

10. Concerns Process

Concerns and conflicts do not necessarily signal a crisis. They are a natural outcome of a community working together and they offer an opportunity for change and improvement.

A healthy social life is found when, in the mirror of each human soul, the whole community finds its reflection and when, in the community, the virtue of each one is living (Rudolf Steiner, 1920).

The school requests that all concerns and complaints be dealt with through the processes made available by the school rather than through informal discussions (gossip) with those not involved.

DO:

Strive to communicate well, with honesty and integrity.

Strive to resolve a concern or conflict as soon as possible (rather than brooding on it).

Focus on finding a solution with those directly involved rather than talking about the concern or conflict with those farther afield.

It is SSWS's position that concerns and conflicts cannot be resolved unless all affected parties are involved. The process includes face-to-face communication between affected parties. Mediators are available to facilitate this: three Ombudspersons, a Care Committee, and outside professionals where necessary.

There are two available options when you have a concern or are in conflict:

1. Speak directly to the person about whom you have a concern or with whom you are in conflict.

OR

2. Contact one of the school's ombudspersons about your concern or conflict.

Email Communication

Avoid expressing and trying to resolve your concern via email or other electronic platforms. You may email your concern to one of the school's ombudspersons, but only to register your concern and to begin the concerns process with the support of the ombudsperson.

Confidentiality

"In confidence" means that no one beside those involved in the concerns process will be informed about the concern. Those raising the concern and those whom the concern is about are always part of the process.

The Function of the Ombudspersons

Three ombudspersons positions have been created so that any person in the community knows whom to approach when they have a concern and if they can't, for whatever reason, take Step 1 of the school's concerns process.

Each ombudsperson is a neutral community member who is at arms-length from the school but who knows the school well and is familiar with its values and principles.

Each ombudsperson is there to funnel concerns immediately into a solutions-oriented process, thereby de-escalating conflict and preventing disgruntlement from seeping generally through the community.

An ombudsperson's function is also to ensure that proper record-keeping and follow-up occurs so that the school can keep track of concerns, especially those that are repeatedly being brought forward.

Process

Parent(s) or community member(s) who may be uncomfortable directly approaching the person(s) about whom they have a concern or with whom they are in conflict, may take their concern or conflict to one of the school's ombudspersons. This is the case even for minor concerns or conflicts. The ombudsperson will compassionately listen, sensitively facilitate communication between parties, and carefully guide them through the concerns process to a satisfactory resolution.

Ombudsperson's procedure:

1. Receive concern via phone, email, or in person.
2. Have a face-to-face meeting with the concerned person.
3. Listen compassionately and ascertain from the concerned person whether they want to continue to the next step or whether having their concern heard and recorded is sufficient.
4. Record the concern in writing and file it.
5. If they want to continue, offer to organize and attend facilitated solutions-oriented face-to face between the person with the concern and the person or persons it implicates.
6. Take minutes of the meeting and file with the concern record.
7. If Step 5 does not lead to a resolution, pass the process on to the Care Committee.

Ombudspersons for 2024/25

Paula Cheal paulacheal@zoho.com

Mary Knickle quinte@ns.sympatico.ca

Kathy Lucking kathylucking.lucking@gmail.com

Care Committee

The Care Committee is the next step in the process if no resolution is found through an Ombudsperson. The Care Committee is an arms-length committee mandated to conduct mediation by offering compassionate listening and determining further concrete actions within already available school policies or procedures. It may call in help from professionals familiar with SSWS who have agreed to be contacted as necessary.

The Care Committee for 2024/25

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Paul Pickering paulwpickering@gmail.com