

1.04 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Purpose Statement

The main aim of an environmental program for children is to provide them with knowledge, skills and attitudes to assist them to become environmentally responsible. Participating in environmentally sustainable activities can encourage children's sense of responsibility and empowerment. Staff and educators in children's services can provide opportunities for children to connect with and embrace the natural world (Lauren Boyle Putting Children First NCAC; 2006).

Physical environments, which include natural features, add interest and stimulation and create additional variety for children's learning.

Windermere's Early Childhood Education and Care Services (ECECS) are committed to making choices about resources, materials, spaces, layout, air and light quality and access to a range of opportunities in the indoor and outdoor that has a direct impact on children and their ability to engage in the natural environment and learn from exploration and interaction.

Scope

This policy applies to all salaried full time and part time staff (including casual), educators, contractors, volunteers and students.

Definitions

Natural environment: includes a variety of materials born by nature, not manufactured.

Sustainable Practices: Practices that reduce harm to the environment and minimise the use of natural resources

Policy Statement

WINDERMERE ECECS WILL PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO INTERACT WITH THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, SUPPORTING THEIR CONNECTION TO THE EARTH AND ITS NEEDS.

Procedures

Windermere will support and encourage process and practices in educators that actively promote environmental sustainability and provide opportunities for children to connect with and embrace the natural world. These processes and practices include:

Creating a Natural Environment for Children

1. Creating play spaces that provide children with opportunities to explore and experience the natural environment
2. Ensuring that the outdoor education and care environment has adequate naturally shaded areas to protect children from ultraviolet radiation from the sun
3. Creating, where possible, garden areas that reflect the local natural habitat and encourage native wildlife into the education and care environment



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4. Creating opportunities for children to discuss and learn from natural wildlife experiences
5. Using natural items such as seed pods, pebbles, leaves and sticks for collage and sorting, matching and counting games, painting with natural implements such as sticks, leaves pebbles or adding bark and twigs to sand play.

Examples - Creating a Natural Environment in an Education Setting

Purchase plants with help from children on excursion to a local market or nursery

Involve children in planting a sensory herb and flower garden for colour, smell and texture

Build a tepee cubby house constructed from bamboo or other vines/garden matter

Play 'hide and seek' using pebbles to lead children to hidden object

Involve children in raking up leaves and placing in a pile to be 'jumped' on or 'thrown' in the air

Fill small watering cans or spray bottles with water and encourage children to water garden plants

Find an area in your garden for a 'digging pit'. Children love to dig and transport dirt in trucks, buckets or old plastic plant pots

Lay a piece of scrap plywood (roughly 50cms square) on the ground in a quiet, vegetated area of your outdoor play space. Leave it for a couple of days, and then periodically check to see what's living underneath – like ants, slugs, snails and millipedes

Involve children in building a bird house and then watch and listen to birds feeding and/or nesting





Lay a log in your outdoor play area for balancing, sitting and hiding

Non-Toxic Play Environments

1. Education and care services must ensure that play environments surrounded by trees and shrubs are non-toxic and safe for children.
2. Where existing plants and shrubs are identified as toxic or poisonous, these must be removed or guarded to prevent access by children.








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Ensuring a Non-Toxic Play Environment - Plants to Avoid		
Common Name	Botanic Name	Image
Angels' Trumpet, Datura	Brugmansia spp. / Datura spp	
Apple-of-Sodom	Solanum linnaeanum	
Arum lily (white), Calla lily	Zantedaschia aethiopica	
Autumn crocus, meadow Saffron	Colchicum autumnale	







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Belladonna, Deadly Night Shade	Atropa Belladonna	
Bittersweet, Woody Nightshade	Solanum dulcamara	
Spanish and Weaver's Broom	Spartium junceum	
Castor Oil Plant, Ricin	Ricinus communis	
Coral Tree	Coral Tree	



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Daphne	Daphne spp.	
Day Jasmine, White Cestrum, Green Cestrum, Chilean Cestrum, Green Poisonberry	Cestrum diurnum, Cestrum spp.	
Delphinium	Delphinium x cultorum	
English Ivy	Hedera helix	
Foxglove	Digitalis purpurea	



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Glory Lily	Gloriosa superba	
Hellebore, Winter Rose	Helleborus spp.	
Water Hemlock (Cowbane)	Cicuta virosa	
Lantana	Lantana camara	
Larkspur	Consolida ambigua	

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Lily-of-the-Valley	Convallaria majalis	
Monkshood	Aconitum napellus	
New Zealand Laurel	Corynocarpus laevigatus	
Nightshade, Blackberry	Solanum nigrum + spp	



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Oleander	Nerium oleander	
Bushman's Poison; Poison Arrow Plant, Wintersweet	Acokanthera oblongifolia, Acokanthera oppositifolia	
Rosary Bean, Crab's Eye	Abrus precatorius	
Sheep Laurel, Mountain Laurel	Kalmia latifolia, Kalmia angustifolia	

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White Cedar Tree	Melia azedarach	
Wild Mushrooms (Death Cap, Fly Agaric and Yellow Stainer Mushroom)	Amanita spp. Agaricus xanthodermus	
Yellow Oleander, Daffodil Tree	Cascabela thevetia	

REF: Kidsafe NSW Playground Advisory Unit – Grow Me Safely – Plants to Avoid (www.kidsafensw.org)

Creating Opportunities for Sustainability

3. Creating opportunities to experience and to discuss with children sustainable practices
4. Whenever possible, using recycled or handmade equipment as well as manufactured resources for activity based learning
5. Sustainability to be represented in planning for learning based activities
6. Windermere will support each educator to complete a sustainability audit annually
7. Windermere will support all educators in developing and implementing an individual sustainability plan.



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Examples - Creating Opportunities for Sustainability in an Education Setting

Use washing line rather than clothes dryer to dry wet clothes, bed sheets, tea towels etc

Turn off lights when not in use

Use natural light and ventilation when adequate

Ensure computer, printer, photocopier etc are turned off at the end of each day

Switch to compact, efficient light globes

Make sure children are appropriately dressed, thus requiring less artificial heating/cooling

Educate children to act as *Energy Experts*, noting lights left on, proper use of heating and cooling, appliances left on etc. The children can become the driver of sustainable behaviour change.

Relevant Legislation/Standards

- National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care Services including:
 - Education and Care Services National Law 2011
 - Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011

Related Policies & Links

- ECECS Policy and Procedure Manual
- www.kidsafensw.org/growmesafely