

Intereach Children’s Services

Complaints Procedure



Applies to	Intereach Out of School Hours (OOSH) and Intereach Community Preschool				
Policy	NQF Two: Children’s Health and Safety Policy				
Version	2.0	Date approved	31/10/2025	Next review date	15/8/2028

Objective

Intereach Children’s Services is committed to ensuring that all complaint handling and decision-making upholds the safety, rights, and best interests of children as the paramount consideration. The service will maintain full compliance with mandatory national child safety training requirements by supporting staff capability, appropriate supervision, and professional conduct.

Intereach Children’s Services will provide a transparent, child-focused process for managing complaints that ensures compliance with Education and Care Services National Law & Regulations, ACECQA guidelines, National Quality Standard (QA7), and Child Safe Standards. The procedure prioritizes child safety, fairness, and continuous improvement.

Key Principles

- **Paramount Consideration:** The safety, rights and best interests of the child are the overriding consideration in all complaint responses and outcomes.
- **Inappropriate conduct:** Any allegation of inappropriate conduct toward a child is treated as a serious matter requiring immediate protective action and escalation.
- **Child Safety First:** Every complaint is assessed for potential risk to a child’s safety and wellbeing.
- **Child-Friendly & Inclusive:** Processes are age-appropriate, culturally safe, and accessible to all children and families.
- **Transparency & Fairness:** Procedural fairness and natural justice apply.
- **Confidentiality:** Privacy is maintained in line with legal obligations.
- **Mandatory Reporting:** Allegations of abuse or harm are reported immediately to authorities.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Complaints inform service quality and child safety improvements.

Definitions

Complaint: Expression of dissatisfaction about service, staff, or practices.

Serious Complaint: Allegation of harm, abuse, or breach of National Law/Regulations.

Notifiable complaint: A complaint alleging a serious incident or a breach of the National Law.

Anonymous complaint: A complaint where the identity of the complainant is unknown.

Complainant: Child, parent, staff, or community member making the complaint.

Grievance: A formal expression of dissatisfaction or concern raised by individuals.

Child-safe culture: A service environment where safety, participation, respect and protection from harm are embedded in all practices.

Inappropriate conduct: Conduct by any person (staff, volunteer, FDC educator or others) that a child must not be subjected to under the National Law; allegations must be managed as high-risk complaints.

Child safety training: Mandatory national training required for persons with management/control, nominated supervisors, persons in day-to-day charge, staff, volunteers and students.

Responsibilities

Approved Provider:

- Ensure individuals hold an approved/valid Working with Children Check (WWCC) before commencing work and manage/record complaints or concerns about WWCC status changes in line with National requirements.
- Ensure all persons with management/control, nominated supervisors, persons in day-to-day charge, staff, volunteers and students complete mandatory national child safety training and prescribed child protection training within required timeframes.
- Maintain workforce information as required for the national early childhood educator register (where applicable) and ensure complaint investigations consider any related compliance obligations.
- Ensure policies for complaints and child safety are in place, notify Regulatory Authority within 24 hours of serious complaints, display complaint contact details.

Nominated Supervisor

- Ensure all regulatory obligations under the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations are met in relation to complaints and grievances.
- Implement procedures for dealing with complaints in line with:
 - Intereach Feedback and Complaints Policy
 - Intereach Complaint Handling Guide
 - Intereach Child Protection Procedure
- Communicate the complaints policy and procedures clearly to families, staff, and the wider service community.
- Implement complaint and child safety procedures, ensure staff are trained, maintain records and report serious complaints promptly.
- Treat any complaint alleging 'inappropriate conduct' or serious misconduct toward a child as requiring immediate risk mitigation, escalation and regulatory reporting where required.
- Ensure complaints involving prohibited personal device use when working directly with children or unauthorised image/video practices are investigated and addressed in line with new national device restrictions.

Nominated Supervisor / Responsible Person

- Act as first contact for complaints, escalate child safety concerns immediately.
- Provide effective age-appropriate complaints management that meets the needs of families and children.
- Provide translated materials and interpreters if needed.
- Ensure the Approved Provider is informed if:
 - The complaint is notifiable (e.g., involves a serious incident or breach).
 - The complaint cannot be resolved at the service level.
- Ensure the name and contact details of the person responsible for handling complaints are clearly displayed at the service (Reg. 173).
- Maintain confidentiality of all complaints and grievances.

- Ensure complaints handling reflects procedural fairness and natural justice.
- Discuss concerns with the complainant within the timeframes outlined in the Intereach Complaints Handling Guide.
- Investigate and document complaints fairly and impartially.
- Ensure all complaints and grievances are recorded in the Intereach Complaints Register (Reg. 183).
- Work cooperatively with the Approved Provider, educators, staff, and complainant during investigations and resolution.
- Ensure staff, educators, volunteers, and students are trained and informed about:
 - Child protection responsibilities.
 - Mandatory reporting obligations.
 - Privacy obligations.
- Ensure educators understand how children express concerns or distress and disclose harm.
- Provide guidance on responding appropriately to disclosures from children.
- Notify the Regulatory Authority in writing within 24 hours of any incident or allegation of physical or sexual abuse involving a child while in care (Section 174). Refer to the *Notification of Serious Incidents Procedure*.
- Ensure immediate action to protect children if a complaint involves risk of harm or abuse.
- Promote child-friendly complaint processes that are age-appropriate and culturally safe.
- Regularly review policies and procedures to ensure serious incidents and complaints are investigated promptly and thoroughly.
- Ensure complaints lead to policy and practice improvements for child safety.
- Handle complaints involving actual or potential privacy breaches in accordance with the *Intereach Data Breach Response Procedure*.
- Identify and report actual or potential conflicts of interest in line with the *Intereach Conflict-of-Interest Policy*.
- Ensure complaints result in reviews of relevant policies, procedures, and practices and improvements are added to the Quality Improvement Plan or the Intereach Continuous Improvement Register
- Monitor and evaluate complaint handling processes for effectiveness and compliance.

Staff & Educators

- Understand and follow the Children's Services complaints procedure and Intereach Feedback and Complaints Policy.
- Listen respectfully, document complaints, support children to express concerns safely, report any suspicion of harm or abuse immediately.
- Encourage children to speak up through child-friendly channels (e.g., Worry Box, visual forms).
- Report all complaints or grievances promptly to the Nominated Supervisor or Approved Provider.
- Support the Nominated Supervisor and Approved Provider during investigation and resolution.
- Be aware of child protection laws and individual responsibilities.

- Recognize the different ways children express concerns or disclose harm and know how to respond.
- Help children understand who to talk to if they feel unsafe and support families and children to make a complaint.
- Record feedback promptly using the Intereach complaint handling form.
- Maintain privacy and confidentiality at all times.
- Comply with record-keeping and reporting requirements.

Parents/Guardians

- Be familiar with and follow the Complaints Policy and Procedures.
- Raise concerns promptly, cooperate with investigations.
- Discuss concerns first with the relevant staff or educator associated with the child/family.
- Raise any complaints or grievances in line with the policy and procedures.
- Escalate unresolved concerns to the Nominated Supervisor.
- Cooperate with the Nominated Supervisor or staff during complaint handling.
- Maintain confidentiality at all times.

Child Safety Integration

Complaints processes must be child-focused, trauma-informed, and culturally safe.

Immediate steps to protect children during investigations.

Provide emotional support and advocacy for children involved.

Allegations of abuse reported to child protection and police.

Procedure

For Children – Key instructions

When a complaint is received from a parent/guardian or carer acting on behalf of a child, confirm where possible that the child or young person is happy for this to happen, and that the complaint submitted reflects the child's views.

- Speak Up: Child can tell any educator or use a child-friendly form or Worry Box.
 - Children are made aware they can make a complaint about any kind of harm:
 - At the service or outside the service.
 - By an adult or by other children.
 - Including bullying, cyberbullying, and all forms of abuse.
- Listen & Record: Educator listens, reassures, and documents.
 - Encourage children to raise concerns with a trusted adult if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
 - Ensure children:
 - Are protected from any risk during the investigation by completing a risk assessment.
 - Are heard and validated—what seems small to an adult may be significant to a child.

- Be transparent and open about the process for responding to complaints or grievances.
- Be proactive—check in with children regularly to help them feel safe to speak up.
- Immediate Safety Check: If risk identified, act to protect child.
- Escalate: Inform Responsible Person/Nominated Supervisor.
- Feedback: Explain next steps to child in age-appropriate language.

Handling a Complaint

- Complaints can be made verbally, in writing, or anonymously.
- Children are encouraged and supported to voice concerns.
- Treat all complaints with respect, fairness, and confidentiality.
- Provide support to children and families throughout the process.
- Explain the complaint process and escalation options clearly.

Screen all complaints for allegations relating to inappropriate conduct, device misuse, training non-compliance or other child safety reforms and escalate as required. Serious Complaints

- Complaints alleging 'inappropriate conduct' toward a child by any staff member or volunteer are categorised as serious/high-risk and trigger immediate protective action.
- immediate control measures: Ensure child safety remove the alleged person from direct contact with children pending risk assessment/investigation; secure any relevant evidence (including service-issued devices, images or videos) and preserve records.
 - Notification: Approved Provider reports to Regulatory Authority within 24 hours.
 - Report to Authorities: Child protection/police if abuse suspected.
 - Documentation: Record in Complaints Register (Reg. 183).

Escalation

- If unresolved, complaints can be escalated to the NSW Regulatory Authority:
Phone: 1800 619 113
Email: ececd@det.nsw.edu.au

Receiving a Complaint

- Complaints can be received via:
 - Email, phone, social media, surveys, website, in person, or conversation with a child.

Recording a complaint

- Complete the Complaint Handling Form to gather relevant information.
- Record complaints in the online Complaint System (Add a Complaint). Attach the filled complaint handling form to the online complaint system.
- Enter details into the Complaint System
 - Section 1: Person receiving complaint
 - Section 2: Person handling complaint.
- Quality Officer assists with the investigation section.

Timeframes and Process

All complaints received must be acknowledged within three business days.

Complaints are assessed and prioritised according to complexity and/or seriousness of the issues raised, which determines the urgency in which it is dealt with. Complaints are assessed under three levels as outlined below:

Level	Description	Handled by	Resolution time frame
1	Minor complaints that can be easily remedied and where a formal response is not requested; they do not require detailed investigation and are most often resolved quickly by providing an explanation or an apology.	Person receiving the complaint or Nominated Supervisor	24 hours
2	More complex, may involve multiple issues and require further investigation, or where a level 1 complaint is unresolved.	Nominated Supervisor	14 days
3	Complex, serious and sensitive issues including a complaint that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is received from an Ombudsman, or a state or Federal Minister or Member of Parliament; • is received by a CEO or a Director; • involves multiple issues that require intensive investigation or involve other agencies; • is urgent or a potential high risk or a high-profile issue that may adversely affect the reputation of the organisation (for example involving media); • alleges a breach of the Intereach Code of Conduct, which includes; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ unauthorised access or disclosure of private and/confidential information, ▪ conflicts of interest, ▪ serious misconduct, and/or ▪ fraud. • is persistent and/or requires intensive management to progress or resolve it; or • is required by contract, regulation and/or legislation to be reported or referred to an authorised third party. 	A Senior Manager or where there is no Senior Manager the relevant General Manager.	21 days

Complaints Alleging Harmful Sexual Behaviours

All complaints about a child exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours will be taken seriously, acted on immediately, and kept confidential.

- Receive and acknowledge the complaint.
- Make informed professional judgments—not all sexual behaviour is harmful; some may be age-appropriate.
- Listen without judgment and reassure the complainant.
- Do not make assumptions or promises about outcomes.
- Document the complaint in the Complaint Handling System:
 - Include date, time, complainant’s name/role, and details of alleged behaviour.
 - Use objective language only.
- Report immediately to the Nominated Supervisor—they initiate response and reporting.
 - Any incident or allegation of physical or sexual abuse must be reported to the Regulatory Authority by the Nominated Supervisor within 24 hours.
- Ensure immediate safety of the child.
- Adjust supervision to keep all children safe.
- Separate children calmly if needed
- Avoid labelling the child with “Problematic Sexual Behaviour”.

- Assess the behaviour using the “[Traffic Light Tool](#)”:
 - **Green:** Typical behaviour.
 - **Amber:** Concerning, monitor.
 - **Red:** Serious, needs immediate intervention.
- Notify Parents/Guardians. Communicate with both sets of parents unless it poses a risk.
 - Use sensitive, non-accusatory language.
 - Do not share personal details about other children.
- Maintain Complaints Register securely for compliance and review.

Report to External Authorities

- If behaviour is coercive, aggressive, persistent, or potentially abusive:
- Make a mandatory report to child protection services (follow the *Intereach Child Protection Procedure*).
 - Document time and outcome of report.
- Report to police if required.

Support and Referral

- Provide emotional support to families and staff.
- Arrange referrals if needed:
 - Child psychology or specialist services.
 - Family support services.

Investigation Process

- Resolve the complaint fairly and independently.
- Provide an appropriate remedy.
- Refer to: *Intereach Complaint Handling Guide* for tools like “5 Whys” and systematic investigation approaches.
- Consider **statutory requirements** and external bodies when planning.
- Develop an **investigation plan**:
 - Consult necessary bodies.
 - Prioritize child safety and wellbeing.
 - Avoid compromising police or child protection investigations.
- Treat staff subject to complaints **fairly**; provide support and HR referral if needed.
- Consult external authorities if the service cannot manage internally.
- **Gather and protect evidence** relevant to the complaint.
- Plan involvement of complainant and parents/guardians:
 - Share timelines and key stages.
 - Communicate progress regularly (at least weekly).
- Update complainant if delays occur and explain reasons.
- **Analyse evidence** and make an objective assessment.
- Update the **Complaint System** with detailed information and attach all documents.

- Aim to resolve promptly and to the complainant's satisfaction.
- If adverse findings involve an individual, consider **Privacy Act 1988 obligations** before sharing information.

Outcome

- Respect privacy, confidentiality, and procedural fairness when sharing the outcome.
- Explain the outcome to the complainant/child in their preferred communication method and offer support.
- Inform the complainant about review or appeal options if they are not satisfied.
- Give the complainant a chance to comment on any adverse information before finalizing.

Closure

- Inform the complainant of the outcome in a way they understand; ensure child wellbeing and support.
- Update the complaint system with:
 - Outcome.
 - How the complaint was managed.
 - Recommendations or outstanding actions.
- Ask the complainant for feedback on how their complaint was handled.
- Provide ongoing support if requested.
- Send a written response (email or letter) and upload a copy to the complaint record.
- If no written response is provided, record the reason in the complaint system.
- Update QIP or Continuous Improvement if improvements or policy reviews are identified.

Reportable Complaints

Notify the Regulatory Authority within 24 hours if:

- A serious incident occurred while a child was in care. ((Refer to *Notification of Serious Incidents Procedure* for a list of the circumstances prescribed as serious incidents)
- Any incident or allegation of physical or sexual abuse of a child while being educated or cared for by an education and care service.
- A complaint alleges a breach of the National Law (e.g., safety, supervision, educator ratios, programming, interactions, qualifications).
Note: An actual breach does not need to be proven - notification is required once an allegation is made, however, but may need to be notified to other bodies.
- A complaint alleges that a person has commenced/continues work without a valid WWCC, or that a WWCC status change has not been notified/acted upon. A serious incident or allegation of inappropriate conduct toward a child; prohibited personal device use while working directly with children; unauthorised image/video capture; failure to meet mandatory child safety training obligations.
- Upload all relevant documents (original complaint, actions taken, risks) to the Complaint System in accordance with the Complaint Handling Guide. (Refer to 3.8.2)

Information Sharing

- Parents/carers of an alleged victim have a right to be informed about the investigation process.
- Share progress and findings unless disclosure would:
 - Jeopardize child safety.
 - Prejudice investigations, court proceedings, or legal privilege.
 - Expose a confidential source.
- Consult police or child protection authorities before sharing information widely.
- Consult parents/carers before sharing details with the child.
- Regulatory Authorities may proactively share information about prohibited individuals or enforceable undertakings with approved providers; the service must act on this information promptly (risk assessment, workforce action) and record actions taken

Confidentiality and Privacy

- Follow the *Intereach Privacy Policy* for all disclosures.
- Children can lodge complaints anonymously; personal details will only be shared if required for investigation or by law.
- Protect personal information from loss, unauthorized access, or misuse.
- Balance fairness and confidentiality; do not share reportable allegation details without child protection authority consent.

Systemic Improvement

Trends and recurring themes from complaints will be reviewed quarterly to identify systemic issues and inform policy, practice, and quality improvement planning

Monitoring, evaluation, and review

This procedure will be reviewed every three years and incorporate feedback and suggestions from children, families, educators, coordinators, volunteers, and students or updated when National Law/Regulation changes commence.

National Quality Framework

Element	Concept	Description
2.1	Health	Each child's health and physical activity is supported and promoted.
2.2	Safety	Each Child is protected
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard
2.2.2	Incident and emergency management	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented
2.2.3	Child Safety and protection	Management, educators and staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding child safety, including the need to identify and respond to every child at risk of abuse or neglect
4.1	Staffing arrangements	Staffing arrangements enhance children's learning and development.

Element	Concept	Description
4.2	Professionalism	Management, educators and staff are collaborative, respectful and ethical.
4.2.1	Professional collaboration	Management, educators and staff work with mutual respect and collaboratively, and challenge and learn from each other, recognising each other's strengths and skills.
4.2.2	Professional standards	Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships.
5.1	Relationships between educators and children	Respectful and equitable relationships are maintained with each child.
5.1.1	Positive educator to child interactions	Responsive and meaningful interactions build trusting relationships which engage and support each child to feel secure, confident and included.
5.1.2	Dignity and rights of the child	The dignity and rights of every child are maintained.
5.2	Relationships between children	Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships
5.2.1	Collaborative learning	Children are supported to collaborate, learn from and help each other.
5.2.2	Self-regulation	Each child is supported to regulate their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.
6.1	Supportive relationships with families	Respectful relationships with families are developed and maintained and families are supported in their parenting role.
7.1.2	Management Systems	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service that is child safe
7.2.1	Continuous improvement	There is an effective self-assessment and quality improvement process in place.

Compliance and Reference

Legislation or other requirements	Education and Care Services National Regulations - Regulations 174A,143B,168,169,170,171,172,173,173A,176 Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 – Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) <i>Privacy Act 1988</i>
Standards or other external requirements	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority <i>National Quality Standards</i> Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority <i>Guide to the National Quality Framework</i> <i>Child Safe Standards (National Principles for Child Safe Organisations) - Standard 6 & 7</i>

	<p><i>National Office for Child Safety – Complaint Handling Guide</i> Department of Education, Child Care Provider Handbook 2024 Early Childhood Australia (2016). <i>Code of Ethics</i></p>
Internal Documentation	<p>Intereach Feedback and Complaint Policy Intereach Complaint Handling Guide Intereach Conflict of Interest Procedure Intereach Privacy policy Intereach Child Protection Procedure Intereach Abuse and Neglect Policy Intereach Data Breach Procedure Notification of Serious Incidents Procedure Complaint template – response letter Complaint no response letter template Complaint investigation form and Complaint handling form Appendix 1 – Child Centred and Improvement Focused child friendly complaints handling principles</p>

Document Control

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Next review date
1.0	15/8/2025	N Brown – Manager, Compliance, Safety and Risk	15/8/2028
2.0	31/10/2025	Procedure updated to include content for Preschool children aged 3-5 years and approved by: N. Brown – Manager, Compliance, Safety and Risk	15/8/2028
2.1	27/2/2026	Legislation Changes –27/2/2026 Approved by: K Hyde – General Manager, Operations	15/8/2026

Appendix 1 - Child centred and Improvement focused child friendly complaints handling principles



For everyone under 18	All complaints affecting any child will be handled in a way that meets their rights under the UNCRC This includes complaints raised directly by a child, as well as complaints raised by an adult, either on a child's behalf, or about matters that affect a child
Focused on Children's Best Interest	The best interests of any children affected will be at the heart of the complaints process. This means all decisions made or actions taken will treat the best interests of any children affected as a top priority
Trusting and inclusive	Trust will be placed in children to make decisions they can manage, recognising their increasing ability to make their own choices. Complaints will be handled in a way that empowers children to realise their rights. They will also be handled in a way that respects the rights of their parent/s or other responsible adult/s to guide, support and direct them.

	<p>A child may not wish their parent/s or other responsible adult/s to be made aware of their complaints. If this is the case, adult involvement will be decided by carefully weighing the child's views, best interests, age, and capacity, with the rights of others involved</p>
<p>Centred on Children's Voices</p>	<p>Children will be given the chance to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters that affect them, to the extent they wish to.</p> <p>Children's voices and views will always be listened to and taken seriously. The impact of their views will be shared with them and explained.</p> <p>Children will be asked how they want to communicate and things will be done their way whenever possible.</p> <p>Children's communication needs will be met in a way that makes them feel safe and involved.</p> <p>Informed consent will be sought from the child affected where a complaint has been raised by parent/s or other responsible adult/s on behalf of the child</p>
<p>Kind and Supportive</p>	<p>Children will be treated with kindness and always understanding, and they will never be treated differently for raising a complaint. This is essential to foster trust and help children to feel able to openly express themselves</p> <p>Every effort will be made to ensure children feel comfortable to express their thoughts and opinions freely and openly.</p> <p>Wherever possible, children will be supported to complain or voice concerns by people they know and trust.</p> <p>Where a child does not feel they have anyone to support them, they will be offered a referral to independent advocacy</p>
<p>Private and confidential</p>	<p>Nothing a child shares will be passed on without their permission, unless doing so is required to raise a child protection concern or meet another legal duty.</p> <p>Before speaking with any child about a complaint, explanations will be given about when things may need to be passed on without their permission. This will include explaining what happens if they say something that suggests they are at risk.</p> <p>If a child's complaints must be shared, or their parent/s or other responsible adult/s involved, they will be told this, and why it needs to happen.</p> <p>If a child's complaints are shared this will be done as far as possible without identifying them.</p> <p>Where an investigation might mean other people could identify the child, this will be discussed with them for their views on whether they wish to continue</p>
<p>Knowing about Rights</p>	<p>Information will be provided to children and any parent/s or other responsible adult/s about their rights, and they will be helped to understand what this means for them</p>