

1.1 Policy Objective

The objective of this policy & procedure is to articulate Affinity Education Group's compliance with National Law and Regulations, including Amendment Regulations, from the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 and the Education and Care Services National Regulations WA 2012.

Affinity Education Group understands the important role families and communities play in their child's care and development and the invaluable role they play as a special part of the centre environment. This policy outlines how our centres manage complaints and feedback from families, children, staff, and members of the community. We are committed to providing a safe, respectful, and responsive environment where concerns are taken seriously and resolved promptly.

1.2 Policy Statement

Our service is committed to fostering meaningful, respectful, and collaborative partnerships with families, guided by the principles of the *Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics*. We value families as their child's first and most influential teachers and are dedicated to ensuring they feel welcomed, respected, listened to, and genuinely included in all aspects of our service. Families are encouraged to share their expectations, insights, and concerns openly.

We recognise that children, families, educators, staff, and the broader community must feel confident that any concerns or issues raised will be managed promptly, transparently, and professionally. Our approach to complaints management is designed to be responsive, family-centred, and grounded in a child-focused lens to ensure that children's voices are heard and their wellbeing protected.

This policy outlines clear steps to support families and children in communicating concerns or constructive feedback. It also guides centre operators in managing complaints efficiently and respectfully, using feedback as a vital tool for continuous improvement and ongoing enhancement of service quality.

Please note: This procedure can be read in conjunction with the *Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Procedure, Family Engagement Procedure and Child Safety and Protection Procedure*.

1.3 Scope of Policy

This policy applies to:

- All employees, contractors, subcontractors, students, trainees, volunteers, agents, official visitors and any other individuals performing work or providing services at Affinity workplaces.
- Children, Families and community members

Complaints may relate to:

- Service operations or processes
- Staff conduct or communication
- Child behaviour, safety or wellbeing
- Fees, enrolment, or administration
- Program or curriculum delivery
- Inclusion and access
- Regulatory compliance

Complaints can be made:

- Verbally (in formal or informal conversations)
- In writing (Letter, email, SMS, Social Media Platform)

1.4 Definitions

- **Complaint:** An expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of the service, whether verbal or written.
- **Feedback:** Comments, suggestions, compliments, or concerns that may or may not require action.
- **Serious Complaint:** A complaint that involves alleged risk of harm, breaches of law, or any issue requiring regulatory notification.

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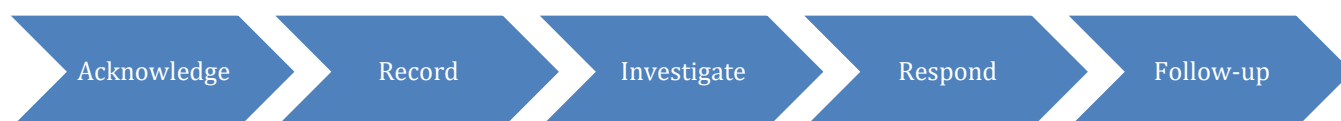
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1.5 Guiding Principles

The complaints process should put children's rights and needs first. Children's immediate safety should be prioritised when responding to complaints.

- **Respect:** All complaints are handled with courtesy and without judgement.
- **Transparency:** Families and staff understand how to raise concerns and what to expect.
- **Timeliness:** Issues are addressed as quickly as possible.
- **Confidentiality:** Information is handled sensitively and shared only with those directly involved.
- **Child-Centred Practice:** The wellbeing, safety, and rights of children guide all decision-making.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Healthy Complaints Culture where complaints help reflect and identify opportunities to strengthen our service.

2.0 Complaints and Disclosure Handling Process



2.1 – Acknowledge

- Where families, employees or community members have a concern or complaint, depending on the nature of the grievance, it is advised that they speak directly with the teacher/lead educator or the person who can best address the issue.
- When receiving a verbal concern or complaint, the employee will:
 - Listen to the person, using suitable and respectful body language and eye contact when receiving face to face complaints. Allow them time to express themselves without interruption
 - Ask questions to ensure they completely understand the concern or complaint
 - Take notes of the complaint to ensure all important details are recorded
 - Thank them for their input and assure the person that they will act to resolve the issue and pass the issue on to the Nominated Supervisor or Responsible Person in Charge who will record the complaint in ServiceNow.
 - If the employee is unable to give the person their full attention at this time (for example, due to supervision or children's needs), the employee is to explain to the person that their concern is important to them and will schedule a time to discuss it or advise them to speak with the Nominated Supervisor

Note: Where employees receive a complaint, they will notify the Nominated Supervisor or Responsible Person in Charge as soon as possible.

- Identify immediate risks to children and manage them quickly and effectively

If it's a Child Concern/Complaints

- Trusting and respectful relationships with employees support children to raise concerns and employees encourage children to have a voice in all decisions that affect them. Children need to understand that they are able to make a complaint or to share their concerns.
- Where a child makes a complaint, the person receiving the complaint must take the complaint seriously. They will listen to the child with their full attention and open body language and active listening. They will make no judgement and thank the child for sharing their grievance.
- Support the child in understanding the complaints handling process and encourage to have a support person present where required
- The employee receiving the complaint will work collaboratively with the child on a suitable solution or strategies to work towards remedying the situation. Families will be involved in the consultation.
- The employee must not make promises to a child or act unethically.
- The employee will escalate concerns where required and keep the child informed of the progress of any action, strategy or investigation, where appropriate.

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Where complaints relate to child behaviour

- Complaints related to child behaviour e.g. physical aggression or harmful sexual behaviours, will be taken seriously, escalated and reported to the appropriate regulatory body as either an circumstance posing a risk, where it meets the threshold or a complaint alleging a breach of law
- Support will be sourced for the child displaying the behaviour and for the family and employees to support the child, other children in the environment and themselves.
- Support sourced will be unique to the child's behaviour and may include support provided by Affinity's Education Team, sourcing Inclusion Support funding or other early intervention program or through organisations such as Bravehearts.
- Reference POL 2-P5 Child Safety and Protection Procedure for further support and strategies

2.2 – Record

- Nominated Supervisor, Responsible Person and/or Incident Support Team record Complaint in ServiceNow
- When receiving a written concern or complaint at the centre, the Nominated Supervisor will acknowledge the person and address the issue promptly and respectfully. Where the complaint is received by the Incident Support Team, this will be issued to the person most suitable to resolving the issue. The person will be acknowledged for submitting their concern.
- Actions taken to resolve the issue must be respectful, ethical and carried out in a timely manner.
- Centre Leadership Team to maintain contact with the person and update them on how their concern or complaint is being addressed. Feedback can be sought from the person throughout this process. Retain any written documentation or communication.
- Incident Support Team assess complaint and ascertain whether it meets guidelines for reporting – See 4.0 Child Safety and Reporting to Regulatory Bodies
- Incident Support Team assess whether complaint should be escalated internally as per escalation matrix criteria (Incident, Injury and Trauma Policy)
- Record all notes, actions, referrals, documentation, investigation and outcome steps in ServiceNow

2.3 – Investigate

- Centre Leadership to conduct initial risk assessment to identify risks to child/ren and steps to ensure safety
- Centre Leadership to conduct initial investigation and what evidence will need to be collected where required
- Follow 4.0 Child Safety and Reporting to Regulatory Bodies section to notify regulatory authority where thresholds are met
- If a Serious Complaint - refer to 5.0 Investigations for Serious Complaints for more information

2.4 – Respond

- To parents throughout investigation as appropriate
- Seek guidance from external authorities on when and how to tell the family and whether to talk to the child and plan conversations.
- Seek guidance from external authorities on whether to, how and when to talk to other families at the service and plan conversations.

2.5 – Follow Up

- Support the child and family
- Support staff – ensuring staff understand confidentiality requirements and are aware of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) available
- Finalise all documents, notes, actions, evidence and details relating to the complaint case in ServiceNow

3.0 If not resolved to the family members satisfaction – Escalation Pathways

Depending on the nature of the complaint if the concern or complaint does not get resolved to the family member's satisfaction, the issue will be:

1. Refer to Nominated Supervisor

2. If still unable to resolve: Refer to Area Manager

3. If still unable to resolve: Refer to Operations or State Manager (May seek support from Crisis Response Team)

4. Only where advised by Affinity Legal Team, external Support and investigation may be sought

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4.0 Child Safety and Reporting to Regulatory Bodies

Written or verbal complaints received must be communicated to the Nominated Supervisor immediately and be logged as soon as possible within 12 hours of receiving the complaint on the Compliance, Risk and Safety portal on ServiceNow.

The Incident Support team review all complaints submitted through the Compliance, Risk and Safety portal on ServiceNow and determine if they meet the threshold of reporting to Regulatory Authority. The Regulatory Authority must be notified:

- Within 24 hours of any complaints alleging
 - o 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
 - o that the Law has been contravened
- Within 7 days of becoming aware of a circumstance arising at the service that poses a risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child
- Within 24 hours (or within 24 hours of becoming aware) of:
 - o any incident where you reasonably believe that physical and/or sexual abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring at the service
 - o any allegation that sexual or physical abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring at the service

A perpetrator of physical abuse may be an adult, adolescent or another child.

Incidents and allegations also need to be notified if they occur during an excursion, transportation to or from the service

For serious complaints with the potential to attract media attention, the Crisis Response Team will be notified and will assemble to coordinate risk assessment and investigation plan. For other complaints, outside of the categories above, the Area Manager or Operations Manager may provide guidance on reporting, risk assessment and investigation of the complaint.

4.1 Reporting to external authorities under laws

Approved providers, educators, and staff must report incidents or suspected incidents of child maltreatment, abuse or neglect involving children in line with state and territory laws, including child protection legislation and reportable conduct schemes.

4.2 Reporting to child protection agencies

Reporting to a child protection agency is separate from notifying the regulatory authority under NQF requirements.

This may be about an incident that happened outside the service, such as in the child's home, or within the education and care service.

The approved provider should also seek guidance from the relevant external authorities on talking to families and staff involved, and what can be shared.

4.3 Reportable Conduct Scheme – VIC, ACT, NSW, WA

Reportable conduct schemes, where they exist in a state or territory, are designed to keep children safe in organisations or services.

Reportable conduct by workers of a designated entity (including employees, volunteers, contractors, officers, directors, secondees, labour-hire workers and other persons) includes:

- Sexual offences committed against, *with*, or *in the presence* of a child (regardless of whether a criminal proceeding has occurred).
- Sexual misconduct involving a child.
- Physical violence against, *with*, or *in the presence* of a child.
- Behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child.
- Significant neglect of a child.

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The Scheme is **allegation based**: if an allegation, based on reasonable belief, that a worker or volunteer has committed reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct **must be notified**. Conduct in either a professional or **private capacity** is captured if AEG became aware while the person was an employee / worker will be reported to the relevant commission and authorities.

5.0 Investigations for Serious Complaints

5.1 Internal Investigation

- Investigation is thoughtfully planned through Crisis Response Team to ensure it is fair to both the child and the adult or child whom concerns or allegations have been made about and to avoid causing more trauma to the child
- Where a child over 4 needs to be interviewed, ensure there is a trusted person and support
- Ensure anyone who interviews children has had appropriate training, ensuring child/ren are safe, comfortable and only happen once, lets the child explain what happened in their own words, avoid asking too many questions which may overwhelm the child.
- Seek guidance from external authorities if it is appropriate to talk to staff, other children and families at the service and what level of information to provide.
- Provide support to the child and their family throughout the complaints handling process and any investigation.
- Check in with the child and their family regularly to update them on the process, timeframes, and next steps, while considering privacy and confidentiality obligations.
- Ensuring privacy, confidentiality and procedural fairness is maintained in a way that complies with the law and is in the best interests of children

5.2 External Investigations

Work with relevant authority what the next steps in the external investigation will be, what contribution (if any) the service can make to that process, and whether the service can start or continue its own investigation

5.3 Outcomes of investigation

- Finalise investigation report and any recommendations based on the risk assessment and final outcome
- Share the outcome to the relevant parties about the investigation results, having regard to privacy and confidentiality obligations. This may include a complainant, and consideration should be given to how much information should be shared
- Ensure any conversations with children are age and developmentally appropriate and use words the child will understand
- Seek advice from other external authorities (like the NQF regulatory authority, child protection or police) on what details can be shared with any family directly involved and with other families and staff at the service.
- Review the service's policies and procedures, self-assessment and risk assessment and quality improvement plan.
- Critically reflect on the process of the investigation, including the privacy and confidentiality of those involved.
- Consider if further professional development is required for educators.

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6.0 Roles and Responsibilities

All employees

- actively work towards developing open and trusting relationships with all families, children and colleagues. Having respectful and reciprocal relationships allows discussions, queries or concerns to be raised calmly and informally before the potential to escalate into bigger issues. Often misunderstanding can arise due to miscommunication.
- greet children and families on arrival in the morning and departure in the afternoon to allow the opportunity to both give and receive information.
- take reasonable steps to ensure that nominated supervisors, educators and staff follow the complaints policy and procedures

Central Support Office Roles - Including Incident Support Team

- ensure that obligations under the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations are met
- ensure that the regulatory authority is notified in writing within 24 hours of any complaints alleging that a serious incident has occurred at the service or that the Education and Care Services National Law has been breached. This includes any complaints about the physical or sexual abuse of a child while being educated or cared for by a service
- ensure the inclusion of policies and procedures for managing complaints alleging that a child is exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours
- ensure policies and procedures dealing with complaints include matters relating to the provision of a complaint handling system that is child focused
- ensure that copies of the policy and procedures are readily accessible to nominated supervisors, coordinators, educators and staff, and available for inspection
- ensure educators, staff, volunteers and students are well informed about their individual child protection responsibilities, reporting and privacy obligations and processes for responding to disclosures (More information in Child Safety and Protection Procedure)
- regularly review the policy and procedures to ensure serious incidents and complaints are investigated promptly, fairly and thoroughly
- ensure that complaints result in reviews of relevant policies, procedures and practices.

Nominated Supervisor:

- ensure the name and contact number of the person to whom complaints can be made is clearly displayed at the service (Responsible Person)
- ensure that regulatory obligations are met and procedures in place to deal with complaints
- inform families and the broader service community on the complaints policy and procedure
- discuss the complaint with the complainant
- ensure relevant CSO is aware of the complaint, if it is a notifiable complaint, or if a complaint cannot be resolved
- ensure the complaint is documented in ServiceNow
- work cooperatively with CSO, educators, staff and/or the complainant during the investigation or resolution of a complaint
- ensure educators, staff, volunteers and students are well informed about their child protection responsibilities and reporting and privacy obligations
- ensure 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
- regularly review the policy and procedures to ensure serious incidents and complaints are investigated promptly, fairly and thoroughly
- ensure that complaints result in reviews of relevant policies, procedures and practices.
- can display a notice of availabilities of employees can be used to inform families of the best times they may contact their child's educator, outside of regular drop off and pick times.
- display a notice in the foyer to inform families and visitors to identify the Nominated Supervisor or Responsible Person in Charge and the Master Centre Information sheet will include details of the person to whom complaints are directed.

Educators

- understand and implement policy and procedures
- report all complaints received to nominated supervisors/AEG promptly so timeframes can be adhered to
- support the nominated supervisors/AEG with investigations and/or resolution of complaints
- understand and are aware of child protection law and their individual responsibilities

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Complaints Policy and Procedure

POL6-P6



- are aware of the different ways children express concerns or distress and disclose harm, as well as the processes for responding to disclosures from children (More information in Child Safety and Protection Procedure)
- support children to know who to talk to if they are feeling unsafe and understand the complaint handling process

Families

- raise any issues or complaints in line with policies and procedures. This can be done in person, via Storypark or through the feedback email.
- cooperate with staff when dealing with complaints

7.0 Resources:

ACECQA. 'Notification Types and Timeframes'. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/applications/notification-types-and-timeframes>

8.0 References and Legislative Obligations

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011

Education and Care Services National Regulations WA 2012

Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics

NQF Child Safe Culture Guide 2025

Dealing with Complaints policy and procedure guidelines 2026

Act: 172, 174, 174A

Regs: 143B, 168-173, 173A, 176

QA2, QA4, QA5, QA6: 6.1, QA7: 7.1.2, 7.2.1

Version History

Version Control	Date	Author	Description of Change
1	Oct 2013	AEG	Update ECSNR
3.16	Mar 2016	AEG	Revision and formatting
7.16	July 2016	AEG	Revision
10.17	Oct 2017	AEG	Amendment Regulations
10.18	Oct 2018	AEG	WA amendment
11.19	Nov 2019	AEG	Scheduled review
2.21	Feb 2021	AEG	Scheduled review
2.22	Feb 2022	AEG	Scheduled review
3.23	Mar 2023	AEG	Scheduled review
10.23	Oct 2023	AEG	Policy name changed, added child-focus and child behaviours
12.23	Dec 2023	AEG	Revised RACI table
4.24	Apr 2024	AEG	Changed ASAS to ServiceNow, emphasised reporting complaints to NS or RPIC by employees, added community
11.24	Nov 2024	AEG	Added to report on ServiceNow 'recommended 12 hours'. Added reference to GUI 1360 and ACECQA link
11.24a	Nov 2024	AEG	Extended on reporting
V8.0	Nov 2025	AEG	Aligned child concerns and complaints information with POL 2-P31 Child Safe Organisation and Principles Procedure
V8.1	Feb 2026	AEG	Refreshed Complaints Policy & Procedure in line with ACECQA Dealing with complaints Policy & procedure guidelines Jan 2026. Included Roles and Responsibilities, Child Safety and Mandatory Reporting section and Investigations for Serious Complaints section

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