

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

At Little Sponges, we follow our legal obligations as an employer at all times including dealing with any disciplinary matter in a fair and consistent manner. We have a policy and procedure that sets out our process.

Legal obligations

Our legal obligations as an employer are detailed in the ACAS Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures. This code of practice was introduced in April 2009 and updated 2015. A full copy of the ACAS Code of Practice and the accompanying guidance can be obtained from the ACAS website www.acas.org.uk.

Objectives and guiding principles

The objective of this procedure is to set out the standards of conduct expected of all staff and to provide a framework within which the Manager can work with employees to maintain satisfactory standards of conduct and to encourage improvement where necessary.

It is our policy to ensure that any disciplinary matter is dealt with fairly and consistently. We will take the necessary steps to establish the facts and to give employees the opportunity to respond before taking any formal action.

This procedure does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. We may also vary this procedure, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case.

The procedure applies to all employees regardless of length of service.

Minor conduct issues can often be resolved informally between the employee and the Manager. These discussions should be held in private and without undue delay whenever there is a cause for concern. Where appropriate, a note of any such discussions may be held on the employee's personnel file.

Formal steps will be taken under this procedure if the matter is not resolved, or if informal discussion is not appropriate (due to the serious nature of the allegation against you).

The employee will not normally be dismissed for a first act of misconduct, unless we decide it amounts to gross misconduct or the employee has not yet completed their probationary period.

The procedure

Our aim is to deal with disciplinary matters sensitively and fairly. All employees must treat all information in connection with the disciplinary procedure and its investigation as confidential.

Where there has been a serious allegation of misconduct or gross misconduct and/or there are serious concerns regarding the employee's capability, we aim to establish the facts quickly and no disciplinary action will be taken until the matter has been fully investigated. The employee will be informed if a formal complaint is made against them, and if necessary, they may be suspended on full pay pending the outcome of the investigation and disciplinary procedure.

STAGE 1: INVESTIGATION

- We will investigate any allegations/concerns quickly and thoroughly to establish whether a disciplinary hearing should be held;
- The purpose of the investigation is to establish a balanced view of the facts relating to the allegations against the employee. The amount of investigation will depend on the nature of the allegations and will vary from case to case. It may involve interviewing and taking statements from the employee and any witnesses, and/or reviewing relevant documents.
- Investigation interviews are solely for the purpose of fact-finding and no decision on the disciplinary procedure will be taken until after the disciplinary hearing;
- The employee is not normally allowed to bring a companion to an investigatory interview. However, we may allow them to bring a work colleague.
- If the investigations lead us to reasonably believe there are grounds for disciplinary action, we will write to the employee outlining the allegations against them, the basis of the allegations and the potential consequences. The employee will be invited to a disciplinary hearing to discuss the matter. They will be sent any copies of evidence which may be referred to in the hearing (e.g. witness statements, or a summary if the statements of the witness's identity is to remain confidential, and minutes of meetings).

Suspension

- If we believe that you may be guilty of misconduct, which we consider (at our absolute discretion) to be serious misconduct, where relationships have broken down, or where we have any grounds to consider that our property or responsibilities to other parties are at risk, or where we consider in our absolute discretion that your continued presence at the nursery would hinder an investigation, we will be entitled to suspend you on full pay;
- Any such suspension will normally last only as long as required to enable an investigation into the circumstances giving rise to such belief of serious misconduct to be carried out and any disciplinary hearing to be convened;
- Any such period of suspension is not a punishment, nor considered as disciplinary action against you, nor does it imply that any decision has been taken about your case.

STAGE 2: INVITE TO DISCIPLINARY HEARING

- We will hold the disciplinary meeting to discuss the allegations. The employee will have the right to bring a companion to the meeting and a companion may be a work colleague. The employee must inform us prior to the meeting who their chosen companion is. If their companion is unreasonable, for example, there may be a conflict of interest, we may require the employee to choose someone else;

- If the employee or their companion is unable to attend the meeting, the employee should inform us immediately and we will arrange an alternative time and date. The employee must make every effort to attend the meeting and failure to do so without good cause may be treated as misconduct in itself.

Disciplinary hearing

- During the meeting, we will go through the allegations against the employee and the evidence that has been collated. The employee will be able to state their case and call relevant witnesses (provided the employee gives advice notice and we agree to their attendance) to support the case;
- We may adjourn the disciplinary meeting if we need to carry out further investigations and the employee will be given reasonable opportunity to consider new information;
- The employee will be notified of the decision in writing, usually within seven working days of the hearing;
- If the employee persistently fails to reply to invitations, or persistently fails to attend the arranged hearing without good cause, it may be carried out in their absence and they will be notified of the decision in writing. The employee will retain the right to appeal.

Appeal

- The employee will be given the opportunity to appeal the decision. If they wish to appeal, the employee should state their full grounds in writing and the letter should be sent to Nicole Bacon, Head, within five working days from the date the decision was communicated to them;
- The appeal meeting will be conducted impartially by the Head and Deputy Manager;
- The employee will be able to bring a companion to the meeting and the companion may be a work colleague;
- We may adjourn the appeal hearing if further investigations need to be carried out and the employee will be given reasonable opportunity to consider any new information before the hearing is reconvened;
- We will inform the employee in writing of our final decision as soon as possible, usually within five working days of the appeal hearing.

There is no legal right to appeal beyond this stage.

Disciplinary penalties

In the first instance where less serious offences are concerned, we are most likely to give the employee a verbal warning. This warning will be recorded, and a copy kept in the employee's personnel file with a timescale for improvement or to not re-offend.

The usual penalties for misconduct are set out below. No penalty should be imposed without a hearing. We aim to treat all employees fairly and consistently, and a penalty imposed on another employee for similar misconduct will usually be considered but should not be treated as a precedent. Each case will be assessed on its own merits.

The employee will not normally be dismissed for a first act of misconduct, unless we decide it amounts to gross misconduct or the employee has not yet completed their probationary period.

First Written Warning

A first written warning may be authorised by the Manager. It will usually be appropriate for a first act of misconduct where there are no other active written warnings on the employee's disciplinary record.

Final Written Warning

A final written warning may be authorised by the Manager. It will usually be appropriate for:

- a. Misconduct where there is already an active written warning on the employee record;
- b. Misconduct that we consider is sufficiently serious, to warrant a final written warning even though there are no active warnings on their employee record.

Dismissal

Dismissal may be authorised by the Manager. It will usually only be appropriate for:

- a. Any misconduct during the employee probationary period;
- b. Further misconduct where there is an active final written warning on the employee's record; or
- c. Any gross misconduct regardless of whether there are active warnings on the employee's record. Gross misconduct will usually result in immediate dismissal without notice or payment in lieu of notice (summary dismissal). Examples of gross misconduct are set out below.

Levels of authority

The Manager has the authority to suspend an employee pending investigation.

Gross misconduct

In the case of gross misconduct, the Manager reserves the right to dismiss an employee without notice (or payment in lieu of notice) if, after investigation and a hearing, the Manager is satisfied that there is sufficient justification for so doing.

Duration of warnings

Under normal circumstances, warnings will be valid for the following time periods, although these may vary according to the nature of the occurrence and may therefore be determined by mutual agreement at the time of issue:

- Verbal warning – six months
- First written warning – six months
- Final written warning – 12 months.

On expiry, warnings will be disregarded for future disciplinary purposes.

Alternatives to dismissal

In some cases, we may, at our discretion, consider alternatives to dismissal. These may be authorised by the Manager and will usually be accompanied by a final written warning.

Examples include:

- Demotion
- A period of suspension without pay

Examples of gross misconduct

Examples of what would constitute a gross misconduct offence include:

- Failure to inform the employer of a disqualification;
- Theft or the unauthorised possession of property belonging to the nursery, its employees or families;
- Assault on any employee or persons associated with the Nursery;
- Breach of confidence i.e. the divulging of confidential information relating to the Nursery, its employees or families;
- Dishonesty, including the use of any funds, expenses or allowances for any other purpose than that for which they have been delegated by the Nursery;
- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol whilst on duty
- Serious or persistent breaches of safety rules;
- Fraud including falsification of work records and expense claims;
- Signing in or out for another employee;
- Physical assault or abuse towards a child e.g. hitting a child in chastisement or harsh disciplinary actions;
- Discrimination/harassment in any way against a person;
- Persistent failure to follow nursery documentary systems and procedures;
- Unauthorised absence from work/unacceptable attendance levels;
- Obscene language or other offensive behaviour;
- Negligence in the performance of the employee's duties.

Further behaviour that could constitute gross misconduct is not limited by the above list.

Examples of misconduct

Examples of what would constitute a misconduct offence include:

- Minor breaches of our policies including the Absence Policy, Mobile Phone, and Social Networking Policy, and Health and Safety Policy;
- Minor breaches of the employee contract;
- Damage to, or unauthorised use of, our property;
- Poor timekeeping;
- Time-wasting;
- Refusal to follow instructions and insubordination;
- Unauthorised use of our telephones for personal calls;
- Excessive personal email or internet usage;
- Smoking in the building;

N.B. Some of the misconduct offences above may, dependent on the circumstances and having followed a detailed investigation, also be classed as gross misconduct offences.