



Statement

At Bethany Christian School we emphasise that positive, clear and effective processes for resolving complaints between the student body, staff and school community members assists in the building of strong relationships, dispels anxiety, and ultimately provides students with an enhanced learning environment.

Purpose

This policy describes Bethany Christian School's practices for handling parent complaints. Throughout this document, the term 'parent' has been used to refer to both parents and carers, which includes individuals who have assumed responsibility for the role of primary caregiver for a child or young person, such as guardians, grandparents, or other family members. It should be noted that this Policy does not cover complaints from staff about aspects of their work or employment conditions. Bethany Christian School will handle these matters in accordance with the appropriate Industrial Award and/or Enterprise Agreements.

Background

A complaint or grievance is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived situation, outcome or decision. The dissatisfaction may be based on a perception that the School has:

- Done something wrong;
- Failed to do something it should have; or
- Acted unfairly or unreasonably.

It may be about the School in general, about a specific department in the School, or about an individual staff member or student.

Once a complaint is raised, the School will endeavour to investigate and resolve it as quickly as possible to ensure they do not become ongoing disputes.

Depending on the complaint, the school will inform their insurance company of the issue, as the insurer may have requirements about the management of the complaint.

It is important to note that neither the Minister for Education, Training and Skills nor the Department for Education has any power to directly intervene in any complaints relating to the operations of a Non-Government School.

Guiding Principles

The following principles underpin Bethany Christian School's Handling Parent Complaints Policy:

- The School ethos encourages an openness to hearing the concerns of parents;
- The School values feedback from parents, and complaints are received in a positive manner;
- Complaints are dealt with speedily and sensitively and those concerned are advised about progress;
- Training in communication skills and the handling of complaints is provided to staff;
- Records are maintained and securely filed;
- All legislative obligations are met (for example, mandatory reporting, privacy);
- Regular reviews of complaint handling procedures are undertaken to ensure the effectiveness and responsiveness of School policy and procedure; and
- The emphasis is on early intervention, effective management and resolution.



Mandatory Reporting

Legal obligations relating to child abuse may limit Bethany Christian School's ability to undertake a comprehensive investigation. This particularly applies to the mandatory reporting requirements outlined in the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (SA). South Australia Police (SAPOL) involvement in some investigations may also limit the nature and scope of the School's investigation. In such cases, the School will seek guidance from SAPOL as to what can or cannot be done while the police are involved in the matter.

Preparation

Bethany Christian School acknowledges that complaints tend to be resolved more readily when parents can discuss issues openly with appropriate School staff. The School aims to actively seek the opinion of parents to help create an open and positive climate.

Staff may handle some complaints if they have the delegated authority to appropriately handle these matters.

Responsive Attitude

Bethany Christian School acknowledges that a complaint may be resolved more readily when:

- There is a demonstrated commitment at all levels within the School to identify a satisfactory resolution to the complaint;
- Issues are dealt with promptly and with appropriate discretion and sensitivity;
- Complaints are treated seriously;
- School policy and procedures are clearly understood, publicised and supported by the School community; and
- Flexibility is shown in dealing with concerns.

Fairness and Objectivity

Bethany Christian School is committed to resolving complaints with fairness and objectivity. Bethany Christian School acknowledges that complaints are more likely to be resolved quickly and effectively when:

- The complainant knows that the School has followed its policy and procedures;
- Information about the process of resolution is received by the complainant in a timely manner;
- Reasons are given for decisions;
- The School acts with appropriate discretion;
- The School considers complaints generally as one means of receiving information that contributes to the overall improvement in the services provided; and
- People believe that the principles of natural justice have been followed.

Bethany Christian School is committed to being as clear as possible with the complainant about what will and will not be treated in confidence.

Effective Communication

Bethany Christian School is committed to ensuring that clear protocols and lines of communication are established to handle complaints. Where possible, issues will be dealt with at the level at which they occurred.



Bethany Christian School strongly encourages the complainant to address the person with whom they have the complaint. If no satisfactory outcome is achieved, the complainant may then contact the school's Community Relations staff member. For high level complaints, matters will be referred to the Deputy Principal for a resolution, before being escalated to the Principal. At times, the matter will need to be referred on, in which case the complainant may be required to meet with the Bethany Christian School Council's Chairperson. The Deputy Principal is the site leader for all mandatory notification and child abuse related complaints. Complaints relating to finance or building and maintenance, complaints will be referred to the School Bursar.

Investigation and Keeping Proper Records

Information about complaints can be obtained from three chief sources: witnesses, other persons with relevant knowledge or information, and written records.

Bethany Christian School will keep a record of the complaint which will include the following detail:

- Date when issue was first raised;
- Name of parent(s);
- Name of student(s);
- Detailed statement of concern/complaint including:
 - Nature of complaint;
 - Identity of person(s) involved; and
 - Time of allegation;
- Description of the procedures applied and the time frame for reporting on the outcomes of any investigation;
- Statement of outcomes; and
- Names of staff member(s) handling complaint.

Bethany Christian School acknowledges that documents that may be created during the investigation and handling a complaint might have to be produced in legal proceedings. Therefore, records will contain clear and accurate notes of conversations with parents, students and staff. It is important that all records are created contemporaneously.

Expectations

While a complaint is being investigated, it is expected that all parties will behave in a manner consistent with the School's Community Code of Conduct and ethics and behaviours. Please refer to the Protections of Teachers, Staff and Students at School & ELC policy, the Communication Policy and the Code of Ethics policy.

Should the parent have a complaint against another student within the school, they must **NEVER** approach the student to resolve the conflict. This is a serious breach of the Child Protection Policy and the school will be obliged to will take further action.

Confidentiality

Bethany Christian School wishes to advise parents that we will treat your complaint with respect and sensitivity. However, the School cannot guarantee that communications or documents will be kept confidential. Although we endeavour to deal with complaints with appropriate discretion, we reserve our right to disclose details of the matter to other persons who in our opinion need to know them to facilitate the resolution of the complaint.



Often it is not possible to keep the information only with the complainant and the staff member(s) who receives the complaint to reach resolution. Generally, the details of the complaint will be disclosed only to people who need to know them, either because they are dealing with the complaint, or are advising about how it should be handled, or are providing information such as witness statements.

In handling complaints, Bethany Christian School will distinguish between situations where a legal obligation of confidentiality arises and cases where it does not.

Bethany Christian School notes that it may be possible to investigate a complaint without naming individuals. However, the source of the complaint may be obvious even if no names are given. Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to undertake an investigation without disclosing the identity of the complainant, the staff member(s) and/or the student concerned.

Any staff member involved in the investigation will be instructed very clearly not to discuss the matter with any other people, including, but not limited to, other staff, students or parents.

Anonymous Complaints

There may be occasions where anonymous complaints are received. There are limitations to the extent that an anonymous complaint can be investigated. The Principal will determine how to manage these complaints on a case-by-case basis.

Procedure for Managing a Parent Complaint

The procedure for managing a parent complaint is outlined in Bethany Christian School's Complaints Procedure [<https://www.bethany.sa.edu.au/about-the-school/school-policies>].

Legislative Context

[Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#)

[Child Safety \(Prohibited Persons\) Act 2016](#)

[Statutes Amendment \(Child Sexual Abuse\) Act 2021](#)

[Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935 \(SA\)](#)

[Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(SA\)](#)

[Sex Discrimination Act 1984 \(Cth\)](#)

[Education and Early Childhood Services \(Registration and Standards\) Act 2011 \(SA\)](#)

[Education Act 2013 \(Cth\)](#)

[Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#)

[State Government Funding Deed](#)

Relevant Standards and Frameworks

[Australian Student Wellbeing Framework](#)

[Child Safe Organisations National Principles](#)

[Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)

[Privacy Act 1988](#)

[Privacy Amendment \(Enhancing Privacy Protection Act 2012 \(Amending Act\)\)](#)

Relevant Cross Sector Guidelines



[Behaviour and Wellbeing Policy](#)
[Handling Complaints Procedure](#)
[Protective Practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people](#)
[Managing allegations of sexual misconduct in SA education and care settings](#)
[Protections for Teachers, Staff and Students at School & ELC](#)
[Responding to problem sexual behaviour in children and young people](#)

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