

PARENTAL CONCERNS POLICY

NSPo1
V5

Statutory Framework for EYFS 2017, Page 33 paragraph 3.74
Statutory Framework for EYFS 2017 pages 33 paragraphs 3.74 and 3.75
Early Years Compliance Handbook 2015 updated 2019, Page 27 paragraph 81

PROCEDURE	REFERENCE	FORM
NSPr1 – Concerns Procedure	NSR1 - Building Better Childcare: Concerns and Complaints about Childminders and Childcare Providers	NSF1 – Staff Parent Concern Report
	NSR13 – Parents (Ofsted Poster)	NSF1a – Contact Information Sheet

Various other documents relating to customer care can be found in ‘Marketing & Customer Care Toolkit’

Parents rarely complain about things that happen within the setting; they express a “concern”.

A concern can be defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction which needs a response” and this policy been prepared to help establish a Concerns Procedure **NSPr1** for Wellingtons for Langley Hall.

Why have a concerns procedure?

A concerns procedure can provide a form of accountability, providing the concerns are taken seriously and not dismissed as an unwarranted interference.

Effective systems can enable individual dissatisfaction to be expressed.

The concerned parent’s knowledge is unique and if they express their dissatisfaction there is an opportunity to put it right.

An effective concerns procedure allows the parent to inform the setting when, as far as they are concerned, there has been a failure of service. If the service is improved as a result and policies adjusted as required, the expression of concern was worthwhile.

Things will go wrong from time to time. What is important is that effective systems exist to put things right; that parents find it easy to register their concern; and that concerns are welcomed and acted on, not ignored or brushed off.

Putting a concerns system in place is however not an end in itself. There needs to be an evaluation of how it is working and adjustments when improvements can be made. Just like the public services, we need to ask ourselves:

- are those who use the concerns procedures satisfied with it?
- does it promote good practice and deter bad practice?
- is it used to learn from concerns?

Why don't parents express their concerns?

Studies show that the main reason people give for not expressing their concerns is that they think it will do no good. It has also been found that those who had expressed concern in the past were even less likely to do so again, suggesting that their experience in showing concern had been less than satisfactory. Parents may not voice their dissatisfaction because they feel vulnerable to recrimination. "Complaints and Redress in Scottish Schools 1994" found that many parents are afraid of causing trouble for their children if they make a complaint to the school authorities.

Why have formal, written procedures?

If there are no formal written procedures for handling concerns, there can be:

- greater uncertainty among staff on how to handle concerns.
- inconsistency in approach making it difficult to draw conclusions about the quality of service.
- a low level of recording concerns and little analysis to enable lessons to be learnt.

On the other hand however, we should bear in mind the view of the Secondary Heads Association who commented that "At school level, complaints procedures are seen as low key and not always formalised. That is in our view the very reason why they are so successful."

Handling concerns

Verbal concerns made in person or on the telephone must be given the same consideration as those written down. Parents will often express their concern verbally in the first instance and their issues may be resolved at this stage through good, honest communication. If a written record is needed, then staff should offer to undertake this for the parent, checking with them that they are happy with the record. If a parent puts their concern in writing Staff / Parent Concern Report **NSF1** and Contact Information Sheet **NSF1a** should be used by the setting to record the concern and action taken.

The system must be fair to parents, but staff who may be questioned as part of an investigation must also feel they are being treated in a fair way and that they too will have an opportunity to put their case, to be told what will happen and be kept informed of progress. This is particularly important in view of the very small number of misinformed or malicious concerns made against staff.

Evidence suggests that it is, without doubt, beneficial to have simple, clear guidelines for staff on what they should do when they hear a parent expressing a concern.

Good concerns handling will involve:

- **Listening** – to satisfy the parent's wish for their concern to be taken seriously and handled sympathetically and efficiently.
- **Evaluating** – to tell the setting a great deal about where things are going wrong; complaints are, in effect, free market-research.
- **Communicating** – to allow decision-makers to be aware of what parents really want. Better information should mean better decisions on policy and service improvements.
- **Liaising** – to remove parental frustration that no one cares or is listening.



- **Relating** – to avoid “blame culture” where staff feel threatened by complaints and defensive about recording them and divert anger away from Administration staff who may be blameless but feel vulnerable.

Poorly handled concerns can:

- cause strained relations between parents and staff.
- cause the setting to get a bad reputation amongst existing parents, the local community and potential parents.

Redress

- An apology – this is often all that someone wants.
- An explanation – good, full explanations can quickly clear up concerns.
- An assurance that the same thing will not happen again – if such an assurance is made, it needs to be backed up by action and monitoring.
- Action taken to put things right – demonstrable action which shows that the setting has taken the concern seriously is a very effective form of redress. It also sends out positive messages to parents that it is worth expressing a concern if they are worried or dissatisfied.

Fairness when investigating concerns

Parents must perceive the concern procedures to be fair. Perception of fairness is closely linked with satisfaction with the way the concern was investigated and the outcome. However, it must also be fair to others involved, including staff who may be the subject of the concern.

Many parents are only too happy for the whole world to know they have a concern, whilst others are concerned that word will get around and they fear that this will prejudice staff against them and they or their child will suffer some form of recrimination. Parents should be encouraged to talk directly to staff – playground gossip is unhelpful to all concerned.

Staff attitudes

The fact that parents want an apology and/or explanation has implications for staff. However, the key to whether a system will be effective or not lies in the attitude of both the organisation and individual staff.

A number of factors affect staff attitudes towards concerns handling:

- staff may not understand the system, feel powerless to change anything or feel threatened by an investigation.
- the “blame culture” where members of staff are personally held accountable for a complaint and suffer in consequence
- the continuous and vexatious concerns from parents who, despite full investigation, will not take NO for an answer and will continue to bombard the setting with concerns. They can take up a disproportionate amount of time and resources and can cause staff considerable distress and possibly prejudice staff against reasonable concerns.

Blame culture

Staff have real fears about being blamed for making mistakes. This makes them defensive in dealing with concerns. This fear can be tackled by:

- creating an environment where concerns are seen as opportunities to identify where improvements need to be made in services or systems.
- making sure staff feel confident that procedures support them, and are directed at identifying the root cause of the concern.
- encouraging staff to learn from the experience and develop a better understanding of the parent's perspective.
- ensuring that staff who are the subject of a concern are supported and encouraged to learn new skills, not blamed.

If staff do feel they operate in a “blame culture” it makes them reluctant to welcome concerns, and defensive in responding to them.

Learning the lessons

After satisfying an individual parent's concerns, the next aim of an effective concerns system is to learn the lessons from concerns, to improve services and minimise the risk of future failure.

Learning the lessons involves: -

- Understanding – getting a clear picture of parent's views of the service and the improvements they want.
- Analysing – consistent and comprehensive recording of concerns and analysis of their implications.
- Communicating – channelling the information to those who can take action to prevent the problems recurring.
- Liaising – giving feedback to the parent expressing concern, other parents and staff on what action has been taken.

However, it should be noted that while each parent wants the best for their child, setting policies have been formulated based upon the corporate need, The philosophies of Wellingtons for Langley Hall may not coincide with those of the parent (i.e. encouraging children to be independent) and if, after giving the concern our fullest attention, we are unable to satisfy the concern, the parent may be advised to withdraw the child.

Recording concerns

Not all concerns will be recorded in writing. On a day to day basis, many concerns are dealt with verbally to the satisfaction of the person raising the concern.

When the concern is made in writing (by letter or e-mail), it is important to:

- provide a true and useful picture of the concern, ensuring that it is recorded in a comprehensive and thorough way using Staff / Parent Concern Report **NSF1** and Contact Information Sheet **NSF1a**.
- keep the method of recording simple, practical and not a great burden on staff time.
- ensure that the information recorded enables the setting to track, monitor and respond to the concern and highlight particular areas where services appear to be failing. The concern



should be kept in a file following Ofsted guidelines and can also be used for staff training purposes.

The record of concerns must be kept and made available to any Ofsted Inspector. It is also considered good practice to make the record of concerns available to any parent who asks to see it. Findings and recommendations will be sent to complainants electronically or in printed format.

Regulations regarding the timescales for responding to concerns and keeping records vary depending on whether a setting appears on the Childcare Register, Early Years Register, or both registers. Changes that we may wish to make to the services we offer in the future could require our registration to change and this has the potential to cause confusion among staff. Therefore in order to ensure that there is no possibility of an error occurring, Wellingtons for Langley Hall has chosen to respond to concerns within the shortest period required i.e. 20 days, and keep all records for the longest period required i.e. 3 years.

Recording compliments

There is a danger that in having a formal concerns procedure, only the negative side of parental contact is captured. Therefore, a book of compliments and thanks is kept in the staff area and all staff are encouraged to add letters and cards that are sent to them by grateful parents. This book of compliments is made available to the Ofsted Inspector at the same time as the Concerns File.