

Fact sheet

Building collaborative relationships with families

It's every teacher and early childhood teacher's responsibility to ensure they treat learners with courtesy and dignity at all times. This also includes maintaining a professional relationship with learners' families.



To help set clear expectations and build a strong foundation that supports the best learner outcomes, it's important to understand what positive relationships look like in relation to the [Victorian Teaching Profession's Code of Conduct](#) (the Code) and how to build and foster them.

Interacting with learners in line with the Code

Building and maintaining positive relationships with learners and their families isn't just good practice, it's also a requirement under the following principles of the Code

- Principle 1.2 – Teachers treat their learners with courtesy and dignity, and promote participation and empowerment
- Principle 1.4 – Teachers maintain objectivity in their relationships with learners
- Principle 1.5 – Teachers are always in a professional relationship with their learners, whether at the education setting where they teach or not
- Principle 1.6 – Teachers maintain a professional relationship with parents / carers
- Principle 1.7 – Teachers work in collaborative relationships with learners' families and communities.

Tips for communicating with learners and their families

When communicating with learners and their families, try to

- only send emails during business hours – including publishing student results, or responding to parent / carer concerns
- avoid last minute communication, give as much notice as possible about events / information / news relating to the learner or school / service
- ensure communication is clear and factual
- use simple language
- be courteous and respectful in all correspondence.

Building trust with families

To support the best possible learner outcomes, teachers should

- demonstrate cultural sensitivity
- consider the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners
- model and engage in respectful and impartial language and behaviour
- engage with families to consult about their learner's needs
- display an understanding of a learner's individual context and specific vulnerabilities when they interact with them
- use behaviour management strategies appropriate for a learner's individual context and actions, aimed at supporting positive change.

Responding to a complaint from a family

Sometimes, despite a teacher or early childhood teachers' best efforts, complaints can arise from families. Receiving a complaint can be a learning opportunity for teachers and early childhood teachers to improve their teaching practice. Anyone can receive a complaint during their career and it's important to approach the situation with a mindset focused on resolution and learning.

A complaint does not mean that a relationship with a learner and their family is damaged beyond repair.

Effectively managing and appropriately responding to a complaint is important in ensuring everyone can get on the same page and work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for learners.

When managing a complaint

- provide acknowledgement to the complainant when the complaint is received and if required, provide a timeline that the complainant can expect to receive a more detailed response
- inform senior leadership of the complaint and any other relevant details
- discuss support / guidance from senior leadership about next steps
- document what happened with detailed notes, including any conversations that might have happened with the complainant
- ensure record keeping is taking place in Compass or the equivalent learning management system or portal.
- consider how data and records are stored, noting that all records can be used as evidence in any further investigation of a matter if required
- avoid making statements based on opinion, stick to the facts
- if a complainant shows up at your school or service angry or frustrated, schedule a time in the near future where a discussion can take place so they have an opportunity to be heard
- for any meetings or discussions with complainants, consider who should be present and give adequate notice in advance.



Resources

For more support, explore the following resources

- [Victorian Teaching Profession's Code of Conduct](#)
- [Victorian Teaching Profession's Code of Ethics](#)
- [Ethical decision making model](#)
- [Teacher Guidance Pack](#)
- [VIT case studies](#).