

## COMPLAINT HANDLING POLICY

### SCOPE

From time to time, complaints may be received by the School from students, staff, parents (including guardians and caregivers) or other members of the community. This document sets out the processes by which these matters can be addressed respectfully, fairly, in a non-adversarial manner, expeditiously and with sensitivity to all concerned.

This document does not address complaints relating to staff employment matters which are managed through appropriate statutory provisions and the *TVCS Enterprise Agreement*.

### DEFINITION

For the purposes of this document a 'complaint' can arise if a member of the community believes, in good faith and with supporting information, that the School has, for example:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something that it should have done
- acted unfairly, unreasonably, inappropriately or unprofessionally

### RATIONALE

When differences occur, the preferred pathway in solving them is by using the moral and spiritual guidelines given to us in God's Word, the Bible. We are to live and work together in harmony, giving preference to the other and showing love and consideration towards each other. The Bible exhorts us to "love one another" as demonstrated to us by Jesus (John 13:34-35) and to resolve disagreements by 'living in harmony with one another' whenever possible (Romans 12:14).

### CREATING A CULTURE OF SHALOM

#### What is "Shalom"?

We call it peace, but shalom means so much more than just peace of mind, or cease fire among enemies. In the Bible shalom means universal wholeness and delight, each created thing a wonder, each created person a source of joy, and the Creator and Saviour opening doors and speaking welcome to His children. *A Vision with a Task* (Stronks & Blomberg:1993).

Torrens Valley Christian School is a community made of many individuals, created by God, united in a common understanding that all wisdom and knowledge can be found in Christ alone (Colossians 2). We live in a world redeemed by Christ, but acknowledge that we struggle with the ongoing effects of the Fall, and that conflicts and differences of opinions can cause grief and disunity within the school community. As God's redeemed people we are to be peacemakers in this fallen world, called to work for restoration. We strive therefore to follow the example of Jesus and the teachings in the Scriptures, despite the complex nature of a school community often making this challenging.

As Christians, we need to consciously consider how the faith we profess should shape our daily actions (Galatians 5:24-25). For this reason, this policy seeks to outline the desired ongoing development of an 'Organisational Culture of Shalom' for the various members of the TVCS community. Procedures for positive resolution of differences follow, encouraging all members of the community to seek a Biblical approach to such concerns. The intention is to provide community guidelines for grievance procedures aiming for a positive resolution for all involved.

#### Developing a Culture Of Shalom

An organisation's culture – or 'ethos', is a combination of its shared mission, values, behaviours, symbols, beliefs and assumptions. Torrens Valley Christian School has identified six Focal Points, based on our understanding of the Bible and our purpose as a community. Focal Point number four calls us to strive to build a community of Shalom and states: We aim to share each other's joys and burdens.

While often we feel justified in our grievances, we need to be aware of the un-godly culture we live in where looking out for oneself above others is counter to the heart of the Gospel. As Christians we are exhorted to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ... and love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:30 - 31), 'being completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love, make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:2).

Issues that, involve bullying and harassment (verbal and/or physical abuse) should be dealt with accordingly (see the current TVCS *Behaviour Improvement Policy* and the student diary page: *Management of Bullying and Harassment at TVCS*).

We acknowledge that as a school, we are obliged by Government regulations to fulfill the Mandated Notification requirements, with issues involving physical and or sexual abuse needing to be reported accordingly (see the current *TVCS Child Protection Policy*)

### **Developing Positive Behaviours Based On The Key Values**

In order to continue to develop and sustain the 'Organisational Culture of Shalom' at TVCS we have identified three key values that need to underpin and shape all motives and behaviours within the School. It is important that the whole School community reflects this at all times to the wider community around us, being "Salt and Light" to the wider community. The three Key Values promoted at TVCS are Respect, Honesty and Service:

#### **Respect**

- Valuing and respecting diversity and difference
- Listening and respecting others' views
- Being aware of the impact of people's personal lives on their work/study
- Disagreeing constructively
- Respecting others' time, resources and families
- Respecting confidentiality
- Speaking respectfully to, and about, other members of the school community
- Respecting School policy and procedures

#### **Honesty**

- Giving constructive and accurate feedback
- Being professional in record keeping and legal obligations
- Listening honestly and openly
- Being accountable to one another as professionals, parents and students
- Being prepared to admit mistakes, and forgive others' mistakes
- Speaking openly with colleagues, parents and students

#### **Service**

- Desiring to serve God and therefore others in all actions
- Being supportive of the Mission Statement and Focal Points of TVCS through action and service
- Striving to be a servant to TVCS staff, students and their families
- Providing support for others in other Christian Schools and the wider community
- Growing in one's relationship with God, developing and using skills, knowledge and gifts to the best of one's ability in service to God and His body

## **A Biblical Model for Responding to Conflict**

Jesus taught: *If your brother sins against you go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them take it to the Church, and if he refuses to listen even to the Church, treat him as you would a pagan.* (Matthew 18:15-17)

If a member of the school community has a concern about, or complaint against another believer within the school community, the first step is to take it to the person directly and deal with it in a Christ-like manner. If the matter is still not resolved, other believers are to be called upon to assist in finding a resolution to the issue.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6, gives another sobering warning: *If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge the trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge the angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the Church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead one brother goes to law against another – and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?*

Christians are called upon to resolve disagreements amongst themselves and to *Live in harmony with one another* whenever possible. (Romans 12:14).

## **PRINCIPLES FOR POSITIVE RESOLUTION**

**To achieve the best possible outcome the school's response to conflict is shaped by the following principles:**

- **Striving to be peace-makers** – seek a positive resolution
- **Keeping the matter confidential** – as appropriate, talk to those concerned
- **Keeping the circle small** – discourage gossip and involving others unnecessarily
- **Being straightforward** – be honest about the situation
- **Being self-evaluating** – always ask where have I faulted?
- **Being forgiving** – seek restoration and move forward

The following *PeaceMaking Principles* as developed and promoted by PeaceMaker Ministries (2004) provide clear guidelines on responding to conflict biblically and should be adopted by the TVCS community in responding to conflict:

## **PEACEMAKING RESPONSES**

### **Personal Peacemaking**

There are three Biblical ways to resolve conflicts personally and privately, just between one party and another:

#### **1. Overlook an offence**

Many disputes are so insignificant that they should be resolved by quietly overlooking an offence. *A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offence.* (Proverbs 19:11). Overlooking an offence is a form of forgiveness, and involves a deliberate decision not to talk about it, dwell on it, or let it grow into pent-up bitterness or anger.

#### **2. Reconciliation**

If an offence is too serious to overlook or has damaged our relationship, we need to resolve personal or relational issues through confession, loving correction, and forgiveness. *If your brother has something against you...go and be reconciled*" (Matthew, 5:23-24). *"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.* (Galatians 6:1). *Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* (Colossians 3:13).

#### **3. Negotiation**

Even if we successfully resolve relational issues, we may still need to work through material issues related to money, property, or other rights. This should be done through a cooperative bargaining process in which each person seeks to reach a settlement that satisfies the legitimate needs of each. *Each of you should look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* (Philippians 2:4).

## **Assisted Peacemaking**

When a dispute cannot be resolved personally, God calls us to seek assistance from other believers.

### **1. Mediation**

If two people cannot reach an agreement in private, they should ask one or more objective outside person to meet with them to help them communicate more effectively and explore possible solutions. *If he will not listen (to you), take one or two others along.* (Matthew 18:16). The mediators may ask questions and give advice, but they have no authority to force an individual to accept a particular situation.

### **2. Arbitration**

When you and an opponent cannot come to a voluntary agreement on a material issue, you may appoint one or more arbitrators to listen to your arguments and render a binding decision to settle the issue. *If you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even among men of little account in the church.* (1 Corinthians 6:4).

### **3. Accountability**

If a person who professes to be a Christian refuses to be reconciled and do what is right, Jesus commands his or her church leaders to formally intervene to hold him or her accountable to Scripture and to promote repentance, justice, and forgiveness. *If he refuses to listen to others, tell it to the church.* (Matthew 18:17).

## **PROCEDURES FOR POSITIVE RESOLUTION**

Students, teachers, parents and community members are entitled, in good faith, to lodge a bona fide complaint with the School.

Every reasonable effort will be made by the School to ensure that the matter is addressed respectfully, fairly, in a non-adversarial manner, expeditiously and with sensitivity to all concerned.

In responding to a complaint, informally or formally, every reasonable effort shall be made to ensure that natural justice and procedural fairness are afforded to all concerned. This means, in practical terms, that:

- all parties are entitled to be treated with respect and to be heard.
- all parties should participate fully in the resolution process to achieve an outcome that is realistic and reasonable.
- a person who is the subject of a complaint should be informed of the substance thereof and given a full opportunity to present their perspective.
- all parties have a right to seek advice and support.
- investigations and proceedings must be conducted fairly, thoroughly and without bias or undue delay.
- parties should provide all relevant, material, complete and factual information, documents or other evidence relating to the complaint.

## **COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE**

### **STAGE 1: INFORMAL RESOLUTION**

1. Many complaints are minor in nature, or readily resolved, and may arise from genuine misunderstandings and/or issues relating to communication. In the vast majority of cases, these can be satisfactorily resolved informally.
2. Wherever possible, the informal and amicable resolution of concerns through direct communication and discussion between those concerned is encouraged.
3. Formal procedures for the resolution of complaints should only be invoked when a matter is of a very serious nature or when the matter cannot be resolved by the parties themselves through informal means.

### **STAGE 2: FORMAL AND SERIOUS COMPLAINTS**

1. If no positive resolution can be found, or the complaint is of a more serious nature, the matter may be referred to the appropriate staff:
  - Coordinator
  - Deputy Principal
  - Principal.
2. As soon as practicable after a formal complaint has been received, a process will be put in place by the School to investigate the complaint.
3. In resolving a formal complaint the School will gather relevant and material and information relating to the situation and convene a meeting of the parties to discuss the concerns.

### **STAGE 3: REFERRAL OF A COMPLAINT TO THE SCHOOL BOARD**

1. The Board Chair and members of the School Board are not directly involved in the first instance with the receipt, investigation or resolution of complaints other than complaints arising within or about the School Board itself.
2. In instances where a complaint is about the Principal and the matter cannot otherwise be resolved or the complainant feels it is appropriate to do so, a formal written complaint may be lodged with the Board Chair. In this instance the Board Chair will expeditiously take all reasonable steps to have the complaint fully investigated and to facilitate a resolution.
3. In other exceptional and special circumstances, a direct approach may be made to the Board Chair to formally lodge a complaint or refer a complaint where the resolution processes within the School have failed or are otherwise inappropriate. In this instance, the Board Chair will take advice from appropriate persons and make a determination as to how the complaint should thereafter be effectively dealt with.

### **STAGE 4: REFERRAL OF A COMPLAINT TO AN EXTERNAL AUTHORITY**

1. When a complaint cannot be resolved within the School, the parties may seek the assistance of external professional agencies or other relevant judicial or para-professional bodies in order that a further attempt can be made to resolve the matter. This is subject to the following important provisions:
  - The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) will not act as a mediator between parents and schools but if a matter remains unresolved, or parents feel that the school has failed to take their complaint seriously, AISSA may be able to provide general assistance to help parents understand the School's position.

- Neither the Minister for Education and Child Development nor the Department for Education and Child Development has any power to directly intervene in any complaints relating to the operations of a non-government school.

#### **DISTRIBUTION OF COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURES**

This Policy, and any changes or updates will be made available to all staff and parents of the School.

The student complaint handling procedures will be placed in the student diary and explained to the students at the beginning of each school year and in the new student information process.

A copy of the *TVCS Responding to Community Concerns: Complaint Handling Procedure* will be made available publically on the school website: [www.tvcs.sa.edu.au](http://www.tvcs.sa.edu.au) and at the School Reception desk.

Staff and Board members will be given appropriate and adequate training in grievance procedures.

#### **EVALUATION**

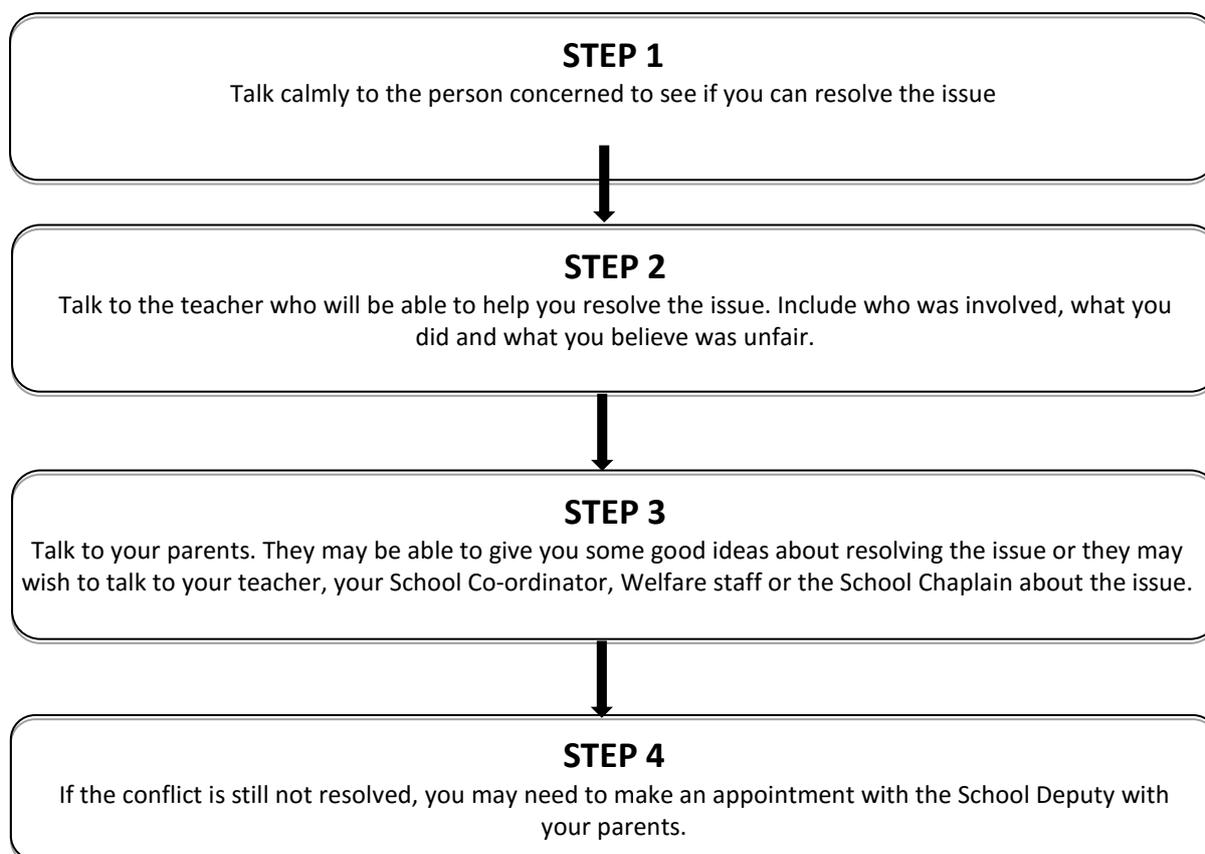
This procedure is to be reviewed as part of a three yearly review cycle.

## **STUDENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE AT TVCS HOW DO YOU SOLVE CONFLICT?**

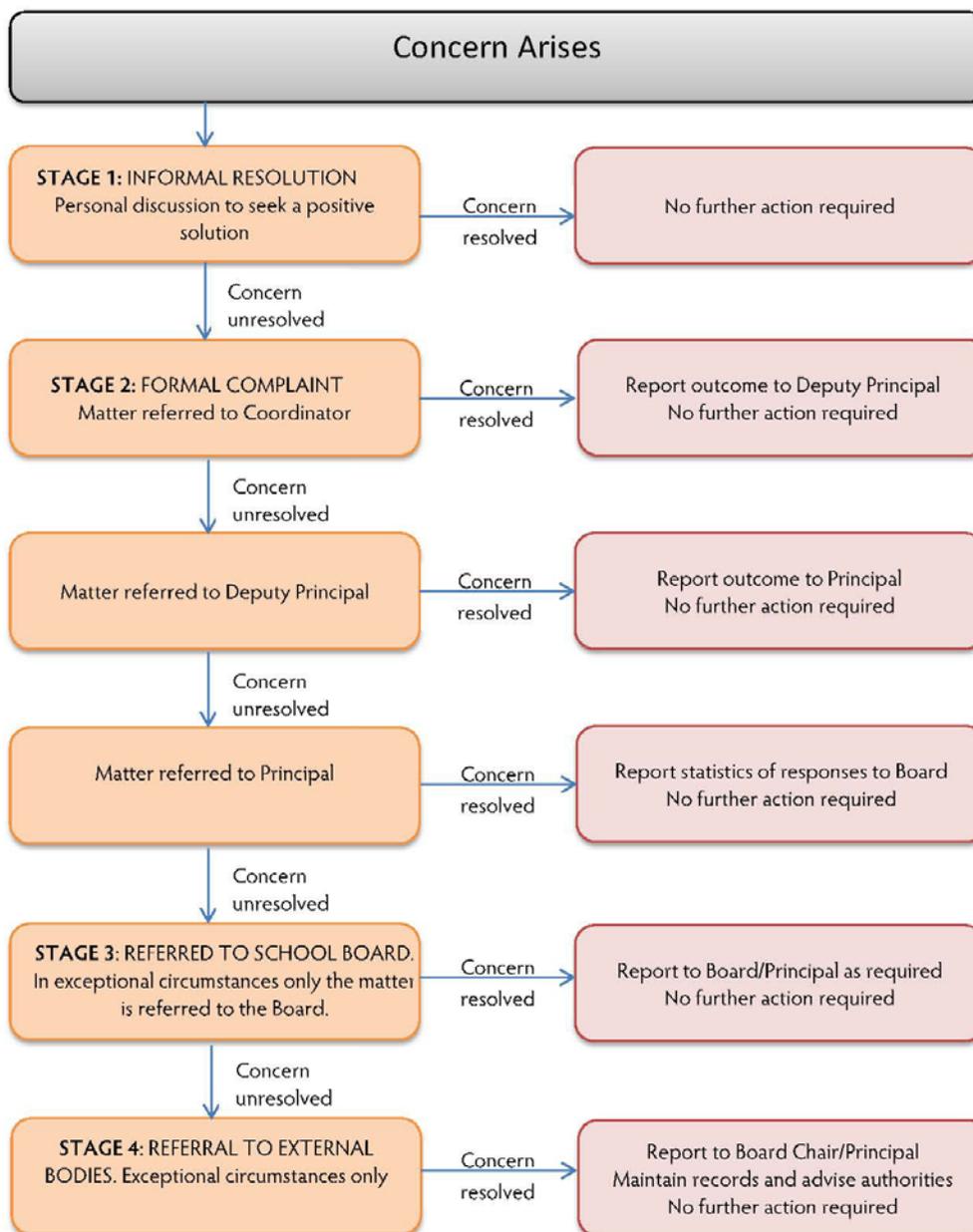
At Torrens Valley Christian School we want to build relationships of love and respect for one another.

Has someone said or done something to you which makes you feel upset?

Follow the steps to see if you can solve the problem and resolve the friendship.



## COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE FLOWCHART



# APPENDIX 1: Proforma for Complaint Resolution

Name of Complainant: \_\_\_\_\_  
Second Party involved \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of record/complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

All relevant parties have been made aware of and read *Complaints Handling Policy*.

To what extent have parties acted on the *Grievance Policy* as a statement which is binding on all staff members?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Steps taken so far:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Issues yet to be resolved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Notes taken so far: attached: yes/no

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Follow up steps to be taken and dated:

1.

	Date	Comments
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____

Agreed time to conclude issues: \_\_\_\_\_

Resolution comments and signatures:

\_\_\_\_\_

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