

Steps for a parent complaint

Fair first steps, the records to keep, and when the regulator must hear about a complaint.

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This guide sets out fair first steps, the records to keep, and when the regulator must hear.

ACECQA sees a complaint as a chance to reflect and improve.

What every service must have

- Each service must have policies and procedures for dealing with complaints (regulation 168(2)(o)).
- They must cover a complaint handling system that is child focused.
- They must also cover a complaint that a child's sexual behaviours may harm that child or another child.
- At a centre-based service, the name and phone number of the complaints contact must be clearly visible (regulation 173(2)(b)).
- ACECQA suggests making the complaints policy easy for families to find, such as at enrolment.
- It also suggests reviewing the policy regularly with the people it affects.

First steps when a concern is raised

ACECQA's information sheet offers these tips.

- Listen actively, and ask questions to understand the concern.
- Ask what the person thinks would help resolve it.
- Avoid answering at once and defensively.
- If the issue is complex, it may help to take notes or ask for the concern in writing.
- If the time or place is wrong, arrange a suitable time and place to talk.
- Talk it through with a colleague or a manager, and keep it private.
- If something cannot be done, explain why with clear reasons.

Records to keep

ACECQA says an effective complaints policy may include:

- a way to write down each talk with the person who complained
- keeping them informed of the complaint's progress
- following up with them
- recording and reviewing the complaint's progress
- keeping it private
- looking back at the outcome to improve the policy

- who else to contact if the concern is not resolved, such as the regulator

When the regulator must hear

- Some complaints must go to the regulator in writing within 24 hours (regulation 176(2)(b)).
- That includes a complaint that a serious incident happened, or is happening, at the service (section 174(2)(b)).
- It also includes a complaint that the National Law or Regulations were broken (section 174(2)(b)).
- Regulation 12 lists serious incidents. One is a child's serious illness or injury needing hospital care.
- Another is a child who is missing or cannot be accounted for (regulation 12).
- Another is an emergency where emergency services came (regulation 12).
- In NSW, the regulator is the NSW Early Learning Commission.
- Claims of physical or sexual abuse at the service must go to the regulator within 24 hours (regulation 175(2)(e)).
- Other laws, such as child protection laws, may also require a report.

Questions for the committee

- Who takes complaints, and is their name and number on display?
- Who tells the regulator within 24 hours, and who covers when they are away?
- When did the committee last review the complaints policy?

Sources

[ACECQA, QA7 Using complaints to support continuous improvement, updated 5 June 2026](#)

[ACECQA, Notification types and timeframes, updated 7 October 2026](#)
[Notifying the NSW Early Learning Commission of persons with management or control, updated 2 October 2026](#)

This is general information for NSW community preschools, current at the date shown. For advice on your own service's position, ask a qualified adviser.

The Forum's wellbeing, conflict and complaints theme covers parent complaints: [book a place](#), \$500 + GST (\$550 total) per person.