



External Conflict Resolution

Intent

Autism Ontario is committed to providing services free of conflict, where all people are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. Autism Ontario has instituted this policy to create a fair and transparent process for resolving conflicts between users of our services, parents of dependent children/adults, volunteers and staff. This policy establishes clear and consistent standards that apply to conflicts between users of our services, stakeholders, volunteers and/or staff in order to ensure that issues and concerns are addressed in a timely manner and result in appropriate outcomes. The guidelines in this policy may apply to situations arising out of serious occurrences.

Autism Ontario is committed to providing equal treatment according to the protected grounds established under the mandatory *Ontario Human Rights Code*. For more information, see our *Human Rights Policy*.

Guidelines

Conflict Resolution Procedure

Step 1: Discussion

- Users of our services, parents of dependent children/adults, volunteers and/or staff are encouraged to discuss the unwanted behavior or actions with the involved parties as the situation dictates.
- Under ideal circumstances, the conflicting parties shall reach a reasonable resolution without the necessity of filing of a formal complaint.
- If a discussion is not feasible or fails to reach a reasonable resolution, a formal complaint should be filed.

Step 2: Formal Complaint

- If a person wishes to file a complaint, volunteers or staff should provide the person with the appropriate documentation to do so, and should advise them of the proper procedure for filing the complaint, including :
 - Directing them to the complaint form on our website or
 - Printing the complaint form if the person is not able to access it online
 - Accommodations will be provided for those who require it. For more information, see our *AODA – Customer Service Policy*.



Step 3: Complaint Investigation

- Formal complaints shall be reviewed and investigated by the appropriate manager.
- Formal complaints must be submitted within seven (7) days from the date of the alleged incidents.
- In all cases where formal complaints have been lodged, it is important to maintain a policy of strict confidentiality between the complainant and the respondent. For investigative purposes, the offending party may be notified.
- Investigations shall be completed within thirty (30) days, unless circumstances prevent the investigation from being completed within that timeframe. All parties involved will be notified of the outcome.

Expectations

Staff

- Must fully comply with the External Conflict Resolution Policy.
- Shall be treated fairly throughout the process, as either a complainant or respondent.
- Shall be responsible for maintaining confidentiality regarding their involvement and the complaint itself.
- Shall co-operate with any investigations in relation to complaints.

Management

- Shall be responsible for the communication of this policy and its procedures.
- Shall receive and address properly filed complaints appropriately.
- Shall investigate any complaints, claims, and supporting documentation in a timely manner.
- Shall attempt to reach a reasonable resolution to the conflict between the participant, parent of dependent child/adult, volunteer and/or staff
- Shall inform the complainant and the offending party of possible resolutions available.

Users of Service

- Shall treat staff with respect in all interactions.
- Shall direct complaints to the appropriate staff member and communicate all complaints in a mature and respectful manner.
- Shall participate in the conflict resolution process as defined in this policy and other Autism Ontario policies and procedures.

Resolutions

- If an apology is made by the offending party, and the complainant accepts the apology, this may be viewed as a reasonable resolution.



- All attempts shall be made to reach a reasonable resolution through dialogue of the complaint with both parties' involvement followed by successive levels of internal supervision as required.

Where the complaint is substantiated:

If a complaint is substantiated and a reasonable solution through mediation is not possible, the following actions may be taken for the offending party. Please note that the items in this list are not necessarily progressive, and steps may be skipped dependent on the nature of the incident.

Where the respondent is a staff member:

- Education and training.
- Verbal warning.
- Written warning.
- Suspension.
- Termination of employment.

Where the respondent is a volunteer:

- Education and training
- Verbal warning
- Written warning
- Termination of volunteer role

Where the respondent is a user of our services:

- Verbal warning advising of changes that need to be made to actions, attitudes, or behaviours.
- Written warning advising of changes that need to be made to actions, attitudes, or behaviours.
- Termination of services offered by Autism Ontario.

Where the complaint is not substantiated:

If a complaint is not substantiated due to lack of evidence or other reasons, both parties shall be informed of the decision, along with the rationale used. The complainant shall be notified first. Both parties should be reminded that an unsubstantiated complaint does not necessarily mean that it was filed under false or frivolous pretences.

A complainant may request that the investigation be re-opened if pertinent new evidence can be provided, or a reprisal due to the allegation has occurred.

Records

- Autism Ontario shall keep on file all formal complaints, the accompanying documentation, and the findings of any investigation.



- Information from a previous investigation resulting in a substantiated complaint may be used for review and consideration purposes in the event of a new allegation.

False or Frivolous Complaints

- Staff, users of our service, stakeholders, and volunteers should be aware that a formal complaint against a parent or a staff member is a serious allegation with repercussions.
- Where a complaint is found to be either false or frivolous, or where supporting documentation for a complaint has been falsified, the complainant or witness may be subject to disciplinary measures up to and including termination of employment.

Approved: April 2017