

NOVEMBER 2019
CONFLICT RESOLUTION
CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY
BOARD POLICY

Conflict Resolution Policy

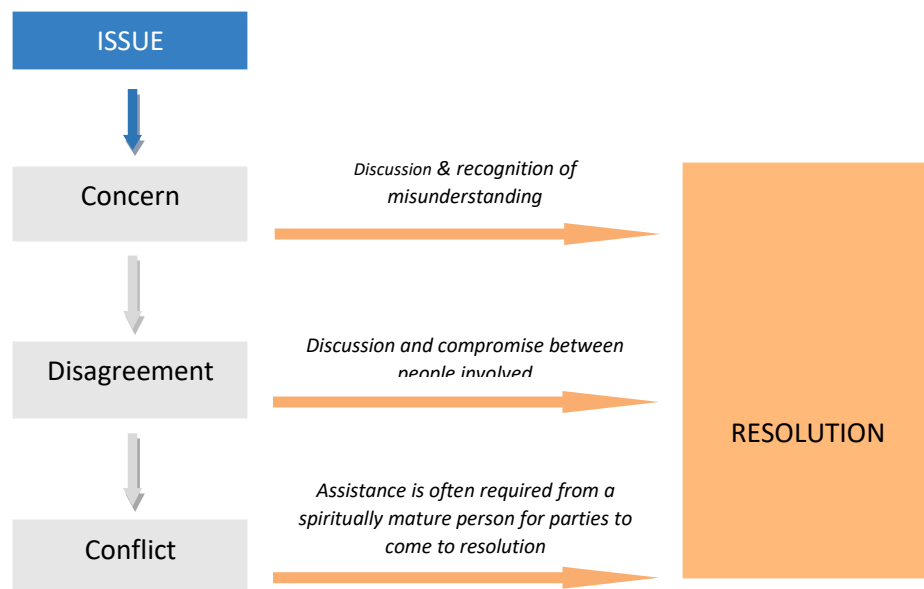
PREAMBLE

Who this policy applies to

Everyone involved in the NT Christian Schools community.

1. Summary

- 1.1 In every community from time to time people may have concerns about how an issue is being addressed. Upon being raised, these concerns may be found to be misunderstandings and be easily resolved, or they may become a point of disagreement between the people involved. Where a disagreement is not comfortably resolved, it may at times become a point of conflict, where assistance from another person may be required in order to help bring about resolution.



- 1.2 The manner in which concerns, disagreements and conflicts are managed can mean the difference between harmony and tension in a community. This policy sets out for parents, students, employees and others involved within the NT Christian Schools community, the way to deal with any concerns,

disagreements and conflicts that may arise, to promote their resolution by measures based on consultation and co-operation consistent with biblical principles and practices.

2. Related Documents

- a) NT Christian Schools Complaints and Investigations Policy
- b) NT Christian Schools Code of conduct
- c) NT Christian Schools Protected Disclosures(Whistleblowers) Policy
- d) NT Christian Schools Performance and Misconduct Policy
- e) NT Christian Schools Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy
- f) NT Christian Schools Mandatory Reporting Policy
- g) NT Christian Schools Guidelines for Staff and Student Interaction
- h) NT Christian Schools Child Protection Policy
- i) NT Christian Schools Occupational Health and Safety Policy
- j) NT Christian Schools Guidelines for Staff-Student Interaction
- k) NT Christian Schools Mediation Checklist (*available to Principals and Line Managers. Copies are available from Human Resources*)

3. Commencement of Policy

- 3.1 This Policy will commence from November 2019. It replaces all other Conflict Resolution Policies of NT Christian Schools (whether written or not).

4. Guiding Principles

- 4.1 As a Christian community, mindful that we bear witness for God in this world, we strive to maintain an environment of unity in Christ. As a community we therefore strive to maintain unity and the bond of peace through open communication and respect for one another.
- 4.2 We recognise that unity does not mean conformity. As such, we embrace the opportunity that productive disagreement can provide and welcome and value diversity of opinion. While able to cause tensions, differences need not be threatening. They can be God's way of enriching our community.
- 4.3 Conflict generally will involve both disagreements over a substantive issue and the fracturing of a relationship. We recognise that real resolution involves the preservation or restoration of the relationship as well as working through the substantive issues of the disagreement. We commit to working to achieve true and complete reconciliation in resolving concerns, disagreements and conflicts within the community.
- 4.4 We recognise that while not all members of the NT Christian Schools community share the same Christian belief, the principles that guide our thinking and actions in relation to this Policy (and all we do) have strength and value for all. In Christ we maintain a commitment to each other, especially in times of failure and disharmony. We recognise not only that staff, parents and students have shortcomings, but also that sin requires repentance and correction:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

- 4.5 All reasonable steps are taken to respect the confidentiality of the parties involved in a conflict resolution process.
- 4.6 Fairness and impartiality prevail throughout the appropriate resolution process - until a conflict is resolved and the parties' relational issues are resolved.
- 4.7 Appropriate records are maintained throughout the conflict resolution process.

POLICY

5. Other Policies and Procedures

- 5.1 Where an issue involves Child Protection or another area covered by specific legislation it will be referred immediately to the relevant external agency. This may preclude application of this Policy for a time.
- 5.2 In all cases, policies and procedures of NT Christian Schools and the individual school addressing the particular issue shall be followed. This policy is designed to complement, not override, the proper process in relation to such issues.
- 5.3 Where an issue amounts to a formal complaint, it shall be handled under the NT Christian Schools Complaints and Investigations Policy.

6. Fostering an environment of peace

- 6.1 Any person involved in the NT Christian Schools community has the right to raise a concern and have it responded to promptly, fairly and without fear of repercussion.
- 6.2 Information regarding the process for making enquiries, or raising concerns will be made available to all member of the NT Christian Schools community. Parents and caregivers will have the relevant Guidelines for Resolving Concerns and Complaints made available to them through their school and on the NT Christian Schools website.
- 6.3 Members of the NT Christian Schools community have a responsibility to raise their concerns at the earliest possible time. Generally, the greatest success in resolving issues is where they are addressed as soon as they arise.
- 6.4 Where an issue is raised, everyone involved is expected to treat one another as they would wish to be treated, and speak to one another with respect and expectation of understanding and resolution. An essential part of this process includes acting discreetly and maintaining confidentiality at all times.
- 6.5 Most issues will be able to be resolved informally.
- 6.6 Where the issue raised is not able to be immediately resolved and people are in disagreement, they should work to deal with the issue appropriately and promptly so that discord does not have the opportunity to fester.

- 6.7 Where a disagreement cannot be resolved in private, resolution will be sought by all involved in a timely, appropriate and satisfactory manner in accordance with this Policy.
- 6.8 Every person involved in a disagreement has both the right to confidentiality, and the responsibility to maintain confidentiality. Where it is deemed appropriate to inform other people of the disagreement, every person involved will be informed of this and the reasons for involving another person.
- 6.9 An individual Board or Council member must never be a channel for particular disagreements. If a parent or staff member approaches any Board or Council member in circumstances where application of this Policy would be appropriate, the Board or Council member must always insist that the person involved follow the proper procedure. The first step will be to meet directly with the person with whom they have an issue.
- 6.10 Where a student has a concern that would be appropriately dealt with under this Policy they will be required to inform and involve their parent/caregiver in the process unless there are exceptional extenuating circumstances. It is expected that in most instances it will be appropriate to involve their parent/caregiver. Where this is not possible the school will ensure that the student has a suitable support person to guide them.
- 6.11 Vexatious, trivial or previously finalised issues will not be pursued.

7 Context

- 7.1 As the NT Christian Schools community is so broad, with a number of different management structures, this procedure must be read with some understanding of context. There will be occasions where it is appropriate to leave a step set out in this procedure or conversely insert another level of facilitation/mediation.
- 7.2 By way of definition: 'Line Manager' refers to the direct supervisor of the person involved. 'Principal' refers to the Head of the school or functional entity.

8. Disagreement or Conflict

- 8.1 The Bible provides us with great wisdom for dealing with disagreement. It commands and challenges us to bring honour and glory to God through all our Interactions, during times of peace or conflict with one another. When people are in disagreement within our community we strongly encourage them to be guided in their one-to-one interaction by the peace-making principles, found throughout the Bible and particularly in Matthew 18, in order to resolve the substantive and relational issues at the heart of the disagreement.
- 8.2 Within NT Christian Schools there is a commitment to the ongoing development of a culture of peace. This includes commitment to the promotion of understanding across the community of these biblical principles as explained through Peacewise (www.peacewise.org.au).
- 8.3 If a disagreement arises between a staff member; a parent/caregiver/ guardian; a student; or a community member the people involved must first meet together to

clearly and respectfully discuss the issues involved and attempt to resolve the matter.

- 8.4 Most issues are able to be resolved at this one-to-one level, with forgiveness and restoration being the normal conclusion.
- 8.5 Where resolution is not achieved at this one-to-one level, the Bible provides a clear process for continuing to bring glory to God through our interactions, even in times of disagreement. Under the Matthew 18 biblical principal, where the people involved in a disagreement fail to reach a resolution in a timely manner, they should request a person with pastoral responsibility for them to assist them to come to a resolution and restoration of their relationship.
- 8.6 Within the context of a school or functional entity in the NT Christian Schools organisation, this will generally mean referring the matter to the relevant Line Manager, Principal or NT Christian Schools executive to facilitate further discussion between the parties involved.
- 8.7 While this can be an ongoing, lengthy and potentially frustrating process at times, it is the best possible way to bring about actual resolution of both the relational and substantive issues between the people involved. Therefore, where those involved remain willing to participate in this process, NT Christian Schools will support their efforts in whatever manner may be appropriate and required. This may include bringing in outside resources (for example a Peacewise facilitator, Mediator) to assist the people involved in bringing about resolution.

9. MEDIATION

- 9.1 Mediation may be undertaken as early as possible after an issue has arisen and has not been directly resolved between the parties.
- 9.2 Mediation is worthwhile because it facilitates a voluntary process of self-actualization for each of the participants, and empowers them to express themselves, to be heard and understood, and to negotiate solutions on their own terms.
- 9.3 Mediation may be identified as a way to resolve the issue either by the parties themselves or through a Mediator (who is neutral and independent). ***The Principal/ Line Manager mediates on the dispute however given the nature and severity of the conflict, the CEO may appoint an external mediator.***
- 9.4 The best results are achieved when the issue is in its early stages before it becomes sore and begins to affect the emotional wellbeing of the parties, motivation to attend work or leads to behaviour that warrants disciplinary action.
- 9.5 Mediation can be ideal and beneficial at any stage of conflict and may also be used as an alternative in the management of formal complaints.

10. Process

- 10.1 Depending on the nature and severity of the conflict, the process undertaken will involve some or all of the steps outlined below.

- 10.2 Initial briefing and discussion on the issues, expected outcomes and support to be given by NT Christian Schools during the process.
- 10.3 Individual meetings with the parties to understand their perspective on the issue and intended/ proposed outcomes.
- 10.4 First joint session with parties to explain the mediation process, make introductions, decide on agenda and set guiding principles for the process such as procedural fairness, voluntary, confidentiality, respect, good faith and open communication.
- 10.5 Parties may be required to sign a pre- mediation statement confirming their commitment to adhere to the guiding principles of the mediation.
- 10.6 Second joint session is an opportunity to clarify any issues and provide any further information to assist the process.
- 10.7 Once the process commences, the mediator guides the parties to ensure that an amicable solution to the issues is found.
- 10.8 The primary responsibility to resolve a conflict through mediation rests with the parties and a mediator only seeks to assist them to achieve this outcome.
- 10.10 Once an amicable solution is found, the Mediator shall under the direction of the parties draft a mediation statement agreement outlining the issues and the conclusions reached. This shall be signed by the parties.
- 10.11 A copy of the agreement shall be kept in the individual employee files.

11. FORMAL COMPLAINT

- 11.1 It may happen that:
 - a. after sustained effort a resolution is still not reached through following the steps outlined above; or
 - b. there is unwillingness by a party to engage in the process outlined above.
- 11.2 In such circumstances Formal Complaint Proceedings will need to take place in order to bring about some form of resolution regarding at the substantive issues of the disagreement or conflict.
- 11.3 In order to initiate the Formal Complaint Proceedings any party to the issue (or the facilitator/ mediator) may make a written complaint in accordance with the Complaints and Investigations Policy.

12. Sources informing this policy

Peacewise - Peacemaking Principles (www.peacewise.org.au)

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NT Christian Schools is committed to achieving and maintaining workable solutions for your school. We may make changes to this policy from time to time to improve the effectiveness of its operation. In this regard, any NT Christian Schools member or employee who wishes to make any comment about this policy may forward their suggestions to us.