaints you need to:

- Recognise your limitations
- Demonstrate respect and empathy
- Maintain professionalism
- Use paraphrasing and reflective listening to demonstrate an understanding of the parent's concerns
- Seek parents opinions
- Don't make moralistic or judgemental statements
- Never make excuses

## When you receive complaints you feel:

- Under attack
- Believe your reputation and skills are being questioned
- Tend not to listen and become defensive
- Try to justify your actions
- YOU NEED TO PUT YOUR EMOTIONS ASIDE

### IMPORTANT STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- ◆ *Ensure the service has a current and practical grievance and complaints handling policy and procedure which has been developed and reviewed with parent input*
- ◆ *Make it easy for parents to raise their concerns and complaints*
- ◆ *Deal with complaints promptly*
- ◆ *Maintain confidentiality*
- ◆ *Keep the parent informed about how their complaint is being dealt with*
- ◆ *Record and evaluate the progress of each complaint and feedback the stages*

### TREAT CONCERNS SERIOUSLY OR PARENTS MAY:

- ◆ *Feel angry*
- ◆ *Be embarrassed*
- ◆ *Feel frustrated*
- ◆ *Be reluctant to raise their concerns in the future*
- ◆ *Take their child out of your centre*

### FACTS ABOUT COMPLAINTS

- ◆ *91% of all customers will stop doing business with you without saying why*
- ◆ *On average only 4 % of dissatisfied customers will complain*
- ◆ *A typical dissatisfied customer will tell an average of 8—10 people about their complaints*
- ◆ *7 out of 10 customers will do business with you again if you resolve their problem*
- ◆ *95% of customers will do business with you again if their problem is resolved on the spot.*
- ◆ *Complaints dealt with appropriately will increase the loyalty of your customers*
- ◆ *Many customers do not complain because they feel it won't make a difference*



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# Effectively dealing with complaints

Let parents know that you welcome complaints and make it easy for them to raise their problems.

Steps to managing complaints:

- ◆ When first receiving the complaint, thank the parent for letting you know and explain why you appreciate the complaint.
- ◆ Apologise for the mistake or the fact that they are unhappy.
- ◆ Use your conflict resolution skills to diffuse emotions and get to the heart of the problem.
- ◆ Ask for information from the parent regarding how the situation could be rectified to their satisfaction.
- ◆ Clarify the issue by actively listening and asking questions to improve your understanding of the issues.
- ◆ Correct the problem on the spot if you can, or promise that you will deal with it as a priority or as soon as possible. Avoid responding defensively to the issues raised. If they are complex take notes and ask the parent to put their concerns in writing.
- ◆ Discuss the concerns raised confidentially with a colleague or higher management. If you are unable to manage the problem because it is outside your control, then clearly explain this to the parent and let them know who they should contact if they wish to take the matter further.
- ◆ Make sure that you follow through on any promises that you make in regard to addressing the issue.
- ◆ Check the parent's satisfaction by calling a few days later to find out whether everything is fine, and if they are happy with the way you have resolved the problem.
- ◆ Prevent future mistakes or issues by finding out how the problem occurred and making the necessary corrections or changes to operation. Do not assign blame. Instead change the process. Understand that your staff will be more likely to pass along complaints to you if they know this is the centre's approach to managing complaints.

## Brainstorm ways to delight your parents

*Parents will expect that you will take action to deal with their complaint. That is why they complained.*

*If you respond in an overly generous way you will turn the unhappy parent into a delighted, surprised and very satisfied parent who will not hesitate to tell everybody about what you did!*

## Ask WHY families are leaving?

*Find out why families are leaving—put the questions in a short survey sheet:*

- ◆ *Please tell us why you are leaving:*
  - ◆ *Are you moving to a different area?*
  - ◆ *Have you experienced any problems with our service?*
  - ◆ *Is another centre more convenient?*
  - ◆ *Do the services at another centre better your needs?*
- ◆ *Have you enrolled your child in another centre?*
- ◆ *Which of our services did you find most helpful?*
- ◆ *Which of our services did you use the most?*
- ◆ *How would you rate our service in the following areas:*
  - ◆ *Staff*
  - ◆ *Services*
  - ◆ *Programs*
  - ◆ *Premises*
  - ◆ *Meals*
- ◆ *Do you have any comments that will assist us in improving the quality of our service?*

## Important

- Always treat parents with respect
- Ensure confidential matters are discussed in private