

# COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

QUALITY AREA 7 | VERSION 1.6

Adopted by Approved Provider of Golden Plains Shire Council Children's Services	Month / Year
Date revised	Month / Year
Next revision due	Month / Year



## PURPOSE

This policy will provide guidelines for:

- receiving and dealing with compliments and complaints at early childhood education and care services operated by Golden Plains Shire Council
- procedures to be followed in investigating complaints.

**Note:** This policy does not address complaints relating to staff grievances or employment matters. The relevant awards provide information on the management of such issues.

**Note:** This policy should be read in conjunction with Golden Plains Shire Council's Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure. All Council complaints recording, actions, response and notification processes must be strictly adhered to.



## POLICY STATEMENT

### VALUES

Golden Plains Shire Council is committed to:

- providing an environment of mutual respect and open communication
- recognising excellence and gratitude
- complying with all legislative and statutory requirements
- dealing with disputes, complainants with fairness and equity
- establishing mechanisms to respond to complaints in a timely manner
- treating information in relation to complaints with sensitivity

### SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others attending the programs and activities of Golden Plains Shire Council.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

Approved provider and persons with management or control

Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge

Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff

Parents/guardians

Contractors, volunteers and students

R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted

Being familiar with the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*, service policies, constitution and procedures

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Acknowledge compliments and thank complementor for their interest and feedback

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Save compliments and share with relevant parties

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Ensuring that compliments and complaints are monitored and used to continually improve the overall quality of the service

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Identifying, preventing and addressing potential concerns before they become formal complaints

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Ensuring that the name and telephone number of the responsible person (*refer to Staffing Policy*) to whom complaints may be addressed are displayed prominently at the main entrance of the service (*National Law: Section 172, Regulation 173(2)(b)*)

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Ensuring that the address and telephone number of the Authorised Officer at the DE regional office are displayed prominently at the main entrance of the service (*Regulation 173(2)(e)*)

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Advising parents/guardians and any other new members of Golden Plains Shire Council of the *Compliments and Complaints policy* and procedures upon enrolment

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Ensuring complaints are taken seriously, and responded to promptly and thoroughly

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Ensuring the complaints processes are child focused, understood broadly (including by children, their families, staff and volunteers), culturally safe and compliant with privacy laws, reporting obligations and employment law (*refer to Attachment 1 & 2*)

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Ensuring educators, staff, volunteers and students are well informed about their child protection responsibilities and reporting and privacy obligations

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Ensuring educators, staff, volunteers and students are well informed about the different ways children express concerns or distress and disclose harm, as well as processes for responding to disclosures from children

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Ensuring that the management of a complaint that alleges a child is exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours is child focused, culturally safe and compliant with privacy laws, reporting obligations and employment law

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Ensuring that children have access to age-appropriate information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand	R	√	√		√
Ensuring barriers for all children to make a complaint are removed and reasonable adjustments are made to meet their needs.	√	√	√		
Ensuring that this policy is always available for inspection at the service ( <a href="#">Regulation 171</a> )	R	√			
Ensuring the complaint-handling system is easily understood by children, families, staff and volunteers and are culturally safe ( <a href="#">refer to Attachment 1 and 3</a> )	√	√	√		
Ensuring there are various ways for children to make complaints and are made available based on their feedback about how they prefer to communicate ( <a href="#">refer to Attachment 3</a> )	√	√	√		
Being aware of, and committed to, the principles of communicating and sharing information with service employees, members and volunteers	R	√			
Responding to all complaints in the most appropriate manner and at the earliest opportunity	R	√	√		√
Treating all complainants fairly and equitably	R	√	√		
Discussing minor complaints directly with the party involved as a first step towards resolution (the parties are encouraged to discuss the matter professionally and openly work together to achieve a desired outcome)	R	√	√	√	
Communicating (preferably in writing) any concerns or compliments relating to the management or operation of the service as soon as is practicable		√	√	√	√
Providing a Complaints Register ( <a href="#">refer to Definitions</a> ) and ensuring that staff record complaints along with outcomes	R	√			
Follow Council's internal complaints register process	R	√			
Providing information as requested by the approved provider e.g. written reports relating to the complaint		√	√	√	√
Notifying and/or referring the complaint to the approved provider if the complaint is a notifiable complaint ( <a href="#">refer to Definitions</a> ) or is unable to be resolved appropriately in a timely manner		√	√	√	√
Complying with the service's <a href="#">Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</a> at all times ( <a href="#">Regulations 181, 183</a> )	R	√	√	√	√
Council may appoint an investigator to investigate and resolve complaints as determined through established processes. See Council's <a href="#">Complaints Handling Policy</a> ( <a href="#">refer to Attachment 1 &amp; 2</a> )	√	√			
Co-operating with requests to meet with the approved provider and/or provide relevant information when requested in relation to complaints	√	√	√	√	√
Informing DE in writing within 24 hours of any complaints alleging that a serious incident ( <a href="#">refer to Definitions</a> ) has occurred at the service or that the Education and Care Services National Law has been breached ( <a href="#">National Law: Section 174, Regulation 176(2)(b)</a> )	R	√			

Working co-operatively with the approved provider and DE in any investigations related to complaints about Golden Plains Shire Council, its programs, or staff.	√	√	√	√	√
Receiving recommendations from the approved provider and taking appropriate action	√	√			
Analysing complaints, concerns and safety incidents to identify causes and systemic failures to inform continuous improvement	√	√			
Maintaining professionalism and integrity at all times ( <i>refer to Code of Conduct policy</i> )	√	√	√		√
Regularly reviewing the policy and procedures to ensure serious incidents and complaints are investigated promptly, fairly and thoroughly	√	√			
Seeking input from children on the design, implementation and ongoing improvement of the complaint-handling system.	√	√	√		



## BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

### BACKGROUND

Compliments are expressions of praise, encouragement or gratitude about service, staff, management and program. Compliments provide valuable feedback about the level of satisfaction with service delivery and are a valuable indicator of the effectiveness of a service. Compliments impart useful insights about the aspects of service that are most meaningful to children, families and stakeholders, and provide an opportunity to recognise the efforts of staff and family day care educators, foster a culture of excellence and boost morale.

Complaints may be received from anyone who comes in contact with Golden Plains Shire Council including parents/guardians, volunteers, students, members of the local community and other agencies.

In most cases, dealing with complaints will be the responsibility of the approved provider. All complaints, when lodged, need to be initially assessed to determine whether they are a general or a notifiable complaint (*refer to Definitions*).

When a complaint has been assessed as 'notifiable', the approved provider must notify Department of Education (DE) of the complaint. The approved provider will investigate the complaint and take any actions deemed necessary, in addition to responding to requests from and assisting with any investigation by DE.

There may be occasions when the complainant reports the complaint directly to DE. If DE then notifies the approved provider about a complaint they have received, the approved provider will still have responsibility for investigating and dealing with the complaint as outlined in this policy, in addition to co-operating with any investigation by DE.

DE will investigate all complaints it receives about a service, where it is alleged that the health, safety or wellbeing of any child within the service may have been compromised, or that there may have been a contravention of the [Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010](#) and the [Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011](#).

### LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic)
- National Quality Standard, Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

- Privacy Amendment (Enhancing Privacy Protection) Act 2012 (Cth)
- Privacy Amendment (Notifiable Data Breaches) Act 2017 (Cth)
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)
- Privacy Regulations 2013(Cth)

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: [www.legislation.vic.gov.au](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au)
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: [www.legislation.gov.au](http://www.legislation.gov.au)



## DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g., Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the PolicyWorks catalogue.

**Complaint:** (In relation to this policy) a complaint is defined as an issue of a minor nature that can be resolved promptly or within 24 hours and does not require a detailed investigation. Complaints include an expression of displeasure, such as poor service, and any verbal or written complaint directly related to the service.

Complaints do not include staff, industrial or employment matters, occupational health and safety matters (unless related to the safety of the children) and issues related to the legal business entity, such as the incorporated association or co-operative.

**Child-initiated complaint:** a child or young person makes the complaint/brings the issue/concern/allegation to the attention of the service.

**Adult-initiated complaint:** a child or young person's parent, carer or guardian or other adult may make a complaint on behalf of, or that concerns, a child or young person.

**Service Complaints and Compliments Template :**(In relation to this policy) records information about complaints and compliments received at the service, together with a record of the outcomes. This register must be kept in a secure file, accessible only to educators and responsible persons at the service. The register can provide valuable information to the approved provider on meeting the needs of children and families at the service.

**Compliment:** a compliment is an expression of praise, encouragement or gratitude. It may relate to an individual staff member, a team, the program or the service.

**Dispute resolution procedure:** The method used to resolve complaints, disputes or matters of concern through an agreed resolution process.

**Notifiable complaints:** A complaint alleging that a serious incident has occurred while the child is educated and cared for or complaints alleging that the Law has been contravened (*National Law: Section 174(2)(b)*). Any complaint of this nature must be reported by the approved provider to DE within 24 hours of the complaint being made.

The approved provider to notify DE within the specified timeframes below (*National Law: Section 174(2) (b), National Regulation 176(2) (b)*)

- serious incidents in writing within 24 hours of the incident or the time the person becomes aware of the incident
- any circumstance arising at the service that poses a risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or children attending the service - Within 7 days of the relevant event or within 7 days of the approved provider becoming aware of the relevant information
- any incident where the approved provider reasonably believes that physical and/or sexual abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring while the child is being educated and cared for by the service - Within 7 days of the relevant event or within 7 days of the approved provider becoming aware of the relevant information.

- any allegation that sexual or physical abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring while the child is being educated and cared for by the service.

In addition, approved providers must take reasonable steps to ensure that these incidents and complaints are adequately addressed.

Notifications should be made to the regulatory authority (DE) through the NQA IT System. If this is not practicable, the notification can be made initially in whatever way is best in the circumstances.

**Mediator:** A person (neutral party) who attempts to reconcile differences between disputants.

**Mediation:** An attempt to bring about a peaceful settlement or compromise between disputants through the objective intervention of a neutral party.



## SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

### SOURCES

- ACECQA: [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)
- Commonwealth Ombudsman – Better practice complaint handling guide: [www.ombudsman.gov.au/publications/better-practice-guidelines](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/publications/better-practice-guidelines)
- Better-practice-complaint-handling-guide
- Department of Education (DE) – Regional Office details are available under ‘The Department’: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)
- ELAA Early Childhood Management Manual: [www.elaa.org.au](http://www.elaa.org.au)
- Kindergarten Funding Guide: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)
- Victorian Ombudsman – Complaints: Good Practice Guide for Public Sector Agencies September 2016: <https://assets.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/assets/Best-Practice-Guides/Complaints-Good-Practice-Guide-for-Public-Sector-Agencies.pdf?mtime=20191217165914>

### RELATED POLICIES

- Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing
- Code of Conduct
- Enrolment & Orientation
- Fees
- Governance & Management of the Service
- Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness
- Inclusion and Equity
- Interactions with Children
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Staffing
- Supervision of Children
- Golden Plains Shire Council Complaints Handling Policy



## EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor complaints as recorded in the Complaints Register to assess whether satisfactory resolutions have been achieved
- review the effectiveness of the policy and procedures to ensure that all complaints have been dealt with in a fair and timely manner
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required

- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk (Regulation 172 (2)).



## ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Complaint Handling Flowchart
- Attachment 2: Dealing with Complaints
- Attachment 3: How to Make a Complaint – Children’s Version



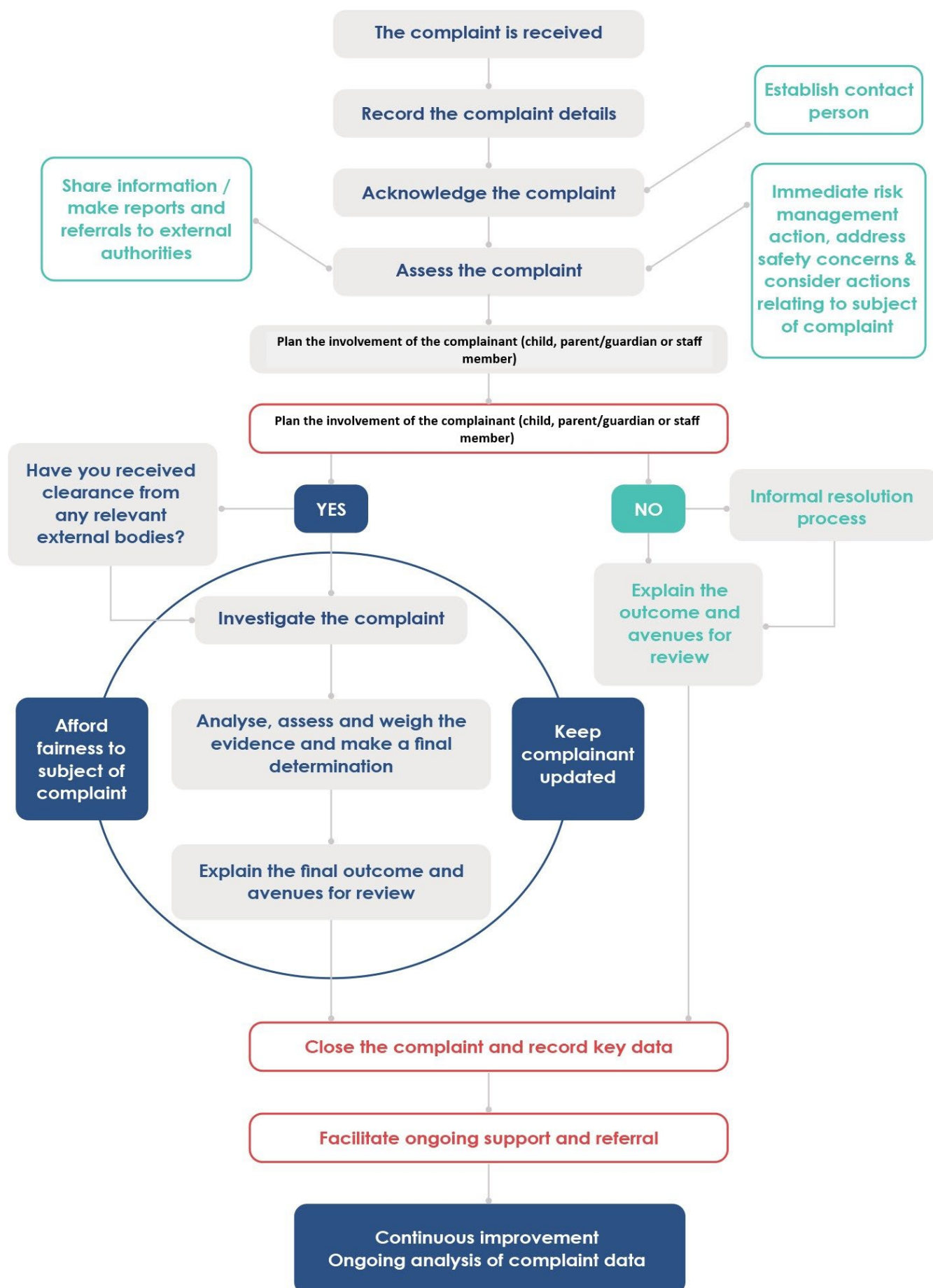
## AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Golden Plains Shire Council on dd/mmm/yyyy

REVIEW DATE: dd/mmm/yyyy



## ATTACHMENT 1: COMPLAINT HANDLING FLOWCHART





## ATTACHMENT 2: DEALING WITH A COMPLAINT

When a complaint is received, the person to whom the complaint is addressed will:

- inform the complainant of the service's *Compliment and Complaint Policy*.
- notify Lead Teacher immediately of the complaint and seek support to move forward and resolve.
- encourage the complainant to resolve the complaint with the person directly, or to submit their complaint in writing.
- the staff member receiving the complaint will record all relevant details in the Service Complaints and Compliments template (*refer to Definitions*) together with the outcome.
- assess complaint for severity, safety, complexity, impact and the need for immediate action.
- inform the approved provider if the complaint is a notifiable complaint (*refer to Definitions*) or is unable to be resolved appropriately in a timely manner.
- comply with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* with regard to all meetings/discussions in relation to a complaint.
- the approved provider must investigate the matter as per the GPSC Complaints Handling policy and assess if the complaint is determined to be a notifiable complaint (*refer to Definitions*).
- the Complaints Subcommittee/investigator will assess the complaint to determine if it is a notifiable complaint (*refer to Definitions*).

### DEALING WITH A NOTIFIABLE COMPLAINT

When a formal complaint is lodged with the service:

- if the complaint is notifiable, the approved provider will be responsible for notifying DE. This must be in writing within 24 hours of receiving the complaint (*Regulation 176(2)(b)*).
- the written report to DE needs to be submitted using the appropriate forms from ACECQA and will include:
  - details of the event or incident
  - the name of the person who initially made the complaint
  - if appropriate, the name of the child concerned and the condition of the child, including a medical or incident report (where relevant)
  - contact details of a nominated member of the Complaints Subcommittee/investigator
  - any other relevant information
- if the approved provider is unsure if the complaint is a notifiable complaint, it is good practice to contact DE for confirmation.

### COMPLAINTS SUBCOMMITTEE/INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES

In the event of a complaint being lodged, the Complaints Subcommittee/investigator will:

- convene as soon as possible to deal with the complaint in a timely manner.
- disclose any conflict of interest relating to any member of the subcommittee/panel of investigators. Such members must stand aside from the investigation and subsequent processes.
- consider the nature and the details of the complaint.
- identify which service policies (if any) the complaint involves.
- inform the approved provider if their involvement is required under any other service policies.
- if the complaint is a notifiable complaint (*refer to Definitions*), inform the complainant of the requirements to notify DE of the complaint and explain the role that DE may take in investigating the complaint.
- maintain appropriate records of the information and data collected, including minutes of meetings, incident reports and copies of relevant documentation relating to the complaint.
- respect the confidential nature of information relating to the complaint. The approved provider and the subcommittee/investigator must handle any complaint in a discreet and professional manner.
- store all written information relating to complaint securely and in compliance with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*.

## INVESTIGATING THE COMPLAINT AND GATHERING RELEVANT INFORMATION

When investigating the complaint and gathering relevant information, the Complaint Subcommittee/investigator will:

- meet with individual witnesses and give right of reply to the person against whom the allegations are made in relation to any accusation or information relating to an alleged incident.
- offer the complainant the opportunity of meeting with the approved provider to discuss the complaint and provide additional information where relevant.
- Approved provider to inform the complainant of the procedures for dealing with the complaint if the complainant does not take up the opportunity to attend a meeting.
- document the time, date and detail of meetings/discussions, and follow this up with a letter to the complainant outlining the information discussed.
- be available to meet with DE staff, if required, and provide additional information as requested
- review relevant information and documents.
- obtain any other relevant information or documentation that will assist in resolving the complaint.
- seek advice, where appropriate, from individuals and organisations that may be able to assist in resolving the complaint (any cost in seeking advice will require prior approval by the approved provider).

## FOLLOWING THE INVESTIGATION

Once the investigation of the complaint is complete, the Approved provider will:

- meet to discuss the information gathered and determine further action, including generating recommendations to be presented to the approved provider.
- ensure that any recommendations or actions are in accordance with relevant legislation and funding requirements including, but not limited to:
  - Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
  - Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- The Kindergarten Guide (*refer to Sources*) report outcomes that may include relevant information gained in investigations and consultations to the approved provider and, where required, provide any recommendations for consideration by the approved provider.
- inform the approved provider on the involvement of DE and the outcomes of any investigation by DE. The approved provider will review the report and any subcommittee/investigator recommendations and will be responsible for making decisions on the action to be taken (if any), including relevant review mechanisms.
- advise the complainant and other relevant parties of any decisions made by the approved provider in relation to the complaint.
- follow up to ensure the parties involved are satisfied with the outcome and monitor progress on any actions taken by the approved provider.

## ATTACHMENT 3: FOR CHILDREN HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT



### 01 - You feel unsafe, concerned or worried

You should always feel safe and have the right to be heard.



### 02- Talk to a trusted adult

Like a parent, friend, carer, or teacher, they can help you make a complaint.



### 03- Say or draw why you feel unsafe, concerned or worried

- What happened
- How the problem has made you feel
- What would help fix it



### 04- What happens next

My trusted adult will tell me:

- Who will be told about the complaint
- Who will get back to me
- How long will it take
- When the complaint process is all finished