

Applies to	All Intereach workers and FDC Educators. For the purpose of this document, the term “Worker” applies to all employees, volunteers, contractors, students and Board Members.				
Version	6.2	Date approved	01/03/2022	Next review date	13/01/2024

1. Policy Statement

Intereach Limited (Intereach) welcomes complaints and feedback and is committed to seeking and receiving feedback about our services. Intereach recognises that complaints and feedback are an important component of continuous improvement for the organisation and upholding positive relationships between our services and the community.

This Policy outlines Intereach’s commitment to managing complaints and feedback in relation to the services it provides. Everyone has the right to a positive and sympathetic response to their concerns. This Policy provides guidance on how you may provide feedback or make a complaint, and how we respond to and learn from complaints made towards our services.

Intereach aims to:

- strengthen and improve social and personal wellbeing for individuals, families and communities;
- promote and facilitate access, equality and social justice; and,
- deliver services locally that are of quality and have value.

2. Objective

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that we manage complaints in a manner that is fair, efficient and effective. Intereach intends that this Policy provides a process for people who wish to make a complaint or offer feedback, as well as support our workers to respond to and manage complaints and feedback fairly.

This Policy sets out how to make a complaint and what to expect from our complaint management process.

This Policy does not relate to complaints made by our employees, these complaints are covered by our *Resolving Workplace Conflict Policy*.

3. Definitions

- **Business Days** means a day that is not a Saturday or Sunday or a day that is wholly or partly observed as a public holiday throughout Victoria or New South Wales.
- **Complaint** means an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about us, our services, staff, partnering agencies, Family Day Care educators or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly expected or legally required.
- **Family Day Care Educator** means an educator engaged by or registered with a family day care service to provide education and care for children in a residence or at an approved family day care venue.
- **Feedback** means opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about us, about our services, or complaint handling where a response is not explicitly nor implicitly expected or required.
- **Policy** means this Complaints Policy.

4. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to:

- ensure an effective, fair and transparent complaint system is implemented across the organisation;
- promote a culture that values complaints and their effective resolution; and,
- support a continuous improvement culture around complaints.

It is the responsibility of managers to:

- ensure complaints recorded appropriately and handled in accordance with this policy; and,
- notify regulatory authorities of complaints in line with legislative and regulatory requirements.

It is the responsibility of workers to:

- receive complaints and provide support to those wishing to make a complaint; and,
- comply with this policy.

5. Policy

5.1. What can I make a Complaint about

A Complaint may be made about us, our services, staff, partnering agencies or Family Day Care educators. A Complaint may be made specifically about a breach of our *Code of Conduct* and *Privacy Policy*.

Intereach takes child safety concerns seriously. If a Complaint involves any safety concerns, particularly child safety concerns, including:

- disclosure of abuse or harm;
- allegation, suspicion or observation;
- breach of our Code of Conduct; and/or,
- environmental safety issues.

Please call 000 if a person or child is in danger.

5.2. Who can make a Complaint

A Complaint may be made by any person who is affected by us, our services, staff, partnering agencies, Family Day Care educators or by a person acting on behalf of the affected person, where the affected person is:

- a child, being a person under the age of 18.
- a deceased person;
- in the case of the deceased person, the Complaint must be made by the legal personal representative of the deceased. We reserve our right to request evidence confirming that the person is the legal personal representative of the deceased;
- a person who requires support due to impairment or disability;
- a person who is a power of attorney or otherwise authorised to act on behalf of the affected person; or,
- a third party who has been given written consent on behalf of the affected person.

5.3. How to make a Complaint

A Complaint to Intereach may be made using various means, such as:

- **Call:**

- you may call us on 1300 488 226 and we will direct your Complaint to the appropriate manager or Board Member.
- **Email:**
 - you may email us on complaints@intereach.com.au.
- **Write:**
 - you may write to us at:
Complaints Intereach PO Box 501
Deniliquin NSW 2710; and,
 - please write “Confidential” on the envelope for your privacy.
- **Website:**
 - please visit the “Contact Us” page on our website at www.intereach.com.au/contact-us/#enquiry.
- **In person:**
 - you may attend an Intereach Office or discuss your concerns directly with an Intereach staff member or Board Member; or,
- **Social Media:**
 - due to privacy and confidentiality, complaints should not be made on social media. Please refer to one of our other communication mediums.

5.4. Anonymous Complaints

We accept anonymous complaints and will carry out a confidential investigation of the issues raised where there is enough information provided.

5.5. Accessibility

Intereach will ensure that information on how and where to make Complaints is easily accessible to everyone, particularly people who require assistance. Intereach will address each Complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.

An Intereach Rights, Privacy and Complaints Brochure (Easy English) is available on our website at <http://www.intereach.com.au/contact-us/>

We also have copies of this policy available online on Intereach website under [Key Intereach Policies](#)

5.6. Objectivity and Fairness

Any Complaints or Feedback raised to us will be dealt with in a reasonable timeframe and responded to in an equitable, unbiased and objective manner.

Intereach will ensure that the person handling a Complaint is different from any staff member or Family Day Care educators whose conduct or service is the subject of the Complaint.

Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed appropriately. Any internal reviews of how a Complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision maker of the Complaint.

5.7. No adverse effect

Intereach will use its best endeavours to ensure that the person making a Complaint is not adversely affected because a Complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

5.8. Types of Complaints we cannot deal with

We will advise you as soon as possible if we are unable to deal with part or all of the Complaint and where known and appropriate, direct you to the appropriate forum to make such Complaint.

Intereach will refer Complaints to other bodies if they are required to do so by law e.g. concerns of a possible commitment of a criminal offence, which will be referred to the appropriate police body and if applicable, child protection authority.

5.9. Flexible communication of a Complaint

Intereach are empowered to resolve Complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible. We will adopt flexible approaches to receiving and responding to Complaints to enhance accessibility for people making Complaints and/or their representatives.

Our response to a Complaint will be wherever possible by your preferred method of communication. Should your Complaint be of a serious nature, we may request that you put the Complaint in writing.

5.10. Managing the parties to a Complaints

Where a Complaint involves multiple organisations, Intereach will work with these organisations where possible, to ensure a smooth Complaint process and that communication between us, other organisations and the person making a Complaint and/or their representative is clear, timely and coordinated.

Any communications and information sharing with other organisations will be subject to privacy and where any of our services are contracted out, we expect our partners to have confidentiality considerations.

Where any of our services are contracted out, we expect our partners to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system.

5.11. Managing unreasonable conduct by people making Complaints

Our staff are committed and empowered to implement and manage our Complaints process by being fair, accessible and responsive. At the same time, our ability to successfully manage Complaints depends on:

- our ability to perform our work in the most effective and efficient manner;
- our ability to ensure the health, safety and security of our staff; and,
- our ability to allocate our resources fairly across all Complaints we receive.

When people behave inappropriately or unreasonably towards us and our staff, their conduct significantly impacts on our ability to implement our Complaints process efficiently and effectively. Should a person act inappropriately or unreasonably in making a Complaint, we will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that is negative or unreasonable and will support our staff to do the same in accordance with this Policy.

For further information in relation to unreasonable conduct by people making complaints please refer to the links for relevant state Ombudsman:

- NSW: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au; or,
- Victoria: www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au.

5.12. Steps of the Complaints Process

5.12.1. Receipt of a Complaint

Where possible, we will attempt to resolve a Complaint on first contact with us. This may be in the form of an explanation or an apology, where appropriate.

Upon receipt of a Complaint, we will record the Complaint on our Complaints and Compliments Register, including details about the subject of the Complaint and any supporting information received with the Complaint. We will assign the Complaint with a unique reference number.

5.12.2. Acknowledgement of a Complaint

We will acknowledge receipt of your Complaint at the time of receipt, or as soon as possible being no more than within 3 business days of receipt of the Complaint.

We are committed to managing people's expectations and will alert you as soon as possible of the following:

- an explanation of the Complaint process;
- the expected timeframes for our response to a Complaint;
- the level of involvement you and/or your representative are likely to take in the Complaint process;
- who you would like to be your key contact for the Complaint process;
- your expectations of the outcome of the Complaint; and,
- the possible or likely outcome of the Complaint.

Intereach will consider the appropriate method of contact for communicating with you throughout the Complaint process, taking into account any method requested by you.

Should there be a delay in meeting any timeframe noted in this Policy, Intereach will advise you as soon as possible of the delay and the reason for the delay.

Intereach will further notify any relevant authorities of the Complaint, if required and in line with our statutory obligations.

5.12.3. Initial Assessment

After we have acknowledged your Complaint, Intereach will assess and prioritise Complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised, if a matter involves an immediate risk to safety or security, we will respond immediately and escalate the matter accordingly. In the case of a serious Complaint, Intereach will take all reasonable steps to safeguard the health and wellbeing of any victim/s of abuse, misconduct or exploitation.

Should there be more than one issue in the Complaint, we will assess whether each issue requires a separate Complaint or whether it would be more appropriate for each issue to be investigated together.

We will also consider the outcome you are seeking from the Complaint.

In assessing how a Complaint will be investigated, we will consider the following matters:

- how serious, complicated or urgent the Complaint is;
- whether the Complaint raises concerns about you or other people's health and safety;
- whether you require any additional support during the Complaint process;
- how you are affected by making the Complaint;
- whether further information is needed from you in relation to the Complaint;
- what further information Intereach needs to provide to you following this initial assessment;
- your level of involvement in the Complaint process;
- the risks involved if resolution of the Complaint is delayed; and,
- whether the Complaint requires the involvement of other organisations (e.g. police, child protection authority).

We will further assess whether the issues raised in the Complaint are matters that Intereach may deal with. If we are unable to deal with your Complaint, we will direct you to the appropriate forum to make such Complaint, if known and appropriate.

5.12.4. Investigation of Complaint

In investigating the Complaint, we may:

- get in contact with you and/or your representative to gather more information or further explanation of the Complaint;
- gather information about the issue, person or area that the Complaint is about;
- investigate the claims made in the Complaint; and,
- conduct any investigation in cooperation with any relevant authority (e.g. police).

We will endeavor to keep you up to date on the progress of our investigation. Which actions Intereach decides to take will be tailored to each case and will take into account any statutory requirements.

5.12.5. Investigation Outcome

Where an investigation has occurred, Intereach will endeavour to provide a written response within thirty (30) business days of receiving the Complaint. Complaints within our Aged Care Services follow our Open Disclosure principles, refer to the Aged Care Services Open Disclosure Policy.

Our response where possible will advise you of the following:

- the outcome of the Complaint and corrective actions;
- the reason for our decision;
- the remedy or resolution/s that we have proposed or put in place; and,
- any options for review that may be available to you, such as an internal review, external review by a third party or appeal.

If during the course of any investigation of a Complaint, we make any adverse findings about a particular individual, we will consider any applicable privacy obligations under the applicable privacy legislation and any applicable exemptions in or made pursuant to that Act, before sharing our findings of the Complaint with you.

5.12.6. Closure of Complaint and record keeping

Intereach will keep comprehensive records about:

- how we managed the Complaint;
- the outcome/s of the Complaint (including whether it or any aspect of it was substantiated, any recommendations made to address problems identified and any decisions made on those recommendations); and,
- any outstanding actions that need to be followed up.

All records relating to a Complaint will be stored electronically and filed as confidential, then destroyed after seven years unless otherwise specified by law.

We will ensure that outcomes are properly implemented, monitored and reported to the appropriate person at Intereach and any relevant government authority where applicable.

5.13. What if you are not happy with the outcome

Whilst we hope to be able to resolve your Complaint by reaching a fair and reasonable outcome you are happy with, if you are unhappy with the outcome to a Complaint or the manner in which the Complaint was managed you may write directly to our CEO at the following address:

- CEO
Intereach PO Box 501
Deniliquin NSW 2710

Please write “Confidential” on the envelope for your privacy.

At any time, you may choose to contact the following external agencies to have your Complaint investigated externally:

- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission – phone 1800951 822
- Human Rights Commission – phone 1800 620 241;
- NSW Community Services Commission – phone 1800 060 409;
- NSW Ombudsman – phone 1800 451 524;
- Victorian Ombudsman – phone 1800 806 314;
- Commonwealth Ombudsman – phone 1300 362 072;
- Complaints Resolution and Referral Service (CRRS) for services funded under the Commonwealth Disability Services Act – phone 1800 880 052;
- National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/contactus/feedback-complaints>; or,
- NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/about/complaints>

Intereach does not discourage the use of the external complaint process and will use its best efforts to provide any further referral information required by you to these external agencies.

Should you decide to have your Complaint investigated by an external agency, we will cooperate with and share information as authorised by law.

5.14. Confidentiality and Privacy

Personal and/or sensitive information is collected during the complaint process.

The nature of a complaint will contain personal information of the parties involved in the Complaint. Intereach recognises that your personal information should only be used or disclosed for the purpose for which we collect it.

Intereach will protect your identity where practicable and appropriate. Personal information that identifies an individual will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted by law and in line with our *Privacy Policy*.

6. Context	
6.1. Standards or other external requirements	<p>Aged Care Quality Standards</p> <p>National Principles for Child Safe Organisations</p> <p>National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care</p> <p>Human Services Standards 2015 (Vic)</p> <p>National Disability Service Standards (2013)</p>
6.2. Legislation or other requirements	<p>Children’s Health and Wellbeing Act 2009</p> <p>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)</p> <p>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)</p> <p>Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011</p> <p>Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010</p> <p>Aged Care Act 1997 (Cth)</p> <p>Anti- Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)</p> <p>Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)</p> <p>Disability Act 2006 (Vic)</p> <p>Disability Amendment Act 2012 (Vic)</p> <p>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</p> <p>Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)</p> <p>Education and Care Services National Act 2010 (Cth)</p> <p>Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)</p> <p>Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW)</p> <p>Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)</p>
6.3. Reference Internal documents	<p>Quality Management Framework</p> <p>Code of Conduct Policy</p> <p>Disciplinary and Dismissal Policy</p> <p>Privacy Policy</p> <p>Aged Care Services Open Disclosure Policy</p> <p>Intereach Rights, Privacy and Complaints Brochure</p> <p>Complaint Form</p> <p>Complaint Handling Tool</p> <p>Complaints and Compliments Register</p>

7. Document control			
Version	Date approved	Approved by	Next review date
1.0	01/08/2010	Executive Team	01/08/2013
2.0	01/03/2013	CEO Executive Team	01/03/2016
3.0	01/02/2015	Leadership Governance Group	01/02/2018
4.0	01/02/2017	Leadership Governance Group	01/02/2020
5.0	01/04/2017	Leadership Governance Group (minor review)	01/02/2020
6.0	13/01/2021	Leadership Governance Group	13/01/2024
6.1	01/03/2022	C. Holness – General Manager, Corporate Services (Acting). (Minor Amendment)	13/01/2024
6.2	10/11/2022	C. Holness – General Manager, Corporate Services (Acting). (Minor Amendment)	13/1/2024