

Early Learning

Environmental Sustainability Policy

Policy Statement

Uniting Early Learning is committed to:

- supporting children to develop a sense of place, identity and connection to the land, and where possible influencing the community about the same;
- promoting understanding, respect for, and an appreciation of, the natural environment and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land;
- fostering children’s capacity to be active participants in the natural environment,
- 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.

Executive Summary

Current research confirms that experiences in the early years help establish lifelong behaviour and values. 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 conscious and responsible, and develop a sense of empowerment in wanting to make a positive difference. This learning should not wait until the ‘formal education’ of primary school.

Children and educators can take an active role in caring for the environment and contributing to a sustainable future, by developing personal and meaningful strategies and embed these practices into day-to-day operations (*refer to Attachment 16b*).

Environmental awareness as a platform for ongoing environmental education, will be developed by services in collaboration with their community. Services will include natural and living materials in the environment, to support children to use all of their senses, and create experiences to enable children to understand seasons and life cycles. Considering children’s level of understanding and development, as future caretakers and advocates of our environment, educators will encourage positive attitudes and individual and collective responsibility for day-to-day and long-term sustainability.

The curriculum will promote environmental education and foster children’s wonder and current knowledge about the natural world. With a focus on open-ended play opportunities, science and nature experiences will be integrated into the daily program so that children develop deeper understanding of the knowledge, skills and values required when understanding and caring for their environment.

Information and resources will be shared with families to create and support environmental awareness and minimise the impact of human activities on the environment.

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Current Environmental Context

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 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.

Uniting Early Learning also have a responsibility to align service practice with the organisation’s environmental sustainable 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 and Recycle 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.

Attachment 16a: Responsibilities relating to the Environmental Sustainability Policy

Attachment 16b: Strategies for Environmental Sustainability

Attachment 16c: Assessment guide for meeting Element 3.2.3 *Supporting environmental responsibility*

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Reference/Sources

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

Keeping Children Safe Policy of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (approved May 2017).

- *Educational Program and Practice Policy*
- *Excursions Regular Outings and Service Events Policy*
- *Sun Protection Policy*
- *Supervision of Children Policy*
- *Water Safety Policy*
- Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) <http://www.aeee.org.au/get-involved/become-a-member/>
- Code of Ethics (2016) Early Childhood Australia <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics/>
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*: Regulation 113
- *Environmental Action Kit*. World Forum Foundation. <https://worldforumfoundation.org/> (sourced April 2017)
- Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC): <http://www.eeec.org.au>
- *Mud pies and daisy chains: Connecting young children and nature*. Davis, J. M. and Elliott, S. (2004) Every Child, 10(4) p4. Available at: http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pdf/everychild/eco404_mudpies.pdf
- More than just a veggie patch: sustainability and sustainable practices in early childhood education – *the way forward*. Educating Young Children – Learning and teaching in the early childhood years. Vol 20. *Charlotte Bowley and Jenny Clarke (2014)*
- *National Quality Standard*, Quality Area 3: Physical Environment
- *Natural Environments*. Department of Education & Training (Vic) 1 October 2017
- Play Australia <http://www.playaustralia.org.au/>
- *Sustainability in the childcare setting seriously!! Kids!!* <http://www.seriouslykids.com.au/2015/09/sustainability-in-childcare/> (sourced April 2017)
- *Sustainability and the Early Years Framework*. Elliott, S. (2014) Pademelon Press.
- *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework 2016*. Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world.
- *Why Nature Play is Good Fun for our Children*. Zotti, M (2014) Nature Play SA. Australia

Authorisation

This policy was adopted by Uniting Early Learning on: 21 September 2018

Review

This policy is to be reviewed by 30 September 2020

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