

FRIDAY NIGHT SCHOOL LTD

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. BACKGROUND

The Friday Night School is unequivocally committed to fostering the dignity, self-esteem and integrity of children and young people and providing them with a safe, supportive and enriching environment to develop physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. The Friday Night School believes in a community where children are safe and have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We promote children's rights as described in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

We are committed to a safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people involved in the Friday Night School.

Friday Night School holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as central and fundamental to its responsibilities.

We want children and young people who are involved in the Friday Night School whether as students or tutors to be safe, happy and empowered. We have zero tolerance of abuse of children or young people, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated seriously and reported in line with our legal and moral obligations.

It is important that each member of the community, including staff, volunteers, parents, guardians, other carers and students, are contributors to the building of the school community. A timely and professional response to complaints is an effective means of encouraging communication, building trust and resolving issues for the betterment of all concerned.

Friday Night School understands that from time to time complaints arise regarding aspects of our operation of programs and activities, and that it is important that all members of the community have the opportunity to be heard. Friday Night School commits to ensuring procedural fairness is observed when dealing with complaints and grievances. This means that we commit to ensuring that anyone raising a complaint will have the right to be listened to by Friday Night School, that anyone having a complaint made against them will have the right to be told about and respond to that complaint, and that Friday Night School will endeavour to make decisions about complaints fairly and without bias.

Positive, clear and effective procedures and processes for resolving grievances between the school and community members can assist in building strong relationships, dispelling anxiety and ultimately providing students with a settled and happy learning environment.

Friday Night School Codes of Conduct for parents/guardians/carers and students outline the expectations for behaviour for members of our community. The following procedures relate to any concerns that members of the community may have – whether these are serious grievance issues, or relatively minor concerns.

In this document, we use the word “Carers” to include parents, guardians, carers and other people who have responsibility for looking after the children who attend the Friday Night School. We use the word “Complainant” to refer to a person who has made a complaint under this policy.

2. AIMS

To develop and implement procedures and processes by which community members can confidently raise concerns in the knowledge that they will be listened to and their concerns will be professionally managed in a timely, confidential and appropriate manner. Relationships with community members are important to us. We take complaints raised by community members seriously. There are many avenues for community members to provide feedback to Friday Night School staff. These include:

- annual formal parent survey
- formally scheduled parent feedback forums
- meetings with the Program Director or Board members to express concerns.

3. COMPLAINTS ABOUT SERIOUS MISCONDUCT BY A PERSON INVOLVED IN THE FRIDAY NIGHT SCHOOL

3.1 Who to contact to make a complaint?

Complaints of serious misconduct by any person involved in the Friday Night School should generally be reported to the Program Director of Friday Night School.

However, if a complaint concerns serious misconduct by the Program Director, or if the Complainant is not comfortable raising the complaint with the Program Director, the complaint should be reported to the Chair of the Friday Night School Board.

Contact details for the Program Director and the Chair of the Friday Night School Board are at the end of this document.

Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), the regulator in relation to the registration and investigation of serious misconduct (including conduct which is of a physical or emotional nature) of all teachers in the state of Victoria. If unsure whether the complaint constitutes serious misconduct by a teacher, contact the VIT on 1300 888 067 or vit@vit.vic.edu.au.

In some cases, certain actions which involve physical or emotional misconduct, such as unlawful assault or threats to the person, may constitute a criminal offence. These types of offences should be reported to and investigated by the police. Initial consultation with the Program Director of Friday Night School (or if the complaint concerns the Program Director, with the Chair of the Board of the Friday Night School) may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

3.2 Child abuse (including sexual offences)

Any complaint of alleged child abuse (including sexual offences) of any child attending the Friday Night School should be reported to **Victoria Police and** the Program Director of Friday Night School (or if the complaint concerns the Program Director, to the Chair of the Board of the Friday Night School).

There are legal obligations on all adults to report child abuse to police once a reasonable belief is formed that a sexual offence has been committed against a child. Failure to disclose a sexual offence against a child is a criminal offence under section 327 of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) and applies to all adults (18 years of age and over) in Victoria. (See also the Reportable Conduct Policy)

Communication with children under 16 years of age by teachers, tutors, staff or any other person to prepare or 'groom' a child for future sexual activity is a criminal offence under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act and must be reported to the police. The offence of grooming applies to any person aged 18 years or over and does not apply to communication between people who are both under 18 years of age. For further information, refer to Friday Night School Policy Child Protection – Reporting obligations.

3.5 Anonymous complaints

The Program Director and Board of the Friday Night School endeavour to address and respond to all complaints of serious misconduct.

We will deal with all complaints professionally and in accordance with procedural fairness and confidentiality.

In some situations, we may not be able to fully address complaints that are made anonymously or without sufficient detail being provided to enable an inquiry or investigation, or resolution of the matter. To ensure procedural fairness, any person who has a complaint made against them has a right to know the particulars of the allegations being made against them and be given an opportunity to respond to them.

Where possible, Complainants are encouraged to give their names when they make a complaint. If the Complainant wishes to remain anonymous, it is at the Program Director's and/or the Board's discretion what, if any, action will be taken. Anonymous complaints will be recorded in the same manner as all other complaints are recorded.

Complainants who wish to submit an anonymous complaint are asked to submit their complaint in writing addressed to the Chair of the Friday Night School Board of Directors

4. PROCEDURES FOR COMPLAINTS ABOUT OTHER ISSUES AT FRIDAY NIGHT SCHOOL

If a member of the Friday Night School community has concerns about any other matter at the Friday Night School, such as complaints about how events are run, or about decisions that have been made, the community member is welcome to raise those concerns under the procedures described below.

Friday Night School maintains a fair, effective and efficient complaint-handling procedure so that those complaints can be addressed. The following steps can guide the procedure in making those types of complaints about Friday Night School.

4.1 Informal resolution procedures

Raise the matter directly with the relevant staff member first where appropriate. Contact the Program Director of Friday Night School, preferably by email, explaining the nature of your concern and request a telephone conversation or meeting. Complainants are strongly discouraged from sending or discussing confidential, contentious or emotional information by email. This is best done in a meeting or phone call. **The Program Director will endeavour to acknowledge the email within two working days.**

The Program Director may be able to respond to your complaint by return email or telephone with a satisfactory outcome. At times, parties may be assisted to resolve a misunderstanding, miscommunication or lack of clarity through the support of another person, such as a Board member. If further inquiry of the complaint is required, the Program Director will explain this to you and direct you to this Policy if you have not already viewed this. They will also establish a clear timeframe for the inquiry and when you can expect further information from them.

If the matter cannot be resolved informally, or you wish to make a formal complaint, you can telephone to make an appointment to discuss the matter with the Program Director or email your concern in writing.

4.2 Formal resolution procedures

If the grievance or concern is about issues that are difficult to discuss with the Program Director or if the issue not been satisfactorily resolved by contacting the Program Director, Complainants are invited to make an appointment to speak with the Chair of the Friday Night School Board of Directors.

- In all cases, confidentiality is respected. Only the people who need to know about the issue will be involved. The people who need to be informed will be discussed at the meeting.
- Community members may be accompanied by a support person at appointments to resolve grievances.
- All formal discussions and procedures involving grievances will be documented.
- Every attempt will be made to address an issue and, where resolution is possible, it will be reached in a timely manner.

When a formal complaint is received, it will be acknowledged and the Complainant will be provided with a copy of this Policy so they can understand the procedures that will be followed in dealing with their complaint.

4.3 Timeframe for dealing with formal complaints

In moving to more formal procedures, the Program Director or a Board member will undertake the inquiry in the following manner, ensuring procedural fairness is observed:

- organise a meeting/phone conference with you
- direct you to a copy of this Policy if you have not already viewed this document
- at the outset, establish the timeframe for the inquiry into the matter and when you can expect to hear further information or have a resolution. This would normally be within 10 working days

- fully document the complaint, any actions taken to resolve it and outcomes of those actions
- further consider the matter
- ensure that no one is victimised as a result of a complaint being made
- if necessary, enable a Complainant to be accompanied at meetings by another person of their choice as a support person
- if appropriate, enable the person against whom the complaint has been made to respond, and to be accompanied to any meeting by another person of their choice as a support person
- advise the Complainant of the outcome of the inquiry in writing.

4.4 Recording complaints

All complaints received at Friday Night School will be recorded, even those which are about issues perceived as relatively minor. This helps us to identify key risk areas or any issues which, if left unresolved, could lead to harm or injury or more serious concerns.

The following information about complaints received will be recorded:

- contact details of the Complainant
- date of complaint and method of communication
- nature of the complaint and the requested resolution
- name of the staff member handling the issue
- any actions and the timeframe taken, minutes of meetings and communication
- a statement of the outcome, including the closure date and date of advising the Complainant of the outcome.

4.5 Expectations of and information for parents and guardians

In making a complaint, Friday Night School requests and expects that the Complainant will:

- raise the concern or complaint as soon as possible after the issue has arisen
- communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair and respectful
- provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint
- observe confidentiality and show respect for sensitive issues
- act in good faith to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- have realistic and reasonable expectations about possible outcomes/remedies.

If your concern/complaint relates to your child's treatment by another student or students while at Friday Night School, we expect that you will refer your complaint directly to Friday Night School, via the Program Director. Under no circumstances should you approach another student while in the care of Friday Night School to discuss the issue or chastise them. Direct contact with parents to resolve the

matter is also discouraged if the complaint pertains to issues or incidents that have arisen at Friday Night School.

Parents and guardians making complaints should ascertain the facts as best they can and contact the Program Director at their earliest convenience.

- Parents and guardians with complaints may contact Friday Night School by telephone, in person or in writing.
- Parents and guardians are advised that the Program Director may not be immediately available to discuss the complaint.

Parents and guardians making complaints are to be respectful, confidential and courteous. Parents who are unreasonable, threatening or discourteous can expect their discussions with the Program Director to be terminated until such time as an alternative discussion time is arranged.

Friday Night School will record the details of all complaints including the name and contact details of the persons making the complaints. Friday Night School will then refer the complaint to the most appropriate person to undertake an inquiry. This may be someone other than the Program Director. The person conducting the inquiry may conduct a preliminary inquiry or communicate with the parent to discuss the matter further. If the scope of the inquiry is beyond the capacity or jurisdiction of Friday Night School, the matter will be referred to the appropriate person and the parent will be informed of the referral.

Parents and guardians discussing complaints with the Program Director may be accompanied by a support person. The support person can be a family member, a friend or a professional with knowledge of the student. Any person acting in a professional capacity on behalf of the parents must provide their occupational details and full name prior to the meeting being held. The support person may encourage and facilitate sharing of parent knowledge, perception and issues. The support person should support a positive working relationship between all parties. The support person does not speak on behalf of parents/guardians/carers discussing complaints with the Program Director.

Any inquiry by the Friday Night School will be conducted in a timely, efficient and confidential manner, ensuring the fair principles of natural justice are applied for all. Parents will be provided with an anticipated timeframe for a resolution.

The person conducting the inquiry will record the details of the inquiry.

Privacy laws may prohibit information being provided to the Complainant of any specific action that has been taken in relation to individuals about whom the complaint has been raised.

5. OUTCOMES OF COMPLAINTS

Outcomes to complaints and grievances can include the following:

- apology – either verbal or written
- mediation – with an internal or external mediator
- official warning

- disciplinary action
- behavioural contract (in the case of a student)
- pastoral care
- an understanding that the behaviour will not be repeated
- a change in policy or procedure.

6. COMPLAINT ESCALATION

If the matter cannot be resolved at the Friday Night School level the Complainant has the right to seek alternative independent or other advice, or contact other entities such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Children and Young People or the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

7. WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT

A complaint can be withdrawn at any stage during the complaint management procedures. A complaint should be retracted in writing by the Complainant and addressed to the Friday Night School Program Director.

8. CONTACT DETAILS

Complainants can lodge a complaint via email or telephone as per contact details below:

Ms Sheena Teeder Program Director Tel: 0415 034 548 Email: sheena@fridaynightschool.org	Ms Kirsten Gray Board Chair Email: kirsten20@me.com
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Policy Status	Approved 24/08/2022
Key Stakeholders	Board members, staff, teachers, tutors, volunteers, parents, guardians, other carers, students
Approval	Board of Directors
Scheduled Review	24/08/2023