



KEEPING IT COOL

You collect your youngest from her nursery only to find her crying her eyes out with a big graze on her knee. Was this due to the usual rough and tumble of the playground or was it due to staff neglect? You feel you have to say something, but you are not sure of the best way to go about it.

If you feel that you have to complain, step back, let the anger pass and ask yourself what you want to achieve by the complaint. Revenge is never a good option, neither is an unbribled apology. Complaining is never about point scoring, it is about communication and improving the situation. Aim for a win/win solution in which you put across your point, listen to what the staff have to say and leave with a feeling that something positive has been achieved. Remember that all parents have a right to be taken seriously about their concerns.

If the incident has just happened and you are talking to staff, try not to do it in the heat of the moment and let your temper get the better of you. Do not react straight away. If your child comes back to you with a grazed knee, give yourself time and listen to the explanation from the nursery staff; most especially, listen to what your child has to say. If they are still upset, give them time to calm down. Do your best to remain calm and cool, as the situation can be emotionally charged on both sides. I know this is very hard, especially when the person that you love most has just been crying in your arms, but try your best. Keep an even tone and whatever you do, do not shout. This only alienates the staff member and can be quite disturbing for your child. Think before you speak and listen to what the staff member has to say; they too have the best interests of your child at heart.

Complaining in the heat of the moment can lead to defensiveness. What the member of staff says might sound to you like a criticism of your child or even of your parenting skills, so it is important to listen rather than angrily reacting by jumping down their throats. There is usually truth in what they are saying. Listen and ask yourself: does this make sense? If not, at least you can refute it calmly.

When you are complaining, keep to the complaint, do not let external events such as a bad day at the office or being caught in slow-moving traffic intervene. The staff that you are haranguing will not appreciate you taking your bad day out on them. It is the quickest way of closing down any form of meaningful communication. Also, keep to the present complaint; do not bring in past situations. I know when you are in a complaining mood it is easy just to add "and another thing", but if the member of staff is unaware of past issues it just causes confusion.

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Complaining often means that you are concentrating upon the self, and your internal emotions are blocking out or misrepresenting what is being said to you. Make sure you understand what the staff member is telling you. If you miss it or do not understand it, there is no shame in asking them to repeat it. In return, make sure that they understand your worries and what you are saying to them. At the end of the meeting, when feelings are less emotional, try to recap any points and agree a plan of action.

If the problem does not get resolved there and then, you can set an appointment to see the staff member or their supervisor. Now you have time to plan what you are going to say, in a calm and reasonable way. Go with an open mind, as progress is made through a spirit of cooperation, not a spirit of division. If the nursery or school is in the wrong, accept an apology, but also wait to hear what action plan they will put in place to prevent this incident happening again to your or any other child. If you still find that you are not being acknowledged, you have the right to take the complaint to an even higher level or an outside regulatory body.

Throughout the whole of this process, remember that the whole point of this process is not to help you, or the nursery school, but for your child.