

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

- While Victory Christian College aims to be a harmonious community working together in one accord, it is recognized that, from time to time, there will be instances of grievance that will be resolved in a Christ-like manner. Matthew 18:15-16 states that if one of my follower's sins against you, go and point out what is wrong. But do it in private, just between the two of you. If that person listens, you have won back a follower. But if that one refuses to listen, take along one or two others. These insightful verses shape our complaints procedure.
- Our College has a strong desire to provide positive, clear, appropriate, successful and Biblical processes for resolving grievances and complaints between students and staff, and parents/carers and staff. These processes will assist the development of strong and enduring relationships, release anxiety, support sound pastoral care principles, endeavouring to provide students with an enhanced learning environment.

AIMS

- To solemnly treat any complaints and grievances, and continuously respect the dignity and privacy of the individuals involved.
- As early as possible, to establish if there has been any unsatisfactory practise or action.
- To provide clear, positive and fair processes that allow grievances to be aired, responded to, and resolved, in a timely and effective manner.
- To refer any criminal action to the appropriate external agency.
- To exercise proficient judgement and discretion as to the degree of a complaints' severity, and the manner and level at which it should be handled.

IMPLEMENTATION

- The Complaints Procedure Policy will be made accessible to parents on the College Website and to staff on SharePoint. Parents will be informed of the policy in the Parent Handbook. Staff will be informed of the policy in the Staff Manual.
- In any grievance or complaints situation, the first course is to clearly establish the facts associated with the complaint. It is recognised that complaint situations are often composed of complex interpersonal interactions, so an objective investigation will be sought, rather than considering only one point of view.
- In the first instance, the situation will be addressed at the lowest possible level (ie. Teacher directly involved), with matters being treated with confidentiality and professional respect.
- Documentation of all complaints, discussions from interviews and actions will be completed.
- Where the complaint is minor, or the complainant wants the matter dealt with casually, or where there has been a lack of clear communication between parties, the Principal or staff member may choose to respond informally via a phone conversation, general face-to-face discussion, etc. No further action may be warranted.
- The formal process for responding to complaints involves:
 - Investigation of the complaint
 - Dismissing/accepting the complaint
 - Preparation of a detailed confidential report
 - Ongoing monitoring of the situation
 - Investigate and implement changes in process/practice to reduce risk of further similar complaints
 - Disciplinary action if the complaint is justified and discipline is warranted (refer to Respectful Workplaces Policy)

- Where the Principal is unable to resolve a complaint, dissatisfied parties can refer the matter to the Victory Christian College Board, addressed to the Secretary, outlining the relevant concerns. A copy of this letter will also be sent to the Principal.
- Where complaints or disputes are directed to the Board, the Senior Pastor of Victory Church can elect to discuss the matter with the Principal and seek, by arbitration, to resolve the issue/s. If this fails, then the complaint, together with a detailed report by the Principal, will be tabled at the next VCC Board meeting.
- The Victory Christian College Board's decision and action will be final in terms of the internal handling of the matter.

STUDENTS' COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- Where a complaint exists against a staff member, a student is encouraged to reach a personal resolution with the staff member involved. If the student is hesitant to directly approach the staff member, then the student is required to discuss the matter with a Deputy Principal who will provide advice on the most appropriate way to continue. The student might require an advocate in articulating their complaint and discussing the matter with the staff member.
- After the complaint is raised the substance of the complaint needs to be considered, investigated and, where necessary, resolved as soon as practicable.
- If the complaints and disputes are unable to be resolved and become ongoing, then the issue/s should be documented and referred to the Principal.
- The Principal should be informed about any complaints relating to improper behaviour (eg. physically, emotionally, sexually offensive) or where there is a noticeable violation of accepted professional/academic practice.
- Where student complaints are incorrectly directed, in the first instance, to people in higher authority than the matter warrants, the complaint should be referred back to the relevant person for further investigation. Examples of these include the teacher involved in the complaint, or Year Level Coordinators.
- Staff members concerned about the handling of student complaints are able to discuss the matter with their relevant Deputy Principal or the Principal.
- If the matter requires outside assistance and advice, then relevant support bodies such as CSA, Independent Schools Victoria, Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, etc., may be sought.

PARENTS AND OTHER COLLEGE COMMUNITY MEMBERS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- The College's management and staff accept the responsibility to consult, and communicate both clearly and effectively, with the school community. However, parents and other College community members also have an obligation to read notices and newsletters, to attend briefings, and to seek clarification when it might be required. There may be times when members of the community disagree or are confused about the things that we are doing. In such cases, it is recommended that the complaints procedure outlined below is followed to resolve any grievances as they arise.
- Facts surrounding the complaint/s will be established as clearly as possible, to separate out third-hand communication or gossip.
- Where there is an issue of everyday class operation, the parent will be required to make an appointment to see the appropriate teacher, detailing the reasons for that appointment.
- An appointment with a Deputy Principal or Principal can be arranged to discuss matters relating to school policy, proceedings beyond the classroom, concerns about staff, or grievances that are not likely to be easily resolved.
- All complaints will be kept as confidential as possible.
- Parents and/or community members may be accompanied by another person, in a support role, at appointments to resolve grievances.
- All formal and informal discussions and processes involving grievances will be documented.

STAFF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- If the complaint or matter of concern is about a fellow member of staff, the complainant is encouraged to firstly speak directly to their colleague and strive to reach a positive resolution.
- If no positive resolution can be found, the staff member is advised to take the matter to their Year Level Coordinator or Sub-school Head, or approach the College Chaplain to assist with taking steps to positively resolve the conflict through mediation.
- If no positive solution can be found, the Chaplain may advise the complainant to take the matter confidentially in writing to the Principal, or Board Chair as appropriate, for further action.
- If the complaint or matter of concern is about a student and/or parent, the staff member is encouraged to speak directly with the student/parent concerned, with the support of their Year Level Coordinator.
- The student will be given the option of having a third person present who is acceptable to the other party.
- If no positive resolution can be found, the staff member is advised to take the matter to the relevant Sub-School Head or Deputy Principal. to assist in reaching a positive resolution to the matter.

CHILD PROTECTION COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- Any staff member, volunteer or contractor who has grounds to suspect abusive activity must immediately notify the appropriate child protection service or the police. They should also advise their supervisor about their concern.
- In situations where the supervisor is suspected of involvement in the activity, or if the person having the suspicion does not believe the matter is being appropriately addressed or dealt with, the matter should be reported to the next highest level of supervision.
- Supervisors must report complaints of suspected abusive behaviour or misconduct to the Principal.
- Allegations of misconduct which meet the Reportable Conduct Scheme criteria, must be reported by the Principal to the Commission for Children and Young People, within 3 business days of the report being made.
- If appropriate child protection service or the police decide to investigate this report, all employees, contractors or volunteers must co-operate fully with the investigation.
- Whether or not the authorities decide to investigate, the Principal will consult with the authorities to determine whether an internal investigation is appropriate. If it is decided that such an investigation will not conflict with any proceeding of the authorities, the Principal may decide to conduct such an investigation. All employees, contractors and volunteers must co-operate fully with the investigation. Investigations of reportable misconduct allegations must be reported to the Commission for Children and Young People.
- Any such investigations will follow a systematic approach and apply procedural fairness, according to the Commission's guidelines.
- The Principal will make every effort to keep any such investigation confidential; however, from time to time other members of staff may need to be consulted in conjunction with the investigation.
- After an initial review and a determination that the suspected abuse warrants additional investigation, the Principal shall coordinate the investigation with the appropriate investigators and/or law enforcement officials. Internal or external legal representatives will be involved in the process, as deemed appropriate.
- If it is alleged that a member of staff, contractor or a volunteer may have committed an offence or have breached Victory Christian College's policies or its Code of Conduct the person concerned may be stood down (with pay, where applicable) while an investigation is conducted.
- If the investigation concludes that on the balance of probabilities an offence (or a breach of the College's policies or Code of Conduct) has occurred then disciplinary action may follow, up to and including dismissal or cessation of involvement with the College. The findings of the investigation will also be reported to any external body as required.
- All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Victory Christian College will have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how the personal information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will be able to access it.