



# Lock Early Learning Centre

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## PARENT CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

At Lock Early Learning Centre, we believe parents are partners in the education of children and that regular two-way communication between parents/carers and the preschool is essential in helping children achieve their potential.

Our preschool is committed to ensuring that anyone with parental responsibilities for a young person can raise a concern or complaint, with confidence that it will be heard and responded to in an appropriate and timely fashion.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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

1. All persons in the Lock Early Learning Centre community including children, parents, 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 preschool procedures.
4. Complaints will be acknowledged and addressed promptly within specified timelines.
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.

## Step 1: Talk to us

The preschool should always be the first point of contact. The parent needs to find an appropriate time to talk to the staff member to discuss the concern.

If this does not resolve your concern or complaint you should talk to the Director as soon as possible.

You may prefer to organise a mutually convenient time to meet personally or a time to discuss the issue via a telephone conversation. You are welcome to bring a support person with you, if you wish. (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 Director will, following a complaint:

- acknowledge receipt of the complaint as soon as reasonably possible (within 15 working days)
- listen to the you and ensure your complaint and the outcome is documented
- provide support to you if necessary while the complaint is being considered
- investigate, consider and determine the most appropriate way to resolve the issue fairly and promptly
- consider relevant legislation, DECD policy and guidelines, preschool procedures
- inform you if there is a delay in the process
- 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 DECD Pt. Lincoln Education Office.

**Please note:**

*Interpreters and Aboriginal Education Coordinators are available to assist parents in communicating with us. Please contact the Port Lincoln Education Office on 86820700 for assistance.*

**Step 2: Contact our local DECD Education Office**

If the complaint is about the director of the preschool or you are not satisfied with the outcome you may contact the DECD Port Lincoln Education Office.

Port Lincoln Education Office  
3/7 Mortlock Tce, Port Lincoln  
Ph 86820700  
Email [Chris.roberts@sa.gov.au](mailto:Chris.roberts@sa.gov.au)

The Education Office will review the complaint – this may involve meeting with those involved and reviewing the documentation. The parent may also be offered mediation.  
The Education Office will aim to resolve the complaint within 20 working days.

**Step 3: Contact the Education Complaint Unit**

If your complaint remains unresolved after working together with your preschool, and Education Office, a parent may raise a concern or complaint verbally or in writing with the DECD Education Complaint Unit.

Parents can call the DECD Education Complaint Unit hotline at any stage on 1300 677 435 for information, advice and support.

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 Education Complaint Unit will:

- Provide advice and support to parents about their concern or complaint
- Objectively review complaints that have not been resolved at the school or regional level.
- The unit will assess the complaint and decide what action is needed. Staff from the unit will contact the parent about what has been done, explain the process and provide information about when they can expect to hear about the outcome.
- The department's Head of Early Childhood Development and the Chief Executive's office will be advised by the Education Complaint Unit of the outcome of the review. One of these senior leaders will make a final decision about the complaint and communicate the decision within 35 working days in most cases.

**Step 4: External review**

The Head of Schools or Head of Early Childhood Development may determine that part of or all of a complaint requires an independent review undertaken by an external agency, to assist them to make a decision.

At the conclusion of the parent complaint management process, where a resolution has not been reached, the Head of Schools or Head of Early Childhood Development will advise the parent of their right to refer the matter to an external agency, such as the South Australian Ombudsman.

## **The South Australian Ombudsman**

A complaint can be made to the SA Ombudsman about any action or inaction by an agency within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

Ombudsman SA may conduct investigations to determine whether the government agency's process was reasonable and fair, and that the decision is not unreasonable or unlawful. Further information is available at [www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au) and section C, part 6 - *Responding to concerns and complaints from parents and caregivers – Information guides* document).

### ***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. At the discretion of DECD staff verbal communication will be terminated after firstly warning the parent that this will occur if the inappropriate behaviour continues.*

*In some circumstances it may be appropriate that a concern or complaint is escalated directly to the Education Complaint Unit. In these instances, the parent will be advised of where the matter will be referred to and why.*

### **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.

### **Anonymous complaints**

Lock Early Learning Centre 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 a Director, the Education Officer will make the determination and the Head of Schools or the Head of Child Development will make the final decision.

### **Approaches that may be used to resolve a parent complaint**

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

- an acknowledgement that the complaint is valid and is worthy of investigation (overall or in part)
- identification of areas of agreement between the parties involved
- opportunities for all the parties involved to express their concerns, explain their point of view and clarify any misunderstandings
- acknowledgement that the situation could have been better handled (this does not constitute an admission of negligence)
- an opportunity for an apology
- recognition that the situation presents an opportunity for changes or alternate arrangements to be made to resolve the complaint
- discussion with the parties about the steps that will be taken to ensure that the event complained about will not reoccur
- an undertaking to review preschool policy, procedures or practices.

### **Additional Information**

These procedures apply to parent concerns and complaints in relation to Lock Early Learning Centre. These procedures do not apply to matters where there are legislated requirements or existing policies and processes of appeal, such as:

- Concerns and allegations of misconduct by staff, volunteers and service providers (criminal matters, child protection, corruption, etc)
- Employee disputes and grievances. (Employees should refer to HR17 Complaints resolution for employees 2000 for these types of complaints.)
- Complaints or appeals relating to student suspension and expulsion
- Duty of care or mandatory reporting responsibilities
- Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare related issues
- Health support planning.

These procedures will be reviewed every two years.

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