

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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Attachment 16a: Responsibilities relating to the Environmental Sustainability Policy

Approved Provider

- Ensure collaboration occurs between the Approved Provider/Licensee, Responsible Person, educators, staff, parents, children and the community to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation.
- Allocate the necessary resources to implement the identified environmental sustainability strategies at the service.
- Ensure the Responsible Person and all staff are aware of their responsibilities under this policy.
- Ensure appropriate strategies (*refer to Attachment 16b*) are implemented to support environmental sustainability.
- Ensure parents are aware of and have access to this policy.

Responsible Person

- Implement identified strategies for which you have responsibility at the service (*refer to Attachment 16b*)
- Ensure environmental education and practices are incorporated into the curriculum
- Provide 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 this policy.
- Engage with families and the broader community to develop a planned approach to initiating and maintaining sustainable practices.
- Make recommendations to the Approved Provider/Licensee about green and sustainable options for the service that reflect the guidelines within this policy.
- Seek and apply for grants, where appropriate, to support the implementation of strategies within this policy
- Keep up to date with current research, resources and best practice through newsletters, peer-reviewed journals, support agencies such as *Environmental Education in Early Childhood* and relevant professional learning opportunities.
- Connect with local professional organisations / the community to work collaboratively on sustainable projects.
- Reference environmental plans in service philosophy.

Educators

- Engage in activities that support the service to become more environmentally sustainable (e.g. recycling, water conservation, minimising use of electricity, repairing equipment, recycling and reducing the use of packaging).
- Incorporate environmental education and sustainable practices within the curriculum, including celebrations of environmental awareness e.g. National Tree Day, National Recycling Week, Clean up Australia Day, Walk to Work Day and United Nations Environmental Day.
- Plan opportunities for children to connect with nature and the natural world at the service, including on excursions, regular outings and at other service events.
- Follow the strategies identified and outlined in this policy.

Note: Volunteers and students, while at the service, are responsible for following this policy and its procedures.

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Attachment 16b: Strategies for Environmental Sustainability

This checklist can be used to promote discussion and formulate environmental sustainability protocols for a service. Many of these strategies were drawn from: *Climbing the little green steps: how to promote sustainability within early childhood services in your local area.* (Hughes, M. 2007). Other strategies can be added to the checklist as required – refer to *Reference/sources* as a starting point for further information.

Strategy	Adopt (Yes No)	Responsible for implementation (e.g. Responsible Person, Educational Leader, educators, etc.)
Data Collection		
Engage educators, families and children to 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.		
Replace paper towels with individual cloth towels on a peg located in the bathroom or at each child's locker, and washed each week.		
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.		
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.		

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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.		
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.		
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.		

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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.		
Create and promote 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.		
Consider establishing a community garden or exploring a bush or beach kindergarten program, where appropriate.		
Family and community involvement		
Inform and engage families and community members about this policy and the service's approach to environmental sustainability through information sessions, service and community photo displays and newsletters, newspaper articles etc.		
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.		
Engage with families and/or the broader community on joint community/service projects, such as Earth Hour, World Environment Day and Clean Up Australia Day.		

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Attachment 16b: Assessment guide for meeting, *Supporting environmental responsibility* (Element 3.2.3)

The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible.

The educational program is to contribute to the outcome that each child will be connected with and contribute to his or her world.

Children:

- are supported to appreciate and care for natural and constructed environments
- interact with vegetation and natural materials in the environment
- explore insects and animals in their habitats to develop their understanding of biodiversity

Children participate in environmentally sustainable practices that:

- support their engagement with and respect for the natural environment
- increase their awareness of the impact of human activity
- build a sense of responsibility for caring for the environment
- are meaningful, relevant to the service context and community, and
- connect service operations with the educational program and practice

Children given opportunities to increase their:

- knowledge of and respect for natural and constructed environments
- awareness of the interdependence of living things

Educators:

- develop environmental awareness and programs as a platform for ongoing environmental education
- develop and implement strategies to support children to be environmentally responsible and to show respect for the environment
- foster wonder and knowledge about the natural world
- encourage children's learning through investigation and exploration of the natural environment
- use different ways to incorporate animals and plants into the program to
- support children's understanding of ecology and the environment
- foster children's capacity to understand and respect the natural environment and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land
- share information and support children to access resources about the environment and the impact of human activities on environments
- provide spaces that promote the development of life skills, such as growing and preparing food, waste reduction and recycling, and children being actively engaged in these experiences
- implement the service's environmental strategy.

*National Quality Standard and Operational Requirements
Guide to the National Quality Standard*

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