



Client Complaint Handling Policy

Policy Statement

Parent to Parent Association Qld (P2P) intends to provide the best service possible but recognises that at times this may not be the case and encourages feedback from clients that raise issues about the quality or effectiveness of a service.

This is a critical part of reviewing our service effectiveness and in doing so a client needs to be confident that there will be no adverse response related to the feedback provided.

This policy outlines the process that will be taken to respond to complaints.

Principles

A well functioning complaints procedure is a critical component of a service provision in a disability services environment and receives significant attention in many quality and compliance processes. It is not uncommon for client expectations to be different to what the service hopes to achieve or guidelines that it has to comply with.

A complaint process is made up of a number of components. In some instances not all components will be required. At other times they may all be used in one interaction as resolution may occur at any stage. The initial complaint could be fully resolved at the first interchange or it could involve multiple layers of management to complete.

Definitions

1. **Rights:** People have a fundamental right to speak up about the supports they receive.
2. **Respect:** People are treated with respect and dignity throughout the process. This includes respecting their privacy and maintaining the confidentiality of their information.
3. **Fairness:** People are treated fairly and their concerns are dealt with in an unbiased and objective manner.
4. **Accessible:** Information should be provided in ways that enable people who use our services to know how to make a complaint.
5. **Person centred:** A system flexible enough to respond to individual needs and to consider what is both important to and important for people receiving supports.
6. **Responsive** Provide a clear process for ensuring that complaints are handled in a timely way and people are kept informed of the progress of their complaint.
7. **Natural justice** People involved in a complaint are given a fair opportunity to respond to issues raised and to present their views.
8. **Accountable:** Our process for resolving complaints is clearly outlined so people know what to expect.
9. **Excellence** The complaints management system is part of our quality culture that sees the complaint as an opportunity for improvement.

Key steps

1. A complaint/feedback can be made to any staff of P2P in any form eg phone , email, sms or conversation.
2. A formal acknowledgement is to be completed within 2 days by the manager of the relevant service.
3. The information is to be recorded in the Complaints register within 2 days
<https://www.sites.google.com/p2pqld.org.au/intranet/record-or-report-a/participant-complaints-and-feedback>
4. A formal answer of a resolved matter is to be provided within 10 business days.
5. A formal answer of an unresolved matter is to be provided within 10 business days providing information about any delays and estimated timeframes.
6. A person to person contact should be made to confirm receipt of the formal reply and any discussion around its contents.
7. Managers and the CEO are responsible for monitoring completion of a complaint within and outside the 10 business day timeframe.
8. Managers and the CEO are to review the Complaints Register quarterly and examine the issues raised in terms of continuous improvement possibilities.

NOTE: A complaint provided on an anonymous basis will be treated as feedback and reviewed accordingly.

Acknowledgement and recording.

“A good acknowledgement delivered with respect, the right body language and tone will indicate to the person that you are not about to oppose them and that you see their feelings as legitimate. Acknowledgement is about validating emotions.” (G. Furlong. The Conflict Resolution Toolbox)

In many respects this first step is the most important as it often sets the tone for the rest of the process. Having stepped out of their comfort zone to make a complaint, people want to feel that you’ve understood their concern and how the situation has affected them.

There is no perfect way to give a positive and respectful acknowledgement in all situations.

Basic steps.

Listen. Genuinely listen to the concerns of the person without interruption. Look for the positive intention behind the person’s issue and behaviour.

Empathise. Use your body language and/or voice to create an environment where the person can feel comfortable talking with you. Be conscious of whether you are feeling defensive and how this can be perceived.

Acknowledge. Acknowledge how the situation has affected the person who made the complaint. Where relevant, acknowledge where the service response could have been better.

Rectify. Ask the person who made the complaint what would rectify the complaint for them. What would a good outcome look like for them?

Notify. Notify the person promptly and regularly of the steps you will take in response to their complaint but don't commit to things you can't do.

A complaint should be acknowledged and recognised as a complaint or feedback as quickly as possible via the same medium as it was provided or another convenient method but at least within 2 days of the complaint being made.

Identification of the issue generating the complaint. It is critical that the client be listened to carefully and our interpretation of the complaint/feedback is provided back to the client for confirmation.

It is **mandatory** for the complaint/feedback to be recorded in the Complaints Register at <https://www.sites.google.com/p2pqld.org.au/intranet/record-or-report-a/participant-complaints-and-feedback>

The relevant manager of the service and the CEO should be advised of the complaint. The manager will determine the who/how the complaint will be handled/ investigated/ responded to.

Answers or information provided ASAP.

People typically want to know why something has or has not happened or why a decision was made. This is important to their ability to understand and process what has happened and to move on to resolving their concern. Answers should include a clear explanation of the event /decision relevant to the concern raised.

Even at the time of the complaint being made we may be able to provide answers/ information which resolve the complaint. If this is not possible the client should be informed of the timeframe for an answer but this should not be longer than 10 business days.

If external parties are involved and unable to respond in this timeframe the client should be advised within 10 business days.

Actions

People want you to fix or at least take steps to address their concerns. Sometimes you may not be able to fix the concern raised but may be able to initiate actions that will assist in preventing it occurring again. This can be just as important to the person as it validates their concern.

It's a good idea to agree to an action plan with the person who raised the complaint. The plan should include things like:

- What will be done?
- Who will do it and when?
- How will we communicate our progress?

- How will we check that things are on track?

It's a good idea to then follow up with the person who made the complaint to make sure they are satisfied with what action you have taken. This can also be a good opportunity to seek feedback on their experience of the process you used to respond to their complaint. Actions often cannot fix the past, but they can show that the concern raised was taken seriously and offer reassurance that the issue is less likely to happen again.

Apology and explanation

An apology can either be part or the whole of the outcome people seek when they make a complaint. Care should be taken about who might give the apology and what form it should take.

Apologies don't have to be particularly fancy or over the top but they do need to be genuine. Whilst a genuine apology can be an important step in resolving a complaint, a poorly given apology can actually make the situation worse.

Key elements of a 'good' apology.

- Timeliness.
- Sincerity.
- Being specific and to the point.
- Accepting responsibility for what occurred and the impacts caused.
- Explaining the circumstances and causes (without making excuses).
- Summarising key actions agreed to as a result of the complaint.

A genuine and timely apology is a powerful healing force and a way to separate the past from the future, to put things to rest and get on with any new arrangements agreed to.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is vital in promoting the effectiveness of the procedure and all reasonable efforts, consistent with safety and legal requirements which cover situations of potential harm to people, must be made to maintain an individual's privacy. Information relating to an Individual will be transmitted, used and stored in a confidential manner.

We will only disclose personal information if required or authorised by law or where we reasonably believe the use or disclosure is necessary to lessen or prevent a serious threat to the life, health or safety of any individual, or to public health or safety.

Consultation and Approval

P2P team members, board, and people with lived experience were consulted in the development of this policy and procedure. This policy has been approved for implementation.