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Environmental sustainability Policy

Best practice-Quality Area 3

PURPOSE

This policy will provide guidelines to assist [Service Name] to take an active role in promoting sustainability across environmental, social, and economic dimensions and contributing to a sustainable future for all.

POLICY STATEMENT

The safety, health, wellbeing, rights and best interests of every child are the paramount consideration and must guide all decisions, actions and practices of educators within the education and care service.

VALUES

[Service Name] is committed to:

- promoting respect for, and an appreciation of, the natural environment among all at the service
- fostering children's capacity to understand and respect the natural environment, and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and land
- supporting the development of positive attitudes and values in line with sustainable practices
- ensuring that educators and other staff engage in sustainable practices during the operation of the service
- fostering children's understanding of sustainability across social, environmental, and economic dimensions
- ensuring practices at the service promote equity, fairness, and shared responsibility for sustainable futures

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others attending the programs and activities of [Service Name].

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
1. Collaborating with the nominated supervisor, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, parents/guardians, children and others at the service to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation *(refer to Attachment 1)*	√	√	√	√	√

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2. Allocating the necessary resources to implement the identified environmental sustainability strategies at the service	√	√			
3. Ensuring the nominated supervisor and all staff are aware of their responsibilities under this *Environmental Sustainability Policy*	√	√			
4. Implementing identified strategies for which they have responsibility at the service *(refer to Attachment 1)*	√	√	√		√
5. Ensuring parents/guardians are aware of, and have access to, the *Environmental Sustainability Policy*	√	√			
6. Ensuring environmental education and practices are incorporated into the curriculum *(refer to Curriculum Development Policy)*		√	√		√
7. Ensuring that the outdoor and indoor spaces are organised and adapted to support every child's participation and to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments *Regulation 113*	R	√	√		√
8. Ensuring the service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible	√	√	√		√
9. Planning opportunities for children to connect with nature and the natural world at the service, including on excursions and at other service events		√	√		√
10. Engaging with the local community, elders or family members to ensure practices are culturally safe, relevant and respectful	√	√	√		√
11. Fostering children's capacity to understand and respect the natural environment and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land	√	√	√		√
12. Developing procedures for caring for pets/animals at the service *Refer to Attachment 2*	√	√			
13. Incorporating celebrations of environmental awareness into the program e.g. National Tree Day, National Recycling Week, Clean Up Australia Day and Walk to Work Day		√	√		√
14. Keeping up to date with current research, resources and best practice through newsletters, journals and support agencies such as Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC)	√	√	√		√
15. Engaging with children and families in practices that promote social and economic sustainability alongside environmental sustainability	√	√	√		√

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16. Providing families with information about environmentally sustainable practices e.g. through displays, fact sheets and local community resources, and by ensuring that they have access to the *Environmental Sustainability Policy*	√	√	√		√
17. Making recommendations to the approved provider about green and sustainable options for the service, that reflect the guidelines within this policy		√	√	√	√
18. Seeking and applying for grants, where appropriate, to support the implementation of strategies within this policy	√	√	√		
19. Encouraging their children to adopt environmentally sustainable practices at both the service and at home				√	

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

"One of the most significant responsibilities that [early childhood] professionals have is to support children to retain the sense of awe and wonder that they are born with, to add to that a desire to nurture and protect what is beautiful, and to encourage them to appreciate that there are many possibilities for honouring life and wonders that the world holds" *(Stonehouse, A. (2006) NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services – refer to Sources).*

Sustainability in early childhood is now understood through three interrelated dimensions: environmental (care for natural systems and resources), social (equity, fairness, wellbeing and cultural respect), and economic (responsible use of resources, long-term viability and ethical decision-making). Embedding these in daily practices empowers children as active citizens who can shape a fairer and more sustainable world.

Current research confirms that experiences in the early years help establish lifelong behaviour and values, and this reinforces the need for sustainability education to be included in early childhood programs. It is important for children to understand their place in the world and the role that they can play in protecting the environment. Children should learn to be environmentally responsible and be empowered to make a difference, and this learning should not wait until the 'formal education' of primary school. Elliot and Davis *(refer to Sources)* state that "early childhood educators have an active and significant role to play ensuring children experience connections with the natural environment in meaningful way which will ultimately promote action for sustainability".

The Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics (2016) requires early childhood professionals in relation to children to "collaborate with children as global citizens in learning about our shared responsibilities to the environment and humanity".

Learning Outcome 2 in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (2016) guides and supports a collaborative approach between professionals, parents and children where, children "are connected with and contribute to their world" and "broaden their understanding of the world in which they live".

Early childhood professionals in collaboration with families are responsible for scaffolding children's learning to develop an environmental identity and consciousness. Maximising children's engagement with the outdoor environment, and integrating access between the indoors and the outdoors, will enable children to actively engage and explore nature and diversify their play experiences. Intentional

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and planned learning spaces that promote the: development of life skills; such as growing and preparing food, waste reduction, minimising consumption and recycling, and use of recycled, reclaimed, improvised, and natural materials will encourage deeper thinking and leverage learning to promote sustainable environmental habits.

Early Learning also have a responsibility to align service practice with the organisation's environmental sustainability policy. Alignment will include practices and behaviours that support activities which contribute to environmental sustainability by reducing waste, pollution and greenhouse gases, the ethical purchasing of products and assisting to minimise the impact of climate change. This includes the commitment to use the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rethink (how our actions effect the environment) philosophy as a guide to monitor current practices and implement changes. A priority to energy efficient alternatives when considering lighting, building products and design will also be considered.

Environmental education can be defined as learning about the environment and how natural systems function; the interconnectedness of plants, animals, humans and the planet we inhabit. Environmental education promotes the growth of knowledge, skills and values about the environment, often with a focus on science and nature. In an early childhood setting, environmental education is integrated into everyday decisions made as part of the curriculum.

Sustainability can be defined in a broader and more holistic context of education for the environment. The complexities of social, environmental and economic systems are acknowledged, and their implications for sustaining life are considered. The aim of sustainability education is to promote a sense of responsibility, respect, empowerment, active participation, enquiry and a desire for social change (adapted from ECA Environmental Sustainability Policy). The goal of sustainability education is to empower children and adults to think and act in ways that meet their immediate needs without jeopardising the potential of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable practice in early childhood settings requires a holistic approach that integrates all aspects of sustainability into service operations.

The National Quality Standard (Quality Area 3: Physical Environment) includes a discussion on the service taking an active role in caring for its environment and contributing to a sustainable future. As service providers to the community, education and care services have an opportunity not only to make reductions to waste, water and energy consumption through their operations, but to role-model sustainable living to young children in a world facing climate change, increasing levels of air, land and water pollution, and depleted natural resources.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- National Quality Standard, Quality Area 3: Physical Environment

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

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DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file on the Policy and Procedure tan at DNMK.com.au

Environmental sustainability: The responsible use and management of the planet's resources to ensure that they remain available and uncompromised for future generations to use and enjoy.

Social sustainability: Ensuring fair, inclusive, and respectful relationships that strengthen community and promote wellbeing.

Economic sustainability: Making responsible, ethical, and long-term decisions about resources and finances to support current and future needs.

Sustainability in ECEC: Practices that integrate environmental, social, and economic dimensions to empower children as active, responsible, and globally aware citizens.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA): Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
- Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA): Guide to the National Quality Standards
- Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA): My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia
- Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA): Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
- Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC)
- Early Childhood Australia: A shared vision for sustainability
- Sustainability Victoria: ResourceSmart Schools
- The Sector: Dr Jane Warren explores the 3 dimensions of sustainability in ECEC

RELATED POLICIES

- Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing
- Educational Program
- Excursions, Regular Outings and Service Events
- Sun Protection
- Supervision of Children
- Water Safety

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required

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- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk *(Regulation 172 (2))*.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Strategies for Environmental Sustainability
- Attachment 2: Caring for pets in an early years' service

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of [Service Name] on Oct 2026

REVIEW DATE: Oct 2029

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ATTACHMENT 1. STRATEGIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

This checklist can be used to promote discussion and formulate an environmental sustainability policy for the service. Many of these strategies were drawn from Mia Hughes' Climbing the little green steps: How to promote sustainability within early childhood services in your local area *(refer to Sources)*. Other strategies can be added to the checklist as required – *refer to Sources* as a starting point for further information. Ensure that responsibility for implementation is allocated to each strategy adopted e.g. approved provider, Nominated Supervisor, educators, parents/guardians, children etc. Agreed strategies should form the basis of the service's Environmental Sustainability Policy.

Strategy	Adopt (Yes/No)	Responsible for implementation (e.g. Nominated Supervisor, educators, etc.)
Data Collection		
Collect baseline data from energy and water bills and monitor waste collection. Use information gathered to set reduction targets and evaluate whether they have been achieved.		
Green purchasing		
Purchase local products		
Purchase recycled products		
Purchase energy and water efficient products		
Purchase organic produce		
Purchase items with minimal packaging		
Purchase chemical-free, green cleaning products		
Purchase formaldehyde-free paint		
Waste		
Minimise waste from one-use, throwaway products (e.g. paper towels, disposable nappies, wet wipes) by changing behaviours and procedures, and using alternative products. The following are some suggestions:		
Install a low energy electric hand dryer		
Cut paper towels in half to reduce waste while working towards using cloth towels or installing a low energy electric hand dryer		
Replace disposable nappies with a nappy wash service		
Replace wet wipes with washable cloths		

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Encourage children to bring a rubbish-free lunch/snack in a reusable container		
Adopt green cleaning practices by using safe and sustainable cleaning products and methods		
Recycle plastic waste (codes #1–#7), glass, paper, cardboard, foil and metal		
Investigate composting of food scraps		
Explore the waste hierarchy of refuse within the educational program i.e. reduce, reuse, repair and recycle		
Refrain from using food items for children's play experiences (e.g. rice, pasta, jelly etc.) as this is wasteful of both the food items, and the water and energy used in production		
Promote recycling and reusing items e.g. through SWAP markets for children's clothing, toys and books		
Energy		
Turn off computers and/or screens when not in use		
Turn off computers and electrical equipment before leaving the building		
Install and use ceiling fans instead of air conditioning, when appropriate		
Close doors and windows when heating or air conditioning the building where possible, while maintaining adequate ventilation. Strategies must be developed for indoor-outdoor programs to enable this to occur		
Turn off fridges that are not in use during extended holiday periods (ensure no food remains and the fridge is cleaned well beforehand)		
Turn lights off when not required. Install light sensors where possible		
Upgrade old appliances with energy efficient appliances		
Water		
Install 5,000–20,000 litre water tanks and consider connecting these to toilets		

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Set limits for water use during play, while acknowledging that water play is important and that children need to use water in order to learn how to conserve it		
Ensure that water from troughs and bowls is reused to water the garden		
Use grey water (containing low salt/phosphate detergents) to water grass and gardens when children are not in attendance at the service		
Install water saving taps in children's bathrooms		
Install dual flush toilets		
Place buckets or watering cans next to drink stations to collect excess water		
Biodiversity		
Grow food crops in vegetable gardens		
Plant fruit trees		
Grow a diverse range of plants and develop children's understanding of how plant diversity encourages animal diversity		
Grow indigenous (native) and water-wise plants		
Water plants in the play space using recycled water where possible. Plants are a precious resource for the planet and should be protected and nurtured		
Transport		
Encourage staff to walk, cycle or catch public transport to work and on excursions, where possible		
Create prominent, effective spaces for the storage of bikes and prams to promote riding and walking to staff and families		
Social sustainability		
Build respectful community partnerships, celebrate cultural diversity, engage children in decision-making, ensure inclusive access to programs		
Economic sustainability		
Choose durable resources over single-use, budget for sustainable purchases, share and borrow equipment with other services, consider long-term cost savings of energy-efficient design		

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Curriculum		
Role-model sustainable practices and behaviours. Actions such as reusing water from a sink and switching off lights when not in use can have a large impact on young children, who are at a formative stage with respect to skills and attitudes		
Aim to counteract the 'throwaway' mentality that children experience every day in relation to waste		
Take every opportunity to talk with young children about sustainable practices, and encourage older children to take part in these practices		
Assign roles such as water, waste and energy monitors to children within the service (consider providing them with badges and charts appropriate to their role). Children are often vigilant at monitoring the behaviour of their peers		
The curriculum offers many opportunities to explore sustainable issues and practices. The following are some suggestions:		
• Create an 'earth hour' each day where no lights/minimal lighting is used e.g. during rest, relaxation or sleep times.		
• Use a range of pictures, books and stories that address environmental sustainability issues		
• Have waste-free days		
• Use improvised, recycled and natural materials for program activities		
• Examine damaged household appliances and explore whether they can be repaired		
• Play a recycling game to promote an understanding of items that can be recycled		
• Investigate alternatives to texta pens and liquid paint, such as powder paint and refillable markers or pencils		
• Join Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC) for more ideas		
Family and community involvement		
Inform families about this policy and the service's approach to environmental sustainability through information sessions, photo displays and newsletters etc.		

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Design a poster outlining the key principles of environmental sustainability, for display in the foyer of the service. This may include a charter of principles and key targets to be achieved		
Become involved in community events such as Earth Hour, World Environment Day and Clean Up Australia Day		

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ATTACHMENT 2: CARING FOR PETS IN AN EARLY YEARS' SERVICE

Observing, interacting with and learning to care for an animal can be valuable part of a child's education and care, enhancing their understanding of relationships, ecology, and the natural world.

While having animals in a service has many advantages, there are a number of concerns that educators must take into account for the safety and welfare of the children as well as the animals.

Procedures should be developed in collaboration with all stakeholders and should be developed to realistically support the co-existence of pets and children.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PET FOR THE SERVICE

If your service has never kept an animal before, it is essential that conversations are had with all families about the prospect of keeping an animal. This ensures parents can provide feedback about the decision as well as information about any allergies, fears or phobias their child may have. This information needs to be taken into consideration before a decision is made on the right animal for the service.

Keeping animals is not suited for all services, there are other exciting ways to introduce animals to children besides keeping them as pets. Other ways animals can be introduced to children can included but not limited to:

- having an outing to a zoo
- inviting visitors and/or programs to the service such as mobile farms or reptile keepers.

Questions to consider when developing guidelines and procedures:

- Who will be responsible for the care and upkeep of the animal, including feeding, health care and cleaning?
- How will the animal be cared for on weekends and during service closure periods?
- What physical space is available in the service? Is it adequate for that specific animal?
- Are all educators and families happy with the decision to keep an animal at the service?
- What time will be available throughout the day to care for the animal or will educators be asked to give up some personal time for this?
- Are there any children or educators at your service who are allergic to, or have phobias of, animals?
- What changes to your service's policies and procedures need to be considered? For example, your hand washing policy will need to be updated to include washing hands after having contact with the animal.
- What are the health and safety risks?
- Do risk assessments also consider social and ethical factors related to children's interaction with animals, including inclusion, fairness, and overall wellbeing?

Services should consider other regulations and standards relating to children's access to animals including:

- animal welfare and ethics policies, legislation and standards
- local, state or territory government licensing requirements (for example, for the keeping of reptiles or freshwater turtles, or limits on the number of chickens)
- Some animals, such as lizards, turtles, snakes, spiders and tropical fish may not be an appropriate choice. Check with a veterinarian if unsure whether a particular animal is suitable for children.

ASSESSING AND MANAGING RISKS

It is acknowledged that keeping animals/pets at in education and care service and allowing children access to animals has many advantages, however there are also considerations that approved providers and educators must bear in mind for the safety and welfare of both the children and the animal/pet. A risk assessment should be completed before choosing the type of animal to have at the service and how the children interact with it. Risk assessments should be conducted yearly, when a new child commences at the service or when circumstances change at the service.

Disease

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Because contact with animals can spread disease, access to animals in an education and care setting requires specific consideration to stop the transmission of infectious diseases. According to health experts, germs can be found on the skin, hair, feathers, and scales of animals as well as in their faeces, urine, and saliva. Although these microorganisms might not harm the animal, they might harm people. Consider *Dealing with Infectious Diseases Policy*

Effective hand washing and cleaning

Both children and adults should wash their hands thoroughly after handling or feeding animals, or after cleaning their bedding, tanks, cages, or enclosures. The task of cleaning bedding, tanks, cages, or enclosures can be incorporated into the educational process. Consider the *Hygiene Policy*

Appropriate supervision

Children should also be appropriately supervised when they have contact with animals to avoid potential injury or harm to the child or the animal. Consider the *Supervision of Children Policy*

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