

RESOLVING PARENTS ISSUES AND CONCERNS AT SCHOOL

RATIONALE

A school culture that welcomes, encourages and initiates regular two way school-home liaison is one in which healthy problem solving processes can be established and sustained.

Clearly defined and operational resolution processes facilitate parents and school personnel to focus on early resolutions to issues and concerns in order to foster and support children's academic progress, their physical development and social and emotional well being.

PRINCIPLES

- It is recognised that caring parents want 'the best' for their children and are therefore entitled and encouraged to raise issues and matters of concern seeking a resolution.
- Issues and concerns raised are to be listened to, taken seriously, responded to and a resolution sought.
- Satisfactory resolutions to issues and matters of concern are more easily found when these are raised early and directly with the person concerned.
- Doing nothing about an issue or concern in the hope that it will go away often results in the problem becoming more complex and more difficult to resolve.
- The problem solving approach is most effective when it:
 - Focuses on the issues and not the people involved;
 - Results in a satisfactory resolution of the problem;
 - Is easy on the nervous system;
 - Doesn't unintentionally punish a child in the short or long term by making them the scapegoat for unresolved differences between adults;
 - Ensures that a constructive relationship between all involved will be possible in the future; and
 - Helps any child involved to learn something about constructively dealing with problems.

RESOLUTION PROCEDURES

Parents are advised to follow the step by step guide recommended by WACSSO, the peak body representing parents in Western Australia.

Step 1: Get a good grasp of the problem.

Before you visit the school to discuss a problem or concern it pays to do a lot of thinking. Work out what it is that is really bothering you. Be as specific and objective as you can in describing the problem. At this stage, try not to focus too much on solutions. To do so may blinker your thinking and close your mind to any creative strategies that may be discussed later on.

There are three very sound reasons for these actions. First, they help you to be sure that your energy is being directed at the real problem and not just a symptom of it. Secondly, they help you to decide whether or not an approach to the school is warranted. Thirdly, an objective, well ordered approach encourages other people to be cooperative. Shooting from the hip encourages deceptiveness.

Step 2: Arrange an interview with the class teacher.

Your problems and concerns deserve more than a few hurried words before the bell goes, so make an appointment for a time which suits both you and the classroom teacher. Aim for a time when you know you will be relatively free of time constraints and when you won't have a pre-schooler in tow.

It pays to mention the reason why you want the appointment. Not only is it a courteous thing to do, it also promotes efficient use of valuable discussion time by giving the teacher an opportunity to prepare for the meeting the same way that you have.

Step 3: Discuss what is bothering you.

You are meeting with your child's teacher because you have identified a problem which can best be solved through his/her active involvement. The teacher's cooperation will be most readily available when your facts are correct, your manner is at least civil, and you show your willingness to be part of the solution. Here are a few suggestions that will help you to keep on the right track.

- Don't leave the teacher guessing by talking at length about something irrelevant. Observe social niceties by all means, but remember the real purpose of your visit. A friendly, relaxed, but business-like manner will work best.
- State your problems or concerns calmly using the specific and objective language you used in Step 1 to define the problem.
- Show that you want to be part of the solution for example, "I'm very concerned about Dora's poor test results in spelling. What do you think can be done about it?"
- Work at staying calm and objective throughout the meeting. This can be very hard to do when the welfare of your child is involved but losing your temper does nothing to develop cooperation and creative problem solving.
- Listen at least as much as you talk. It is the people who listen who are most likely to learn something new.
- Keep an open mind. If you reject information or suggestions too readily, you may be throwing away part of the solution to the problem.
- Expect to compromise. Compromise is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign that you have come to a sensible give and take arrangement.
- Summarise agreed action. This helps to ensure that important agreements will not be forgotten. It also helps to ensure that you and the teacher understand important points in the same way.
- Arrange a follow up meeting if necessary.

Step 4: Follow through on agreed actions.

How you follow up on a meeting with your child's classroom teacher depends very much on what was discussed and agreed to at the meeting. eg

- Listen to your child read or reading to your child
- Invite other children home more often
- Help your child to develop more efficient work habits.