



## Resolving Disputes



Community Care Licensing programs provide assurance to families who rely on others to care for their children. When parents have a concern, they may feel that they need to refer their concerns to a Licensing Officer. In Northern Health, Licensing Officers are committed to responding to public complaints and inquiries in a courteous, consistent, reasonable, and timely manner.

Quality care is important to all of us at Northern Health. The information the public provides is valuable and forms an integral part of our work in providing public assurance that a healthy and safe environment is maintained in all licensed care facilities.

As a first step in dispute resolution, we believe that conflicts are best addressed and resolved at the time and place they occur and wherever possible with the licensee or manager of the care facility. The public is encouraged to first attempt to resolve concerns by working with care providers to find a quick and effective resolution which in turn helps maintain positive relationships and a healthy environment for their child.

### Preventing Conflict

If you are providing care, it's likely that you'll eventually have concerns brought to your attention that need resolution. Often concerns expressed by the public are a result of unfamiliarity of what occurs in the child care setting. Open and frequent communication and making sure that children are well supervised at all times by child care providers who have appropriate training and experience are key to preventing conflict. Here are some proactive strategies you can implement to encourage family involvement and prevent conflict from occurring in the first place:

- Ensure open and frequent communication by keeping families well-informed about the care and day-to-day experiences of their child. Be approachable, set aside time to communicate with parents without distractions, and have a process for them to follow if they have any concerns or would like to meet with you.
- Have written policies and procedures in place and share them with parents ahead of time so that they understand your schedule, fees and general expectations.
- Have an open door policy that encourages families to participate in the program.
- Provide parents with timely notification of any changes.
- Be willing to work with families on particular problems or limitations in a nonjudgmental fashion that is respectful of the family's background and values.

- Keep a log of all minor accidents, illness and unexpected events involving children in your care. Document any communication you've had with the family to substantiate the decisions you've made and your attempts to improve the situation.
- Contact your Licensing Officer about the situation. Share what has been communicated so far and how you plan to deal with it.

## Resolving concerns and disputes

When it comes to effective conflict resolution, how effectively we listen is just as important as how effectively we express ourselves. To come to a resolution, it's vital to understand the other person's perspective, rather than just our own. In fact, just helping the other person feel heard and understood can sometimes go a long way toward the resolution of a conflict. Here are some tips to consider from Northern Health's Conflict Resolution model:

**"I" STATEMENT** - An "I" statement is the skill of speaking from your own experience. It allows a person to speak from their own perspective without creating defensiveness in others.

**OPEN QUESTIONS** - Open-ended questions are questions used by journalists. They encourage the person to respond with more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer. In conflict situations, open questions often begin with 'what' or 'how.'

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FEELINGS** - is the skill of reflecting back to the speaker how they are feeling. It lets the speaker know that you are listening and that you understand.

**EMPATHATIC RESPONSE** - is a skill designed to let the speaker know you are listening. An empathetic response reflects back to the speaker both what they are talking about, and how they feel about it.

**VALIDATION** - is the skill of confirming or supporting the speaker's perspective.

**PARAPHRASING** - is the skill of restating what the speaker has said in your own words. It lets the speaker know that you are listening, and allows the listener to see if their interpretation is correct.

**SUMMARIZING** - is the skill of recapping the major points made by the speaker. The skill lets the speaker know that you are listening and ensures that important points are noted.

**REFRAMING** - is the skill of taking emotionally charged, negative statements and turning them into neutral or positive statements. Reframing eliminates blaming accusations, and therefore promotes collaboration.

**REFOCUSING** - is the skill of redirecting the speaker back to the topic of discussion. It allows both the speaker and the listener to stay on track and finish with one topic before moving on to another.

**BEHAVIOR DESCRIPTION** - is the skill of describing specifically what you have observed. It allows for the discussion of behavior without placing judgments or interpretations on the behavior.

When problem solving, it is helpful to remember that a working relationship is most beneficial when each party views the other as a valuable partner and resource. Once you have heard and understood each other's points of view and identified that a problem exists, it is relatively easy to decide what the goal will be. Stating the goal provides a focus and direction so that you can start working collaboratively on a solution. When you collaborate, you cooperate with the other party to try and solve the problem to a mutually satisfying outcome by competing against the situation instead of each other.

Sometimes, there is more than one solution to a problem so it is helpful to brainstorm all possibilities and agree upon solutions that work in the best interest of all parties involved.

Develop an action plan and follow up after a period of time to evaluate your progress. This also reassures the parent that their concerns are important to you.