

Raising a concern with school



Most concerns can be resolved by working together with the school towards the best outcome for your child.

You have the right to raise a concern if there is a situation at school that you want changed or improved. It could be about something that just affects your child, or something that affects other students as well. You might offer ideas for improvement or just want to bring the issue to the school's attention.

Raising a concern is different from making a complaint. This is a more formal step you can take if you are not satisfied with how your concerns have been addressed.

How can I raise a concern with school?

Following the school's policy and procedures for raising a concern will increase your chance of success. It will also help if you need to take your concern to the next level and make a complaint.

Planning your approach will help to get the best outcome for your child:

- Gather and write down all the facts to clarify if your concern is about:
 - a particular issue or incident
 - an aspect of your child's program
 - one or more of the school's practices or policies
 - the conduct or performance of a staff member, or
 - a combination of these
- Think about how you will raise your concern. For example, this could be in person, by email or a phone call. Concerns can also be raised through your child's Student Support Group.
- Focus on what would be the best outcome for your child. For example, it could be acknowledgement, a change to school policy or training for school staff.

It's important to raise your concern with the person who can help to resolve the issue:

- For concerns about something that happened in the classroom - contact the teacher.
- For concerns about the school - contact the principal.

You might raise an issue informally first, but you will probably then need to make an appointment to discuss it further.

You have the right to have an advocate or support person at any meeting with the school, and to ask for an interpreter if you need one. You can get advocacy support from friends, family, other parents or professional advocates.

Tips for raising a concern

- Communicate clearly and be respectful. If you raise a concern with the aim of resolving it together you are more likely to get a positive response.
- Get your child's input. Your child is often a crucial source of information about any problem or concern at school.
- Get support to speak up if you need it.
- Plan how to get your message across. Write down what you want to achieve and the points you wish to cover. Discussions often take longer than planned, so consider numbering your points, to make sure you cover the most important ones.
- You are more likely to succeed if you have a good understanding of your child's rights, supports for students with disability and education planning.
- Set a realistic but positive goal of what you want to achieve by raising your concern. Clarify this in your own mind and be clear about it in communications with the school.
- Ask questions about anything you don't understand. This also shows respect for other people's ideas and perspectives, and your openness to working together to support your child.
- Focus on one issue at a time, and on moving forward. Once the issue has been explained and understood, focus on what will help in the future rather than going over the issue again.
- Offer positive feedback when you can. People are often more open to making changes when the good things they are doing are recognised. Acknowledge what is working well and let the school know that you appreciate their efforts.
- Expert advice can help take things forward. Seeking expert advice can be helpful if the usual strategies have been unsuccessful. Therapists and specialists can offer insights and strategies to support school staff with new approaches.
- Try not to get discouraged. Your role is important and very valuable, and you can make a real difference. Speaking up for your child can also be very empowering.