

## **BUSH KINDER: PLAY BENEFIT AND RISK POLICY**

---

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to clearly provide:

- Details of the benefits of outdoor play in the Bush Kinder environment, including the types of activities to be undertaken
- Give parents/guardians comfort that while aiming to develop the children's self-awareness in managing risks, that appropriate play supervision is provided to ensure the safety and wellbeing of participants at all times
- Procedures for staff and volunteers to ensure that children are appropriately supervised and assisted during play and to ensure the safety of participants.

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

#### **1. VALUES**

Home Road Kindergarten is committed to delivering a Bush Kinder program which:

- Offers children opportunities to safely explore rich, diverse, natural play environments while developing self-confidence, teamwork and social skills and an understanding of their surrounding environment
- Allows children, through play, to experience challenge and develop self-awareness in managing risk according to ability and confidence
- Fosters child-led play at the child's pace
- Gives participants freedom to explore using multiple senses which is fundamental for encouraging creative, diverse and imaginative play.

#### **2. SCOPE**

This policy applies to children, parents/guardians, staff, committee members, authorised persons, volunteers and students on placement working at Home Road Kindergarten during Bush Kinder program sessions.

This policy should be read in conjunction with Attachment 5 – COVID-19 Pandemic and Attachment 6 – COVID-19 Risk Minimisation Plan in our Dealing with Infectious Diseases Policy.

#### **3. BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION**

##### **Background**

Contact with the outdoors can be limited for many children in modern society, and the vital experience of using the outdoors and being comfortable in nature is being lost. We have also developed an over reliance on digital and electronic sources for recreation, learning and socialising.

Home Road Kindergarten Bush Kinder program is intended to support young children through play, to develop responsibility for themselves and others. It will encourage early risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others. In so doing, children learn to take on challenges and accept responsibility.

Under this policy, tree climbing, for example, is encouraged on those trees deemed safe by staff in liaison with the Hobsons Bay City Council Ranger's advice given at regular inspections, with support and guidance offered to children as required. Walking across logs, for example, may require staff support to provide stability until the child feels comfortable to manage the task on their own. Encouragement will be offered according to individual needs.

In a Bush Kinder setting, children learn important lessons – what is slippery, what you can trip over or fall from, how to climb.

##### **Legislation and standards**

Relevant legislation includes but is not limited to:

- *Education and Care Services National Law 2010 (Vic)*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (Vic)*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*

- *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Compliance Codes*
- *First Aid in the Workplace (2008)*

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

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: <http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/>
- Commonwealth Legislation – ComLaw: <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/>

#### 4. DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *General Definitions* section of this manual.

**Appropriate clothing:** (Refer to *Clothing Policy*)

**Footwear:** It is mandatory that children wear appropriate footwear (closed toe with a flexible sole) to facilitate effective tree climbing, balancing on rocks, logs etc. (Refer to *Clothing Policy*)

**Play** (examples): Play activities at Bush Kinder are diverse and vast, but typical activities and goals may include (though not limited to):

Activity	Developmental benefit
Playing imaginative games using the resources nature provides	Open-ended learning allows children to explore at their own pace and with their own challenges
Role play	Shared imagination, drama, team work, recollection of models of behaviour
Building shelters or other large structures from branches, with the help of other children and adults	This requires goal definition, planning, engineering, teamwork and perseverance
Counting objects or looking for mathematical patterns	Mathematical and visual recognition
Drawing scenes	Art, creativity, accurate inspection and copying
Arranging natural available items to make a picture or build something	Art, planning, engineering, teamwork and perseverance, concentration
Memory games using naturally available objects	Memory, naming objects
Listening to stories, singing songs and rhymes	Art, drama, concentration
Playing hide-and-seek with others	Rewards accurate anticipation of the thoughts and actions of others
Walking within the parklands	Improves strength and stamina; preparation (e.g. route selection) improves planning and communication skills
Exploring or reflecting alone	Aids self-awareness and character development
Climbing trees, walking on logs and rocks, and exploring bush (See Attachment 1 for Tree Climbing Risk Benefit Analysis)	Improves strength, balance and physical awareness
Play involving water where it occurs naturally (for example puddles and on walks in the rain in weather conditions and their effect on the Bush Kinder area (wearing waterproofs – see <i>Clothing Policy</i> )	Experience and understanding of all the natural environment

**Tree Climbing:** See Attachment 1: Tree Climbing Risk Benefit Analysis. Note this activity has been singled out as it is an activity likely to cause the most unease amongst parents/guardians.

**Water Play:** Water play during Bush Kinder will take place from time to time, in cases where water occurs naturally, for example, looking and playing with puddles, playing in the rain and on walks wearing waterproofs. There is a large body of water at Newport Lakes Reserve which may be encountered by the Bush Kinder group during a supervised walk. Children will be taught an awareness of bodies of water and associated risks, and will learn appropriate behaviour around water. See Attachment 2: Exposure to Water Risk Benefit Analysis.

## 5. SOURCES AND RELATED CENTRE POLICIES

### Sources

- Forest School at Duffryn Nursery booklet (Wales)  
<http://www.newportlearn.net/duffryninfants/mod/resource/view.php?id=54>
- 'Benefit-Risk Assessment of Tree Climbing' Mind Stretchers Pty Ltd (October 2009)
- 'A Marvellous Opportunity for Children to Learn' Liz O'Brien and Richard Murray, Forestry Commission (2006)
- Wikipedia – 'Forest Kindergarten'

### Centre Policies

- *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*
- *Clothing Policy*
- *Hygiene Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Supervision of Children Policy*
- *Excursions and Service Events Policy*

## PROCEDURES

### The Approved Provider is responsible for:

- Implementing and maintaining this policy which provides clarity to parents/guardians and staff as to types of activities the children may be undertaking in Bush Kinder, while highlighting the benefits of these activities, including improved self-esteem, co-operation and ability to assess and respond to risks
- Providing a safe environment for all participants in the Bush Kinder program
- Ensuring that all parents/guardians are aware of this policy and are provided access to the policy at orientation sessions, in written Bush Kinder material and on the Home Road Kindergarten policy manual and website and made available upon request
- Ensuring staff and volunteers are appropriately educated on procedures detailed in this policy.

### The Nominated Supervisor, Certified Supervisors and all other Bush Kinder Staff are responsible for:

- Completing a safety check to ensure a safe environment for all participants in the Bush Kinder program
- Assessing potential tree climbing trees for sturdiness in liaison with HBCC Ranger
- Ensure strategies to mitigate the risks and hazards of tree climbing (as set out in Attachment 1) are carried out as required
- Education of children on water risks, providing an awareness of bodies of water and associated risks, and teaching them appropriate behaviour around water. Ensure strategies to mitigate risks and hazards in relation to water (as set out in Attachment 2) are carried out as required
- Supervising children at all times and ensuring their safety
- Encouraging the children to do things for themselves e.g. putting on clothes, climbing and holding back branches, assessing risk through conversation with educators
- Talking and listening to the children as much as possible
- Offer help and encouragement during play whenever needed (for example, a more timid child may need support when playing Hide and Seek for the first time)
- Encouraging the children during play to help each other, share and to solve problems together, and give praise when this occurs
- Encouraging children during play to reflect on how they have changed (for example, how they can now walk along a log by themselves)
- Pointing out features, insects, plants, weather, sounds etc. that children may not have noticed
- Take opportunities to reinforce safety routines applicable to play wherever possible

**Parents/guardians are responsible for:**

- Ensuring protective and appropriate clothing is worn to Bush Kinder by their child, in line with policy, including closed toe footwear with a flexible sole to facilitate effective tree/log climbing and balancing on uneven surfaces
- Reinforcing appropriate safety and behaviour strategies
- Reading and being familiar with the policy
- Bringing relevant issues to the attention of both staff and committee

**EVALUATION**

In order to assess whether the policy has achieved the values and purposes the committee will:

- Where deemed appropriate, encourage feedback regarding this policy and its implementation with parents/guardians of children participating in the Bush Kinder program. This can be facilitated through discussions and the annual parent satisfaction survey.
- Ask staff to share their experiences and observations in relation to the effectiveness of this policy.
- Regularly review the policy and centre practices to ensure they are compliant with any new legislation, research or best practice procedures.
- Notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any substantial changes to this policy, which would impact on the supervision or care of children.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment 1: Tree Climbing Risk Benefit Analysis
- Attachment 2: Exposure to Water Risk Benefit Analysis

**AUTHORISATION**

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of Home Road Kindergarten on 11 March 2020.

**REVIEW DATE:** MARCH 2022

## ATTACHMENT 1 - TREE CLIMBING RISK BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Source: 'Benefit-Risk Assessment of Tree Climbing', Mind Stretchers Pty Ltd (October 2009)

### Benefits of Tree Climbing

1. Knowledge: tree characteristics (bark/wood/branches), seasonal changes, weather implications
2. Develop physical motor skills
3. Build self confidence
4. Group co-operation
5. Group awareness
6. Aesthetics/spirituality

### Risks/Hazards and Strategies to Mitigate

Hazard	Precaution
Material on the floor beneath tree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform children of the hazard to allow self-evaluation</li> <li>• Vigorously enforce rule that children may only climb trees thicker than their wrist</li> <li>• Remove where appropriate (staff/children)</li> </ul>
Dead wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove dead wood branches when found</li> <li>• Inform children of the fragility of dead wood - likely to break, encourage children to monitor</li> </ul>
Slippery surfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check condition of climbing surfaces prior to activity</li> <li>• Evaluate weather conditions linked to hazard</li> </ul>
Drop Heights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children self-assess abilities</li> <li>• Children &amp; staff monitor landing spaces for obstacles and remove or change landing location as required</li> <li>• Staff support children when required/requested – hand held etc.</li> </ul>
Protruding branches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children self-assess climbing location</li> <li>• Change climbing location or remove branches if deemed too high risk</li> </ul>

## ATTACHMENT 2 - EXPOSURE TO WATER RISK BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Source: 'Benefit-Risk Assessment of Pond and stream in Auchlone woodland', Mind Stretchers Pty Ltd (October 2010)

### Benefits of Exposure to Water (Lakes, Ponds, Streams)

1. Children become aware of open water and associated risks and learn appropriate behaviour around water.
2. Awareness of seasonal and weather changes to still water and running water.
3. Group care and awareness
4. Children self-risk and assess open water
5. Raised awareness and appreciation of wild life on and near lake pond/stream
6. Calming effect of being near open water
7. Group co-operation
8. Group awareness

### Risks/Hazards and Strategies to Mitigate

Hazard	Precaution
Open water – lake/pond/stream: falling in the water, drowning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff discuss the dangers of deep water with children</li> <li>• Staff have a raised awareness of the risks of the lake</li> <li>• Children have an awareness of the risks having done their own risk assessments of the lake</li> <li>• Children are monitored and supervised by educators who are extra vigilant in the vicinity of water and educator/child ratios are strictly adhered to</li> <li>• Adults count children at regular intervals while children are engaged in activities in the vicinity of water</li> </ul>
Slippery banks on lake/pond/ stream: children falling in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness of slippery surfaces near water edge</li> <li>• Ratio of 1 adult to 2 children near banks of lake when increased risk</li> <li>• No access to banks after heavy rain or flooding and on recommendation by HBCC Rangers</li> </ul>
Contaminated water: illness when consumed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have limited access to the lake</li> <li>• Staff raise awareness of contamination</li> <li>• Children wash hands in clean water after contact with lake</li> </ul>