

# The language of FAIRNESS

## FAIR DECISION MAKING

*That's not fair!* What do we mean when we say something isn't fair? What exactly *is* fairness? Understanding the language of fairness can help us explain what we mean when we think something is not fair.

There are at least three different parts to the idea of fairness. If you think something isn't fair, you may have issues that fall into one or more of the three parts – (1) the process or the steps taken when making the decision, (2) the outcome or the decision itself or (3) how you were treated in the decision-making process.

### PROCESS

This part includes the steps taken in making a decision:

- Did you know ahead of time that the decision was going to be made?
- Were you given the information considered in making the decision?
- Did you have the chance to give your side of the story, or to dispute information?
- Was the decision maker unbiased and impartial?

### OUTCOME

This part is about the decision itself:

- Do you think the decision is wrong or unreasonable?
- Can you understand why the decision was made?
- Were you given reasons for the decision?
- Does the decision create unnecessary obstacles for you?
- Do you think the decision discriminates against you?

### TREATMENT

Sometimes called the “soft” side of fairness, this part deals with how you were treated during the decision-making process. Fair treatment includes active listening on the part of the decision maker, respecting confidentiality, and demonstrating courtesy and truthfulness. For example, if a mistake occurred, did you receive an apology?

**Think about an event or time in your life when you felt that something was not fair, and answer the following questions:**

- 1. What happened?**
- 2. List at least three reasons why you believe the situation was unfair.**
- 3. Looking at the three parts of fairness above, identify which parts applied in your situation.**