

Process for Resolving Issues Guidelines

The types of relationships covered by this process

This process covers all *adult* relationships in the community. It is designed to cover the following relationships:

parent/parent

staff/parent

staff/staff

Refer to the Behaviour Management Guidelines for processes around issues with children.

N.B. If you have an issue with another person's child (this would usually be something that impacted on your own child) please approach that child's teacher in the first instance. If your issue is unresolved after talking with the teacher, and you wish to take the matter further, *assume that your issue is now with that member of staff*, rather than the family concerned, and follow the relevant steps of the process in relation to that member of staff. This ensures respectful treatment of individual children and families, and keeps matters within a school context.

Why do we need a process for resolving issues?

From time to time, issues arise between individual members of any group or organisation, and they need to be dealt with efficiently and with everybody's best interests at heart. Because Currambena is a small community as well as a school, it is important that we safeguard our professional relationships, our friendships and the wellbeing of our children.

For this, a formal process is the best tool.

The benefits of clarity

It can sometimes feel odd in a small friendly community to use formal processes to sort out minor issues; we prefer to trust that our goodwill will carry us through the difficulties. And sometimes it does. But by doing it that way, one can sometimes assume things about how our friends are thinking and we may stop communicating as clearly as we might.

Cutting down rumour

Sometimes when we feel bad about something, we start to talk to our particular friends about the issue, often in order to think it through and gain some support at the same time. If those friends are in the community (often caring as much for its wellbeing as we do), this can mean that they now feel burdened with the issue as well. It can happen that they, too, need to seek support from other particular friends to help sort out *their* thinking. Before very long, and without intention, rumours start to spread, and suddenly thirty people might be feeling worried and confused about something.

Rumours can seriously erode the morale of a community and can put the good name of individual members of the community in jeopardy. They also make an issue more complicated and much harder to 'unpick' and resolve.

To prevent this from happening, it is best to follow the sequential steps of the process and give everybody the best chance of both solving the issue and gaining support in thinking things through.

Most people need help thinking through issues that trouble them. It is fine to choose a person with whom to talk things through, either in the community or outside (this can often be very helpful), as long as there is agreement that the content of the discussions is kept confidential. Our Coordinator, Julianna, is available at any stage to provide this kind of confidential support.

Personal responsibility

Underlying this document is a requirement that all of us as individuals are responsible for:

- Making our best efforts to resolve our particular problem
- Making an initial commitment to the person with whom we are currently experiencing difficulty by approaching them first; if that doesn't resolve the issue, using the following process (see below, 'The Process')
- Safeguarding the good name of the person with whom we have an issue (Remember, even if we feel angry with somebody, *their good name is in our hands.*)
- Avoiding personal attacks (Stay specific to this problem, and avoid references to the past or general statements about what they are 'like' as an individual.)
- Making sure that the children are free of worry about such issues (Our children should be protected from issues between adults in the community, unless it is a matter of their safety.)
- Referring members of the community back to the policy and encouraging them to take their issue up directly with the other person involved (If somebody comes to us with an unresolved issue, this is the first step).

Process for resolving issues

Below is a series of steps to be followed sequentially if you have an issue with another member of the community. It is important that each step is undertaken.

1. Try and fix it yourself.

Go and speak informally to the person with whom you have an issue. Tell them clearly what your thinking is about the issue, but avoid attacks. (E.g. stay specific to this problem and avoid references to the past, or general statements about what they are 'like' as an individual.)

Avoid talking to other people in the community at this stage.

If you are the person who is being approached, try to listen as best you can. By coming to you privately with the issue, the other person is showing you respect and dealing with the matter responsibly.

2. If the issue is still unresolved, make a more formal approach to the person with whom you have an issue.

Ask the person if you can fix a time to meet. This makes the issue more formal and gives you both a greater chance of focusing on the subject without interruptions.

If the issue is resolved after Steps 1 or 2, you have done a great job.

3. If you feel that Steps 1 and 2 are too difficult, or if you have tried them and the issue is still unresolved, speak to the School Coordinator and ask for some help. If the issue is with the School Coordinator, speak directly to a Council Member.

It is still important to avoid talking to anybody else in the community, so as not to burden others with an issue that may well be resolved soon.

Be prepared to talk to the person again, this time with the Coordinator (or Council member if the issue is with the Coordinator) to mediate the discussion. Again, stay specific to the problem, and avoid attacks.

At Step 3, the process becomes formal. It is part of the job of the Coordinator to document any action points/matters arising from the discussion, check with both parties that it is an accurate record of events, and file confidentially. Records of complaints and details of disputes including relevant correspondence will be kept in a secure place in the office for a minimum of 6 years. Any complaints against Currambena staff involving interactions with students of a serious nature will be kept indefinitely.

4. If the issue is still not resolved after the mediation process, the Coordinator will, with your permission, then take the matter to an in-camera session of Council and will invite you to come along if appropriate. It is the Coordinator's job to oversee the matter at this stage and to make sure that you are informed of the outcome.

The Coordinator should distribute relevant documentation prior to the meeting, and any actions or decisions arising from the meeting should be clearly documented in in-camera minutes.

Council members, and anybody involved at this stage, have a duty to treat the matter with complete confidentiality.

If the issue is resolved at this point, it has been successfully managed and dealt with calmly and appropriately.

5. If you are not satisfied that Council and the Coordinator between them have satisfactorily dealt with the issue, you are entitled to write to Council directly.

Any such matters will be dealt with in-camera, and it remains as everybody's duty to limit discussion to those who need to know.

6. If you still feel your issues have not been satisfactorily addressed, you can advise Council and they will take the matter to a higher body, such as the AIS, and request unbiased assistance which could mean mediation or further legal proceedings.

This step should be viewed as the last resort, *once all the previous stages have been undertaken.*