

Lady Gowrie Community Kindergartens

COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

(Formerly Grievance for Children and Families)

CONSIDERATIONS:

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| NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS | 6.1, 7.1, 7.2 |
| NATIONAL LAW ACT & NATIONAL REGULATIONS | Law sections: 172, 174 Regulations: 168, 171, 173, 176 |

POLICY STATEMENT:

To ensure that the process by which children, parents/guardians and other stakeholders can raise concerns and complaints is clear and that concerns and complaints are dealt with effectively, transparently and in a way that prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children.

To ensure that all notification obligations to the Regulatory Authority arising from a concern or complaint are made as per legislation requirements.

To ensure processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused and systems are transparent, accessible and designed to empower children to raise concerns safely and confidently, knowing they will be taken seriously is a requirement of the Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 (Child Safe Standard 6).

RELEVANT FORMS/MATERIAL:

- The Kindergarten Handbook
- Lady Gowrie Qld Record of Complaint Form
- Complaint Visual Summary of Key Contacts
- Notification of Complaints and Incidents (www.acecqa.gov.au)
- Kindergarten Service Prescribed Notice
- State and Territory Regulatory Authority Contact Details
- Governance Arrangements Under the National Quality Framework Diagram
- Lady Gowrie Community Kindergartens Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- Kindergarten Service Governance Policy
- Kindergarten Service Quality Improvement Plan
- Kindergarten Service Family Survey or Feedback Forms
- Kindergarten Service Policies and procedures
- Child Safety Commitment
- ECA Code of Ethics

SOURCES:

- ACECQA (2023) NQS Information Sheet: Quality Area 7, Using complaints to support continuous improvement
- ACECQA and Queensland Government, Department of Education Early Childhood Education and Care, Dealing with complaints policy guidelines. (September 2023)
- Guide for effective complaints management, State of Queensland (Department of Education), (2021)
- Education and Care Services National Law (Queensland) Act
- Education and Care Services National Regulations
- Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 (Accessed 2024)

- Queensland Statement of Shared Commitment. Every interaction counts. 2025
- Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000

REVIEWED: September 2024

(Child safeguarding review undertaken November 2025)

DATE TO BE REVIEWED: March 2026

| IMPLEMENTATION | |
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| BACKGROUND INFORMATION | <p>A complaint is a statement of dissatisfaction made by a child, parent or guardian or any other stakeholder (a complainant) about any aspect of their involvement with the Kindergarten as an organisation and/or the program they are attending, where some action is requested to remedy/improve the situation.</p> <p>Complaints include concerns, suspicions, disclosures and allegations of harm and breaches of the Code of Conduct.</p> <p>A complaint may be received by a service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in writing, such as on a complaint form, survey form or in an email or letter, • in person, such as during a verbal exchange with an educator, • indirectly via a third party, such as a friend or relative, • through social media, such as a comment written on a blog or Facebook page, • via the service's management company, head office or other administrative area, • via an exit survey completed by a family, • anonymously. <p>A complaint may also be received by another organization and referred to Lady Gowrie (e.g.Regulatory Authority, another Government department, local council).</p> <p>The Kindergarten Service and Lady Gowrie Qld views all complaints as opportunities to review and improve policies and procedures. The Kindergarten Service will display information regarding the Nominated Supervisor, Approved Provider contact details and Regulatory Authority contact details, on the Service Prescribed Noticeboard which is displayed near the main entry to the Service. This information will include the name and phone number of the person who can be contacted to receive a complaint.</p> <p>Information regarding the Complaint Handling Process will also be shared with families through the Kindergarten Service Handbook.</p> <p>Early childhood education and care professionals have notification requirements under the National Law, and depending on the nature of the complaint, may also have mandatory reporting requirements.</p> <p><i>Under Section 174 of the Education and Care Services National Law Act, The Regulatory Authority is required to be notified of any complaints alleging—</i></p> <p><i>(i) that a serious incident has occurred or is occurring while a child was or is being educated and cared for by the approved education and care service; or</i></p> <p><i>(ii) that this Law has been contravened.</i></p> <p>Notifications must be made within 24 hours by the Approved Provider to the Regulatory Authority through Notification of a Complaint on the National Quality</p> |

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| | <p>Agenda IT System (NQAITS).</p> <p>Where the complaint involves alleged criminal behaviour or raises child protection concerns, the relevant authorities will also be notified.</p> <p>The safety, including cultural safety and wellbeing of children should be the key focus of the Service at all times. Ensuring respectful partnerships with children and families where children and families are confident that any concerns, complaints or issues that they raise will be handled promptly and professionally is essential to children's safety and wellbeing.</p> <p>It is recognised that staff and the Executive Committee may find it challenging to receive complaints. It is important to remember that an effective complaints handling procedure encourages those involved to empathise with other's perspectives and allow for the opportunity to improve practice and relationships. It is important to have a commitment from all staff to respond to and aim to resolve complaints in a positive way and to prioritise child safeguarding.</p> <p>All staff are expected to co-operate in the resolution of complaints including co-operating with relevant external authorities, including police.</p> <p>At all times, the handling of complaints must be undertaken with confidentiality and privacy. The complaint will only be discussed in detail with relevant staff and/or Executive Committee Members and external stakeholders such as the Regulatory Authority, Lady Gowrie Qld or Community Management Solutions (CMS). Where there are key actions, reminders of policies or expected practice, or key improvements to be implemented, this can be undertaken in a general way without providing specific information about the complaint to the service staff team.</p> <p>Children and families that make complaints should be offered support and assistance.</p> |
| <p>COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM</p> | <p>The Guide for effective complaints management, State of Queensland (Department of Education), (2021) advises that the complaints management system should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acknowledge - Acknowledge all complaints quickly. This demonstrates to the complainant a commitment to take the matter is being taken seriously. 2. Assess and assign priority – Assess the complaint, identify whether the Regulatory Authority and/or the Queensland Family and Child Commission should be notified, and give it priority. 3. Plan and investigate – Plan what evidence you may need to collect and how you will collect it. Investigate the complaint. 4. Respond- Respond to the complainant explaining what was found and what was done. 5. Follow Up – Follow up any concerns with the complainant. 6. Reflect – Reflect on areas for improvement. |

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| <p>COMPLAINT PROCEDURE – SIMPLE LOW RISK COMPLAINTS</p> | <p>Some complaints can be resolved quickly through open communication or an apology.</p> <p>Complaints that are straightforward with low risk to children can often be resolved on first contact, by apologising to the complainant and implementing a quick fix.</p> <p>Staff should have the authority to resolve straightforward matters in line with the service's policy and procedures and be adequately trained to do so. Staff must be trained to escalate matters that present risks or require more detailed examination, especially where children are raising concerns about their safety and wellbeing.</p> |
| <p>COMPLAINT PROCEDURE WHAT YOU SHOULD DO</p> | <p>More complex complaints may require Approved Providers, Nominated Supervisors and educators to conduct an investigation or make enquires to other organisations. Sometimes the scope of a complaint is not clear, and clarification is needed from the complainant.</p> <p>In the event of a complaint that can't be resolved easily, staff are required to raise the complaint with the Nominated Supervisor/s.</p> <p>The Nominated Supervisor/s will then make a time with the child, parent or guardian to discuss the matter and work through possible solutions or offer supportive material.</p> <p>When receiving a complaint staff should (ACECQA NQS Information Sheet (2023)):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to diffuse emotions by acknowledging what they are feeling, and state positively that they wish to seek a solution to the issue causing concern. • Ask questions to help identify or clarify their concerns. • Ask the complainant if they have any strategies or solutions that they feel could be put in place to resolve their issues. • Actively listen to the complainant, especially if the complaint involves concerns about child safety and wellbeing. It is important for staff to understand that it can be extremely difficult for children and young people to disclose past or current harm. • Staff must be aware that children and young people will often make indirect or partial disclosures first. It is important to be alert to this to ensure an opportunity to support a child or young person to talk about their experiences is not missed. If a child or young person makes an indirect disclosure, it is important to ask them to tell you more about the situation. If on reflection it appears that a child or young person was attempting to disclose and this was not noticed at the time, it is helpful to inform them that you are there to listen to anything they have to say. • If relevant, avoid responding immediately and defensively to the issues raised. Acknowledge the complaint is received and will be worked through. • If the complainant has approached staff at an inappropriate time or place, advise that a suitable time and place will need to be organised to discuss the issue. • After speaking with the Nominated Supervisor/s or Executive Committee, if the issue raised cannot be addressed due to child wellbeing, ethical, legal or business reasons, explain this to the complainant and provide clear reasons. |

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| | <p>If the child/parent/guardian verbally raises a complaint/concern with a Nominated Supervisor/s, where some action is requested to remedy/improve the situation, the Nominated Supervisor/s will document the conversation and action taken and meet with the President or another Executive Committee Member.</p> <p>Documentation required includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the concern or complaint, • the date and time the discussion took place, • whether the discussion was in person or over the phone, • any information provided to the parent/guardian, • the outcome of the conversation. <p>This information will be compiled on a Service Record of Complaint Form and key areas of concern to be identified in relation to policies, philosophies, regulations and standards contravened.</p> <p>Outcomes are also recorded, and the aim is to resolve the issue with the family at this level.</p> <p>This report is then filed in the family file.</p> <p>A notification of complaint is completed when there is a requirement to notify the Regulatory Authority.</p> <p>Throughout the complaint process it is important that the Nominated Supervisor or Executive Committee Member keeps the complainant informed of the progress of the complaint and follows up with the complainant after the complaint has been resolved.</p> <p>The Nominated Supervisor/s and Executive Committee will review the need to amend the philosophy, policies or procedures or the Quality Improvement Plan following the complaint being resolved.</p> <p>For any complaint that raises concern regarding the safety and wellbeing of children, all staff should be supported to review and revisit their understanding of the key policies, procedures and support information as pertaining to the context of the complaint. The sharing of this information can be undertaken through a staff memo from the Nominated Supervisor/s or Executive Committee.</p> |
| <p>COMPLAINT NOT YET RESOLVED</p> <p>(OR IS IN REGARDS TO THE NOMINATED SUPERVISORS/S)</p> <p>PROCEDURE</p> <p>WHAT YOU SHOULD DO</p> | <p>If a parent/guardian feels that their complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily at this level, the parent/guardian will be encouraged to place the complaint in writing and address the matter to the President who will respond to the complaint and where required, advise the Executive Committee (Approved Provider) for noting and action.</p> <p>If legal action is taken in relation to the complaint, the complaints management process will be put on hold until the outcome of any proceedings is known.</p> <p>All complaints and grievances will be handled with respect for confidentiality, and procedural fairness will be observed in all aspects of handling a complaint.</p> <p>The Nominated Supervisor/Executive Committee will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and advise the parent/guardian of the timeframe in which a response will be provided.</p> |

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| | <p>Where the Executive Committee receives a complaint, it may be necessary to discuss the concerns raised, through calling an Executive Committee Meeting or Flying Minute via email.</p> <p>The complaint must be addressed in a timely fashion. Whilst providing the opportunity for discussion and sourcing further information or guidance for the Executive Committee is important, in most circumstances it will not be appropriate to hold addressing the complaint until the next committee meeting (where the meeting is scheduled for a period of seven days or longer away).</p> <p>Where investigation of a complex complaint or complaint alleging that a serious incident has occurred or is occurring whilst a child is being educated and cared for by the Service, or that the National Law and/or National Regulations or Child Safe Organisation Act have been contravened, is required, the Executive Committee are able to follow the information shared in Step 3: Plan and investigate, Guide for effective complaints management, State of Queensland (Department of Education), (2021) and/or the Lady Gowrie Qld Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy from mid 2026.</p> |
| SERVICE SUPPORT | <p>At any time during the complaint handling process, staff and Executive Committee Members are able to seek advice and support from Lady Gowrie Qld, as the Central Governing Body for the Service. In the instance that a family raises a complaint first with Lady Gowrie Qld, staff will document the correspondence and direct the family to undertake the complaint handling process with the Service.</p> <p>All Lady Gowrie Community Kindergarten Affiliated Services receive membership with Community Management Solutions (CMS), through their affiliation. Executive Committees can seek assistance from CMS regarding a range of areas including complaint handling.</p> <p>As the employer of staff at the Service, when required the Executive Committee as Approved Provider may also need to seek external assistance in supporting staff through the complaint handling process.</p> <p>Where a staff member is accused of breaching the Code of Conduct and/or face disciplinary action, they are entitled to seek advice and support from their union and/or a support person.</p> <p>The Executive Committee as Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor and service staff team, will at all times maintain confidentiality of any information shared during the complaint handling process. Staff will conduct themselves in a professional manner and have a positive work culture during the complaint handling process.</p> |
| RESPONSE AND REVIEW | <p>Once a decision has been reached, the outcome should be clearly communicated to the complainant.</p> <p>A written explanation is suitable for serious, complex or disputed matters. It might be appropriate to talk with the complainant first and to let them know that they will receive a more detailed written explanation.</p> <p>Thought should be given to providing the complainant with an apology. An apology can be an important step in achieving a successful outcome to a complaint and demonstrates empathy to the complainant. It has the power to positively enhance the ongoing relationship between the service provider and the complainant.</p> |

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| | <p>When you make an apology, it can be effective to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> propose the action you plan to take to satisfy the complainant, and communicate how the service is committed to ensuring the issue that caused the complaint, will not be repeated. <p>If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint handling process, they should be advised of their right to appeal the decision with Lady Gowrie QLD or an external complaint mechanism such as the Regulatory Authority.</p> <p>Following the resolution of the complaint, the Executive Committee or Nominated Supervisor will arrange for individual or service team training, if and when required. This helps support the professional growth of the individual or service team and/or their wellbeing and ongoing engagement at the Service.</p> <p>Lady Gowrie Qld uses complaint information collected from across its services and community kindergartens to tailor its education, guidance and support for continuous improvement.</p> |
| RECORDKEEPING | <p>Services should keep a record of complaints received and the actions taken to resolve the complaint, including any change to policies, procedures or practices instigated in response to the complaint.</p> |
| EARLY CHILDHOOD REGULATORY AUTHORITY, EARLY CHILDHOOD DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION | <p>Kindergarten services are assessed under the National Quality Framework and related Legislation. This legislation sets the minimum quality standards that services must meet in order to legally operate. The Regulatory Authority is responsible for assessing Early Childhood Education and Care Services.</p> <p>A copy of the Act and Regulation are available from the Service for you to read or alternatively at www.acecqa.gov.au.</p> <p>If you wish to contact the Early Childhood Regulatory Authority for QLD (ECRA) which is Department of Education, you can do so at any time. Relative to the Service you are attending the contact details are available at the Service and on the Department website.</p> <p>Parents/guardians may also choose to view the information regarding Complaints as shared on the Early Childhood Education and Care, Department of Education website www.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/contact-us.</p> <p>A diagram outlining Governance Arrangements in relation to the National Quality Framework is available at the Service for your reference.</p> |