

# Raising concerns with your child care service

by Angela Owens

At times families may experience some level of dissatisfaction or even concern about the child care service they use. Issues may be as simple as feeling unhappy about a specific incident or may be more complex, involving concerns about the operations of a service and/or the conduct of educators and staff. While you may feel awkward or uncomfortable about raising a concern that you have with your service, airing your grievances clearly and promptly, and having these managed effectively can lead to positive outcomes for families, children and the service.

## Why may concerns about your child care service arise?

You may not always agree with the decisions and practices that are implemented in your service, and it is possible that some of your views about caring for children will be different from what occurs there. Some practices at the service may differ from what happens at home because caring for a group of children in a child care setting is very different to caring for your own child at home.

## Grievance and complaints handling procedures

Quality services will have clear, transparent grievance and complaints handling procedures, and ideally you should receive information about these procedures when you first enrol your child in care. The grievance and complaints handling procedures should be in writing, and state who you need to speak to about your complaint and how the complaint will be managed.

Depending on the nature of your concerns, you may be directed to speak with the educator or staff member concerned. In any service's complaints handling procedures there should be an emphasis on managing complaints professionally and ensuring that your right to

privacy is maintained throughout the process. If you have not yet been shown the complaints handling procedures, you should ask for a copy.

You may be worried that your concerns are silly or seem trivial, or that the service will react by treating your child differently. However, it is important that your child care service recognises that the care and wellbeing of your child is your top priority and that every concern is important and needs to be addressed.

## Raising your concerns effectively

If you are feeling nervous and/or emotional about raising an issue with your service, you may find it difficult to approach the matter calmly and constructively.

The following tips and strategies may assist you to raise your issues calmly, confidently and positively:

- Consider who it would be best to speak to in the first instance – for a minor query or concern it may be best to approach an educator who works with your child or who is directly involved in the issue; for more serious matters, approaching service management will be the best option. Your service's grievance and complaints handling procedures should guide you in this
- If possible, delay raising your concerns when you are feeling angry or very upset – taking some time to calm down and think about the issue will help to make the discussion more productive
- Arrange a time to speak with someone rather than approaching them while they are working with the children or other families. This will help your concerns to be managed more effectively and will also help to protect your privacy
- Before raising your concerns, talk with someone else such as a friend or a partner to pinpoint exactly what the issues are. This can also help you to decide exactly what you want to say
- If the issues you have are quite complex, or you are feeling nervous about raising your concerns, it can be helpful to ask someone to attend your meeting with the service as a support person



- Write some notes about your concerns before you meet with the service, and take these along to prompt you
- State how you would like to see the issues resolved – attend the meeting with some possible solutions in mind but be prepared to negotiate an alternative, mutually acceptable solution if necessary
- Be prepared to listen with an open mind and remember that you may not know all of the facts about the issue
- Avoid making inflammatory or accusatory statements – explain your concerns clearly and calmly
- Ask the person you speak with to clarify their responses throughout the discussion to help ensure you are clear about the actions they are proposing to resolve the issue, and make a note of these
- You can also contact a National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) Child Care Adviser for advice and support in raising your concerns with your service, or for assistance with issues that have not been resolved satisfactorily with the service.

It is also important to remember that some policies and practices will be in place in the service to meet regulations, Accreditation requirements or best practice requirements. In these instances, the service will not be able to change what they do, but they should be able to give you clear reasons why the practice is in place.

## What if you have concerns about children’s safety and wellbeing?

While most concerns that may arise with your service are likely to be relatively minor and simple to resolve, some families may be confronted by quite serious issues that potentially compromise the health, safety or wellbeing of children. If you witness a situation or practice first hand that could potentially harm a child you should take immediate steps to stop this from occurring. Serious issues such as child abuse, leaving children unsupervised or exposing children to danger should be raised with the relevant state or territory regulatory agency (if the service is licensed) or with NCAC. You also need to alert the service’s management to your concerns immediately so that they can investigate and resolve these as quickly and effectively as possible.

## Conclusion

Families can experience concerns or dissatisfaction with their child care service from time to time. This does not necessarily mean that the service is poor quality – these issues often arise due to a family and service having differing, but valid, approaches to caring for children. While raising any concerns you have with the service may be daunting, this does not need to be a negative experience for yourself or the service. When you and the service both approach the process with a respectful attitude and a genuine desire to resolve the issues the partnership between you can be strengthened, and practices in the service can be reviewed and improved ■

### State and territory child care licensing departments:

- ACT – Office for Children, Youth and Family Support: [www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs)
- NSW – Department of Education and Communities: [www.educationandcommunities.nsw.gov.au](http://www.educationandcommunities.nsw.gov.au)
- NT – Department of Education and Training: [www.det.nt.gov.au](http://www.det.nt.gov.au)
- QLD – Office for Early Childhood Education and Care: [www.deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood](http://www.deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood)
- SA – Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS): [www.decs.sa.gov.au](http://www.decs.sa.gov.au)
- TAS – Department of Education: [www.education.tas.gov.au](http://www.education.tas.gov.au)
- VIC – Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)
- WA – Department for Communities: [www.communities.wa.gov.au](http://www.communities.wa.gov.au)

NCAC Child Care Advisers can be contacted on **1 300 136 554**



**For more information on Child Care Quality Assurance please contact a NCAC Child Care Adviser.**

Telephone: 1300 136 554 or (02) 8260 1900  
 E-mail: [qualitycare@ncac.gov.au](mailto:qualitycare@ncac.gov.au)  
 Level 3, 418a Elizabeth St  
 Surry Hills NSW 2010

**[www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)**