

Yarram Early Learning Centre Environmental Sustainability Policy

Quality Area 3: Physical Environment

PURPOSE

This policy provides guidelines to assist Yarram Early Learning to take an active role in caring for the environment, and promoting and contributing to sustainable futures for all.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Yarram Early Learning is committed to:

- promoting respect for, and an appreciation of, the natural environment throughout the Yarram Early Learning Centre
- ensuring educators foster children's understandings of care and appreciation for the natural environment, and the interconnections between people, plants, animals and the land
- supporting the development of children's positive attitudes and values to become advocates and activists for sustainability both in the centre and beyond
- ensuring staff are enabling children's agency and action for ongoing practices that commit all to sustainable patterns of living
- promoting understandings of intergenerational equity such that the needs of the present generation are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs
- ensuring that educators/staff engage in and critically reflect on sustainable practices that are integral to promoting sustainability within the centre
- respecting the wisdoms of Indigenous peoples who have lived sustainably on this land for generations.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Certified Supervisor, educators, staff, students on placement, volunteers, parents/guardians, children and others attending the programs and activities of Yarram Early Learning Incorporated, including during offsite excursions and activities.

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

Background

“Every young child can become a local and global citizen with awareness of sustainability issues based on their own experiences and contexts. Practitioners support children by implementing educational practices with children to promote care for themselves, others, and the world as well as skills for critical thinking,

negotiation, problem-solving, and action competence. Children's active participation is central to current pedagogical practice and reflects contemporary images of young children as co-constructors in learning. Children can be empowered to be active citizens in their daily lives for local and global sustainability.

Together with teachers, they can challenge unsustainable everyday lifestyles and inequities in early childhood settings and the wider community, thus making a proactive contribution to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable world. Young children must be visible participants in the wider community and recognized as current and future citizens with skills to contribute toward changing our ways of being and co-constructing sustainable futures." *S.Elliott, E.Ärlemalm-Hagsér (2019) (refer to Sources).*

"As the impact of humans on the Earth and on its ecological systems that sustain us become more visible — in terms of climate change, resource depletion, and species extinctions — so, too, it is becoming clearer that living sustainably is essential, not optional (Elliott, 2010 – refer to sources) To live sustainably requires a mind shift for many people. Education for Sustainability is about promoting such a mind shift. Bonnett (2004 – refer to sources) describes sustainability as a "frame of mind," a frame that impacts on every thought, decision, or action and a frame that is inclusive of social, economic, and environmental perspectives. Education for sustainability is about questioning the way we live, the impacts we create as a unique part of Earth's systems, and about creatively thinking of ways to live more lightly on the Earth. (Elliott, 2010, p. 1– refer to sources)"

Current research confirms that experiences in the early years help establish lifelong behaviours and values, and this reinforces the need for education for sustainability to be included in early childhood programs. It is important for children to understand their interrelationships with the Earth and the role that they can play in both actively protecting and restoring the environment. Children can 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. Elliott 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 a meaningful way which will ultimately promote action for sustainability".

Education for sustainability requires holistic learning about the environment and how natural systems function; the interconnectedness of plants, animals, humans and the planet we inhabit. Education for sustainability promotes the growth of knowledge, skills and values about the social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions of sustainability (UNESCO, 2010). In an early childhood setting, education for sustainability is embedded into everyday decisions made as part of the curriculum and centre practices. The goal 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 practices in early childhood settings requires a critically reflective approach that integrates all aspects of sustainability into service operations.

The National Quality Standard (Quality Area 3: Physical Environment) includes a statement about each 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
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017
- National Quality Area 2: Children's Health and Safety
- National Quality Area 3: Physical Environment
 - Element 3.2.3: Environmentally responsible.

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.

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.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- *Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia:* <http://education.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework#key%20documents>
- Department of Education, Australian Government (2011) *'Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia:* <http://docs.education.gov.au/documents/educators-guide-early-years-learning-framework-australia>
- Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC): <http://www.eeec.org.au/index.php>
- *Guide to the National Quality Standard*, ACECQA: www.acecqa.gov.au
- Department of Education, Australian Government, *My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia:* https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-05/my_time_our_place_framework_for_school_age_care_in_australia_0.pdf
- *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework:* <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/veyldf.aspx>
- Elliott, S. (2010). *Essential, not optional: Education for Sustainability in Early Childhood Education*. Exchange Press, Redmond: W.A.
- Education for Sustainable Development: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>
- Growing Minds: http://shellharbourkids.com.au/media/GMGC_ResourceKit_V2.pdf

SERVICE POLICIES

- *Child Safe Environment Policy*
- *Curriculum Development Policy*

- *Incursions and Excursions Policy*
- *Nutrition, Oral Health and Active play Policy*
- *Sun Protection Policy*
- *Supervision of Children Policy*
- *Occupational, Health and Safety Policy*
- *Water Safety Policy*

PROCEDURES

The Approved Provider is responsible for the following:

- Collaborating with the Nominated Supervisor, educators, staff, parents/guardians, children and others at the service to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability).
- Allocating the necessary resources to implement the identified environmental sustainability strategies at the service.
- Ensuring the Nominated Supervisor and all staff are aware of their responsibilities under this *Environmental Sustainability Policy*.
- Ensuring the identified strategies (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability) are implemented at the service.
- Ensuring parents/guardians are aware of, and have access to, the *Environmental Sustainability Policy*.
- 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.

The Nominated Supervisor and Responsible Person is responsible for the following:

- Collaborating with the Approved Provider, educators, staff, parents/guardians, children and others at the service to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability).
- Implementing identified strategies for which they have responsibility at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability).
- Ensuring environmental education and practices are incorporated into the curriculum (refer to *Curriculum Development Policy*).
- 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*.
- Making recommendations to the Approved Provider about green and sustainable options for the service, that reflect the guidelines within this policy.
- Seeking and applying for grants, where appropriate, to support the implementation of strategies within this policy.
- Allocate staff with reasonable time to participate, research and develop knowledge to embed into centre programs.
- 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).

- **The Supervisors and relevant Room Leader are responsible for ensuring volunteers and students are following this policy and the outlined procedures.**

Educators and other staff are responsible for the following:

- Collaborating with the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, fellow educators/staff, parents/guardians, children and others at the service to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability).
- Implementing identified strategies for which they have responsibility for at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability).
- Engaging in activities that support the service to become more environmentally sustainable (e.g. recycling).
- Incorporating environmental education and sustainable practices within the curriculum.
- Planning opportunities for children to connect with nature and the natural world at the service, including on excursions and participating in environmental events.
- 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.
- 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).

Parents/guardians are responsible for the following:

- Collaborating with the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, educators, staff, children and others at the service to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability).
- Following the strategies identified and outlined in this *Environmental Sustainability Policy*.
- Encouraging their children to adopt environmentally sustainable practices at both the service and at home.

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
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Strategies for Environmental Sustainability

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of Yarram Early Learning, March 2023

REVIEW DATE: MARCH 2025

Attachment 1

Strategies for Environmental Sustainability

This checklist can be used to promote discussion and formulate an environmental sustainability policy for the service. It is not intended that all strategies be implemented with some being used in discussions and raising awareness of sustainable practices. 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.)
Green purchasing		
Purchase local products where possible.		Responsible Person
Purchase recycled products where possible.		Responsible Person
Purchase energy and water efficient products where possible.		Responsible Person
Purchase items with minimal packaging where possible.		Responsible Person
Purchase biodegradable wet wipes.		Responsible Person
Purchase eco-friendly paint.		Responsible Person
Waste		

Minimise waste from one-use, throwaway products (e.g. paper towels) by changing behaviours and procedures and using alternative products. The following are some suggestions:		All educators/staff
Purchase biodegradable paper towel and turn electric hand dryers off.		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor
Encourage children to bring a rubbish-free lunch/snack in a reusable container.		All educators/staff
Recycle plastic waste (relevant local codes), glass, paper, cardboard, foil and metal.		All educators/staff
Composting of food scraps.		All educators/staff
Explore the waste process of refuse within the educational program i.e. reduce, reuse, repair and recycle.		All educators/staff
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. Playdoh will be made at the centre and not brought in.		All educators/staff
Food to be used for exploration of food source and would need to be composted etc and not go into waste.		
Promote recycling and reusing items e.g. through SWAP markets for children's clothing, toys and books. Share purchasing		Responsible Person
Energy		
Turn off computers and/or screens when not in use.		Responsible Person
Turn off all electrical equipment before leaving the building.		Responsible Person
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.		All educators/staff
Turn off and unplug (all electronics including, fridges, microwaves, washing machines etc.) that are not in use during extended holiday periods (ensure no food remains and the fridge is cleaned well beforehand).		Responsible Person
Turn lights off when not required. Take advantage of natural light where possible.		All educators/staff
Upgrade old appliances with energy efficient appliances as needed. Install solar panels on roof		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor

Water		
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.		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor
Ensure that water from troughs and bowls is reused to water the garden.		All educators/staff
Install rain water catchments in both yards.		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor
Install water saving taps in children's bathrooms.		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor
Install dual flush toilets and/or small scale urinals for boys.		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor
Place buckets or watering cans next to drink stations to collect excess water.		All educators/staff
Install water efficient nozzles on outdoor hoses. Install low flow taps in bathrooms. Install hydro panels on the roof to collect water from the air.		
Biodiversity		
Grow food crops in vegetable gardens.		All educators/staff
Plant fruit trees.		All educators/staff
Grow a diverse range of plants, and develop children's understanding of how plant diversity encourages animal diversity.		All educators/staff
Grow indigenous (native) and water-wise plants.		All educators/staff
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.		All educators/staff
Transport		
Encourage staff to walk, cycle or catch public transport to work and on excursions, where possible.		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor
Create prominent, effective spaces for the storage of bikes and prams to promote riding and walking to staff and families.		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor
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.		Room Leaders All educators/staff
Aim to counteract the 'throwaway' mentality that children experience every day in relation to waste.		Room Leaders All educators/staff
Take every opportunity to talk with young children about sustainable world views and practices, encourage all children to take part and encourage older children to role model these practices.		Room Leaders All educators/staff
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.		All educators/staff
Introduce caring for animals and centre pets.		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor
The curriculum offers many opportunities to explore sustainable issues and practices. The following are some suggestions:		Room Leaders All educators/staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an 'earth hour' each day where no lights/minimal lighting is used e.g. during rest, relaxation or sleep times. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a range of pictures, books and stories that address environmental sustainability issues. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have waste-free days. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use improvised, recycled and natural materials for program activities. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine damaged household appliances and explore whether they can be repaired. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play a recycling game to promote an understanding of items that can be recycled. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate alternatives to Texta pens and liquid paint, such as powder paint and refillable markers or pencils. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting and exploring natural objects and using them in craft and imaginative play. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate and participate in environmental awareness events (e.g. Clean up Australia Day and World Parks Week). 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC) for more ideas. • Enjoy a vegetarian lunch day together on a regular basis. 		
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.		Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor
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.		Responsible Person
Become involved in community events such as Earth Hour, World Environment Day and Clean Up Australia Day.		All educators/staff
Engage the children to take action where their agency sees an environmental impact in the community whilst on excursions.		
Printing and laminating		
Limiting printing to 250 pages per week per room. (To continue to reduce as we convert the centre to paperless.)		All educators/staff
Using technology to reduce printing: projector, emails, social media, books, library books.		
Significantly reduce laminating with the goal of removing laminators from the service. Invest in alternative ideas for durability for children (waterproof).		All educators/staff