



Protected Disclosures (Whistleblower) Policy

Policy Statement:

Pennant Hills Before and After School Care Service Inc, supported by the Parent Management Committee as the approved provider of the education and care service, is committed to ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of children in our care. We provide a safe and confidential process for reporting any wrongdoing, misconduct or any matter that may put the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or children at risk within our service.

We are committed to supporting and building a culture of integrity and accountability by encouraging the reporting of wrongdoing or suspected wrongdoing. We will ensure that anyone making a report can do so without fear of detrimental action.

The integrity of Pennant Hills Before and After School Care Service relies upon service leaders, educators, staff, volunteers, contractors and sub-contractors, as well as parents and carers, speaking up when they become aware of wrongdoing.

We will not tolerate or condone the taking of any negative action or detrimental action against anyone who intends to disclose or has disclosed wrongdoing.

This policy sets out:

- How Pennant Hills Before and After School Care Service will deal with protected disclosures made under the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law (NSW) (the National Law).
- Who to contact if you want to make a report.
- How to make a report.
- The protections are available to you when you make a protected disclosure under the National Law.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Code of Conduct and Management of Complaints policy.

When Pennant Hills Before and After School Care Service receives a protected disclosure, we have obligations including with respect to:

- protecting the maker of the protected disclosure, and
- dealing with the protected disclosure.

Definitions:

Protected Disclosure: A disclosure of information or provision of documents that an offence against the National Law has been or is being committed or the safety, health or wellbeing of children being educated and cared for by an education and care service are at risk.

Detriment: To a person, means disadvantage to the person including damage or loss to the person, damage caused to the person's property, damage caused to the person's reputation, intimidation, bullying or harassment, unfavourable treatment to the person's career, profession, employment or trade, discrimination, prejudice or adverse treatment, or disciplinary action.

Considerations:

- Section 300E (1) (a) (2) of the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law (NSW) (the National Law): each approved provider and approved education and care service must have a Protected Disclosures Policy
- Children (Education and Care Services) National Law
- Education and Care Services National Regulations
- Children's Guardian Act 2019 (NSW)
- Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)
- Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)
- Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act (NSW)

Policy:

This policy applies to protected disclosures under the National Law. A protected disclosure means a disclosure of information or provision of documents:

- (a) to the NSW Early Learning Commission in compliance with a request under, or in accordance with the National Law, or
- (b) to the NSW Early Learning Commission or to a manager of an approved provider of an approved education and care service, if the person is making the disclosure honestly, and on reasonable grounds, believes the disclosure shows or tends to show:
 - (i) An offence against the National Law has been or is being committed; or
 - (ii) The safety, health or wellbeing of a child or children being educated and cared for by an education and care service is at risk. Examples of a protected disclosure may include:

- Conduct that endangers or may endanger the safety, health or wellbeing of children.
- Unsafe work practices.
- Illegal activity or breach of the law.

We encourage everyone to speak up about concerns. However, this policy does not apply to disclosures or concerns that relate only to a personal employment grievance or complaint; that does not have significant implications beyond the individual concerned. A matter may still be considered a protected disclosure if it arises from a decision made by an approved provider or approved education and care service in dealing with a previous protected disclosure; or alleged detrimental action relating to a previous protected disclosure. Examples of concerns that are not generally considered a protected disclosure include:

- Performance concerns.
- Employment related decisions that do not involve a breach of workplace laws.
- Concerns relating to engagement, remuneration, or promotion.
- Interpersonal conflict between employees.
- Disciplinary actions, including suspension or termination that are unrelated to a protected disclosure. Personal work-related grievances should be internally raised using Pennant Hills Before and After School Care Service's internal procedure. See Management of Complaints Policy.

Reporting:

Making a Report:

Within Pennant Hills Before and After School Care Service, if you become aware of a matter, you should report it as soon as practicable. You can make a report to the Director or Assistant Director.

If you do not feel comfortable making a report within Pennant Hills Before and After School Care Service, you can make a report to the NSW Early Learning Commission as the regulatory authority in NSW. If you wish to make a report to the NSW Early Learning Commission, you can do so by calling 1800 619 113 or by email: information@earlylearningcommission.nsw.gov.au. You can do so anonymously if you wish.

To obtain protection under the National Law, a report must be made honestly and on reasonable grounds. The person making the report must honestly believe, on reasonable grounds, that the disclosure shows or tends to show that an offence has been or is being committed under the National Law, or that the safety, health or wellbeing of a child or children being education and cared for by an education and care service is at risk.

A person will have reasonable grounds if there is a factual basis for belief, taking into account the circumstances and context.

You are not required to prove the allegations or concern. However, you are encouraged to provide any evidence, including documentation, to support the report.

If a report turns out to be incorrect or unsubstantiated, the reporter can still qualify for the protections under the National Law, provided it was made honestly and on reasonable grounds.

You can make a report in a number of ways:

- In writing – by email or letter to a person who can receive your report.
 - Through a discussion – have a private discussion with a person who can receive your report. This could be done face-to-face, via telephone or virtually.
- Anonymously – write an email or letter or call a person who can receive your report without providing your name or any details that might identify you as the maker of the report. A report can only be considered anonymous if there is no reasonable or practical way of communicating with the person making the report.

You will still be protected under the National Law if you choose to remain anonymous. However, it may be difficult to investigate the matter if you cannot be contacted for further information.

When you make your report, you should provide as much information as possible to assist the report with being dealt with effectively. You should include:

- Any relevant dates, times and location of key events.
- Any names of person(s) involved in the suspected wrongdoing, their role, title and how they are involved.
- Your description of the matter you are disclosing.
- Possible witnesses to what you are disclosing, and
- Other information (including documents) you have that supports your report.

You should report all wrongdoing that you become aware of, even if you are not sure whether it qualifies as a protected disclosure. Reporting plays a crucial role in managing risk and ensuring the safety and integrity of our service. It is important for Pennant Hills BASC to understand what may be occurring as this helps uncover potential wrongdoing including misconduct. Once a report is made, Pennant Hills BASC is responsible for handling it appropriately and in accordance with our obligations under the National Law. If the report does not qualify as a protected disclosure, it may be managed under other internal policies such as our procedures for dealing with reports, allegations or complaints.

Protections and Remedies for Reporters:

When you make a protected disclosure, you are entitled to protections under the National Law. We are committed to taking all reasonable steps to protect you from detriment as a result of making a protected disclosure or being suspected of making a protected disclosure. We are also committed to maintaining your confidentiality as much as possible while the protected disclosure is being dealt with. We will not tolerate any type of detrimental action in response to a protected disclosure.

Detriment may include:

- Injury, damage, or loss.
- Damage caused to property.
- Damage to reputation.
- Intimidation, bullying, or harassment.
- Unfavourable treatment in relation to employment, career or profession discrimination, prejudice, or adverse treatment.
- Disciplinary action or proceedings.

Preventing Harmful Actions:

A person must not take detrimental action against another person because they know, suspect or believe that the person has made or is considering making a protected disclosure, and that belief is a contributing factor to the detrimental action. Detrimental action includes bullying, harassment, intimidation, or disciplinary action. Once we become aware that a protected disclosure has been made, we will undertake a risk assessment and take steps to reduce the risk of detrimental action occurring. Taking serious detrimental action in response to a protected disclosure is a criminal offence under the National Law. The penalties that apply include:

- For an individual - \$34,200.00.
- For a large childcare provider - \$51,600.00.
- Otherwise - \$172,200.00.

It is not a defence to a prosecution for a detrimental action of offence that the suspicion or belief was mistaken.

A person accused of taking detrimental action must demonstrate that the action was not influenced by any suspicion, belief or awareness that a protected disclosure had been or may be made.

A person who makes a protected disclosure may still be subject to reasonable management action, such as ordinary performance reviews or performance management, provided this action is not taken because of the protected disclosure.

Recovery of Damages:

A person may seek damages for injury, damage or loss suffered as a result of serious detrimental action. Liability for these damages is not affected by whether the suspicion or belief behind the action was mistaken.

In proceedings to recover damages, the defendant must prove that they did not have suspicion, belief or awareness, or that it was not a contributing factor to the detrimental action.

Damages may include exemplary (punitive) damages.

A person can apply for damages even if no criminal prosecution has been brought, or if the person has been acquitted of a serious detrimental action of offence on the same, or substantially similar facts.

Ability to Seek an Injunction:

A person who believes serious detrimental action has been taken against them or may be taken against them can apply to the Supreme Court for an injunction to prevent the action or stop it from continuing.

The terms of the injunction may:

- (a) Restrain a person from engaging in behaviour that would constitute serious detrimental action, or
- (b) Require a person to do a thing or an act to remedy the conduct that constitutes serious detrimental action.

An injunction may:

- Restrain a person from engaging in behaviour that would constitute serious detrimental action.
- Require a person to do a thing or an act to remedy the conduct that constitutes serious detrimental action. Examples of what an injunction may include:
 - Requiring a formal apology to be made.
 - Preventing an attempt to terminate a person's employment.
 - Reinstating a person to the same or substantially similar role.

The Supreme Court may grant an interim injunction pending determination of the application.

A person can apply for an injunction even if no prosecution has been brought, or if the person has been acquitted of a serious detrimental action of offence on the same, or substantially similar facts.

Immunity from Costs Orders:

A person who makes an application for damages under the National Law will not be liable to pay costs incurred by another party to the proceedings unless:

- The person instituted the proceedings vexatiously or without reasonable cause, or
- The person's unreasonable act or omission caused the other party to incur the costs.

A person who applies for an injunction under the National Law will not be liable to pay the other party's legal costs, unless:

- The proceedings were brought vexatiously or without reasonable cause, or

- The person's unreasonable act or omission caused the other party to incur the costs.

Immunity from Civil and Criminal Liability:

Some people are subject to a duty of confidentiality that prevents them from disclosing certain information obtained at work. To make a protected disclosure, it may be necessary to override or disregard these confidentiality duties. In such cases, a person who makes a protected disclosure cannot be disciplined, sued, or criminally charged for breaching confidentiality.

This protection does not cover liability for the person's own past conduct that is disclosed as part of the protected disclosure.

A person making a protected disclosure may have a defence of absolute privilege under the Defamation Act 2005 in relation to defamation of proceedings arising from the disclosure.

Confidentiality:

We are committed to maintaining the confidentiality of anyone who makes a protected disclosure as far as possible while the matter is being addressed. All information received from a person making a protected disclosure will be treated sensitively and confidentially.

Reporting Detrimental Action:

If you experience detrimental action as a result of your report, including bullying, intimidation, harassment, or other adverse treatment, you should report this immediately. Reports can be made directly to the Director or to the NSW Early Learning Commission.

How We Will Deal with your Protected Disclosure:

After receiving a report, we will assess the information to determine whether it is a protected disclosure, how it is to be handled, and whether an investigation is required. The person who made the report will receive an acknowledgment that the report has been received. This acknowledgement will:

- Confirm the report will be assessed to identify whether it qualifies as a protected disclosure.
- Advise that the National Law applies to how the report is managed.
- Provide clear information on how to access this protected disclosure policy.
- Include details of a contact person and available support options.

If the report is determined to be a protected disclosure, we will inform the person who made it how we intend to manage the report. This will happen as soon as possible after the report has been assessed.

Ways we may deal with a protected disclosure include:

- Investigating the wrongdoing internally
- Referring the report to a third party such as the NSW Early Learning Commission or other relevant agencies. Depending on the circumstances, we may provide the person who made the disclosure with details of the referral.
- Deciding to take no action on the report (ie not investigating it or referring it). If this occurs, we will explain the reasons for this decision to the person who made the disclosure.

If we investigate the wrongdoing, we will provide updates to the person making the protected disclosure at key stages including:

- When the investigation begins.
- While the investigation is in progress.
- When the investigation has been finalised.

Once the investigation is complete, we may provide the person who made the disclosure with additional information. Subject to privacy and confidentiality requirements, this information may include:

- A summary of the investigation results, including whether any wrongdoing was found.
- Information about any action taken as a result of the investigation.

Some details of the findings or actions may need to remain confidential to comply with legal obligations. We will always balance the right of a person making the disclosure to know the outcome with our other legal obligations.

If a disclosure was made anonymously, it may not be possible to provide updates or outcomes to the reporter.

Report Not a Protected Disclosure:

Not all reports of wrongdoing will be protected disclosures under the National Law. If we assess that a report is not a protected disclosure, we will inform the person who made the report.

Even if a report is not a protected disclosure, we will still need to assess the concern and determine whether it should be handled under another process or pathway, such as through our internal complaints or grievances procedures. If another process applies, the report will be managed according to the relevant policies.

Protecting the Confidentiality of the Maker of a Public Disclosure:

We understand that people who make a protected disclosure may wish for their identity, and the fact that they have made a report remain confidential.

We are committed to maintaining confidentiality as far as possible while the protected disclosure is being managed.

The identity of a person making a protected disclosure will be kept confidential unless any of the following apply:

- They consent to this information being disclosed.
- Where it is generally known that the person is the maker of the protected disclosure because of their voluntary self-identification as the maker.
- Where the person who has received the protected disclosure reasonably considers it necessary to disclose the information to protect a person from detriment.
- It is reasonably necessary to disclose the information during an investigation to ensure procedural fairness. In these cases, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect their identity.
- Pennant Hills BASC is required or permitted to disclose this by law.
- It is otherwise in the public interest to disclose the identifying information. We will take practical steps to avoid unnecessarily revealing information that could identify the person making the protected disclosure.

If confidentiality cannot be maintained or is unlikely to be maintained, Pennant Hills BASC will:

- Discuss with the maker of the protected disclosure the fact that their identity may become known.
- Implement strategies to minimise the risk of detrimental action occurring, including regularly updating any risk assessments and risk management plan.
- Provide additional support to the maker of the protected disclosure.
- Remind persons who become aware of identifying information of the consequences for failing to maintain confidentiality and that engaging in serious detrimental action is a criminal offence and may also be a disciplinary matter.

How we will Assess and Minimise the Risk of Serious Detrimental Action:

Once we become aware of a protected disclosure, we will assess and take steps to minimise the risk of serious detrimental action, other than reasonable management action, being taken against someone as a result of the disclosure. There is no obligation on a person who receives a protected disclosure to disclose or confirm that a protected disclosure has been made. Wherever practicable, we will take steps to avoid the need to identify the nature of the source of the concern to maintain the confidentiality of the maker of the protected disclosure.

In circumstances where it is necessary or appropriate to refer to a protected disclosure being received, we will make appropriate redactions, use gender neutral terms and avoid the inclusion of contextual information which could identify the maker of the disclosure.

Where appropriate, we will consider the risks to:

- The person who made the protected disclosure.
- The person who is the subject of the protected disclosure.
- Investigators.
- Witnesses.

Where appropriate, we will:

- Consult with these individuals about any concerns they may have.
- Identify and implement strategies to reduce the risk of detrimental action.
- provide a secure and confidential way for them to communicate with Pennant Hills BASC.
- offer access to a support person or other available support.

Dealing with Allegations of Detrimental Action:

If Pennant Hills BASC becomes aware of an allegation that a detrimental action has occurred or may occur, we will take all reasonable steps to address the action and protect those affected.

This may include:

- Taking immediate action to stop or prevent detrimental action.
- implementing measures to protect the person or persons affected.
- Taking appropriate disciplinary action against anyone that has taken detrimental action.
- referring to any evidence of detrimental action to the NSW Early Learning Commission.

Dealing with Wrongdoing:

If, after an investigation, it is found that there was wrongdoing or other misconduct that has occurred, Pennant Hills BASC will take the most appropriate action to address the wrongdoing or misconduct. This may include disciplinary action agreed between the Director and the Parent Management Committee.

The Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor will:

- Ensure that obligations under the National Law and National Regulations are met, with child safety and wellbeing prioritised at all times.
- Foster a workplace culture where reporting is encouraged and integrity is promoted within the service.
- Ensure there are systems in place for receiving disclosures.
- Ensure managers understand their responsibilities in relation to protected disclosures.
- Ensure protected disclosures are handled in accordance with the National Law and this policy.
- Ensure educators, staff, students and volunteers are aware of and comply with this policy and know how to access it.
- Ensure regular training and awareness sessions are provided about the importance of persons making protected disclosures and the protections available to persons making protected disclosures.
- Ensure risk assessments are conducted as soon as a report is received to identify and manage any potential harm.

Managers will:

- Ensure obligations under the National Law and National Regulations are met with child safety and wellbeing prioritised at all times.
- Foster a workplace culture where reporting is encouraged and integrity is promoted within the service.
- Understand and comply with their responsibilities in relation to protected disclosures under the National Law.
- Ensure protected disclosures are handled in accordance with the National Law and this policy.

- Ensure that educators, staff, students and volunteers are aware of and comply with this policy and know how to access it.

Educators / Volunteers / Students will:

- Immediately report all incidents, allegations and complaints relating to child safety and any breaches or suspected breaches of the National Law.
- Cooperate with any assessment or investigation of a protected disclosure.
- Maintain confidentiality in relation to protected disclosures and investigations.
- Support colleagues who make protected disclosures.
- Complete required training and awareness sessions on the importance of making protected disclosures and the protections available to persons making protected disclosures.

Parents / Carers will:

- Be informed of their right to make a protected disclosure.
- Have access to information on how to make a protected disclosure
- Be protected when making a protected disclosure.
- Have confidence that disclosures will be taken seriously and investigated appropriately.

Monitoring and Review:

Pennant Hills BASC will review this policy annually or more frequently as required by legislation or significant incidents to ensure continuous improvement and to maintain the highest standards of child safety.

Accessibility of this Policy:

This policy is available and accessible at all times on our website (www.pennanthillsbasc.com) or in our Policies folder located in our office. Establishing a policy on Protected Disclosures on its own is not enough to ensure that staff understand the importance of making protected disclosures and the protections available to them when making protected disclosures. The Service will provide appropriate training and awareness sessions for all managers and staff to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities relating to protected disclosures. Training and awareness sessions will be provided every 12 to 24 months, and whenever significant changes are made to the law relating to protected disclosures.

Version	Action	Date
V.1	Original endorsement	5 th May 2026
V.1	Approved by PMC	20 th May 2026