

## Complaints from Parent's and concerned individuals

You may encounter a time when you have a concern about something that is occurring in a child care setting. You will need to be able to recognize the difference between a serious complaint (violation of rules and regulations) and a personal complaint. (Differences in beliefs, styles of communication, and business related problems)

Child care providers play an important role in a child's life. Open communication allows discussion of any issues that may arise before complaints would take place.

If you are a parent, remember to:

- Talk to your caregiver on a regular basis
- Discuss any issue that arises
- Know what your child's day is like
- Review any notice or schedule your caregiver shares
- Provide information about your child's development and behavior

You may not agree with all the policies a provider has. As a parent, you are making a choice of a child care situation that fits your child's needs, your beliefs, and what you can agree to regarding policies and fees. It is important to discuss all policies so that you fully understand them. If possible get the policies in writing so that you can refer to them if you have a question.

If you are a concerned individual, communication may also help to alleviate the situation. Talk about concerns that may arise. If the issue concerns health and safety of a child it is appropriate to contact child care licensing.

### **Rule Violations:**

Child care licensing typically only gets involved in complaints that allege a violation of child care regulations. Examples of Rule violations are:

- The provider caring for more children than they are licensed for.
- The provider using inappropriate forms of discipline with the children.
- The provider never takes the children outside.
- The provider is not supervising the children.

If your complaint is regarding the health and safety of a child, it is a serious complaint. The Minnesota rule addresses the following: supervision; agency records; caregiver qualifications; license capacity and child/adult ratios, age distribution restrictions; reporting to agency; training; behavior guidance; admissions, records, and reporting; activities and equipment; the physical environment, sanitation and health; water, food, and nutrition.

If you have a concern about something that has happened in a child care home, contact the area worker and check whether it is a licensing matter. The worker may be able to offer suggestions that would be helpful in discussing concerns with the child care provider. If there is a concern for the safety of a child in care, these concerns should be addressed with the provider's licensing worker.

**Procedure for making complaints:**

Call the area licensing worker and explain the situation to them. They will want to know the specifics of your concern and will ask you what you have seen or what the child has related to you. All complaints are confidential in that only the nature of the complaint can be discussed with the provider, or other involved parties, during the investigation. No one is told the name of the complainant or any identifying information.

Once the licensing worker has received a complaint alleging a license violation, Dakota County Social Services Child Care Unit is required to investigate. We gather information that can shed light on whether the violation occurred. This may include interviewing people who could have direct knowledge of the situation or an unannounced visit to the program. The issues involved are discussed with the provider and a determination is made regarding the matter. There are three options for the determination. These are:

1. Licensing violation occurred;
2. Licensing violation did not occur;
3. No determination can be made.

If a licensing violation has occurred, a correction order is issued and the provider must make changes to comply with the licensing rule. Some complaints may result in a negative action occurring on the license such as making the child care license conditional or revocation of the license. A negative action resulting from just one complaint is a rare occurrence and would only take place should the immediate health and safety of children be in jeopardy.

The second determination, licensing violation did not occur, would result if the investigation led to information that showed that there was no licensing violation.

The third determination, no determination can be made would be a result of not being able to verify whether the alleged complaint occurred or not.

All complaints remain in a child care provider's case record and are public information. When someone contacts our agency and requests information about complaints on a provider's record, we release the general nature of the

complaint, the determination made regarding the allegation, and any action taken by our agency as a result of the complaint.

There are instances where a complaint is determined not to be a licensing violation or is unable to be substantiated. This does not mean that a person does not have a valid concern. The best interest of the child needs to be considered at all times. It should be decided whether the situation can be worked out or a parent may need to assess whether their child is getting all their needs met in a safe environment. It may be in the best interest of a child to change child care providers and environments.

#### Personal Complaints:

Personal complaints should be addressed with the provider directly. Address issues as they arise so that there are no built up feelings of frustration and anger. Examples are:

- Parents being charged a late fee that they feel is not valid
- Parents being called to come get their child as provider feels they are too ill to be in child care
- The provider is unwilling to take a child when the child has no winter boots and mittens
- The provider charging for vacation or sick days.
- Children ruining hedges on a neighbor's property.

Ask for a time that the two of you can meet with no distraction. Discuss your concern and offer an alternative solution. Listen to the provider. See if they can make the change that you recommend. **Remember**; a provider may not be able to make every change any one person wants, as they have to think of the entire group. The provider may also have definite policies they feel they need to adhere to. If the provider cannot make the change, see if they can offer an alternative that would be acceptable. Most concerns can be handled through this type of negotiation.

As a parent, if adjustments cannot be made, you will need to decide whether you can accept this or if you need to look for alternate care. Be up front with your provider if you are looking for alternate care. Advise them that you feel strongly about the situation and you understand their different viewpoint. Let them know that you will be giving them the agreed upon notice when you have found alternate care. Remember that it is just as important for you to have a smooth transition for you and your child, as it is for the provider.

As a concerned individual, you may have to look into what further action you can take or decide to let it go.