

QA3 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT POLICY

SCOPE

This policy, and its associated documents, provide a framework to guide all actions for the Approved Provider, Nominated supervisor, all team members, children, parents, volunteers, contractors, suppliers, and any visitors to the Service.

Failure to adhere to this policy, or any of its associated documents, may result in disciplinary action being taken up to and including termination of employment for personnel, refusal of service for clients, and / or the dissolving of contractual agreements with suppliers and individuals outside of our Service.

INTRODUCTION

We are committed to ensuring that our physical environments are well designed, safe and meet the learning needs of children.

This policy discusses:

- The design of buildings and environments
- Maintenance
- Learning resources
- Environmental responsibility.

POLICY STATEMENT

DESIGN

Our physical environments are reflective of those who learn within them, both children, families and educators. Children and families are regularly consulted about the physical environment, and any feedback and new perspectives are utilised for critical reflection and leading environmental change.

The environments are designed in ways that promote full participation in the learning program for children of all abilities, and design modifications are made to the physical environments as required to maintain equal access. Our learning environments support children's engagement with resources and peers in sustained, meaningful work without interruption.

Educators plan and program learning experiences that encourage different types of play, are interesting, challenging yet safe, and effectively make use of indoor and outdoor environments through arrangement and design of spaces. Our environments are arranged to encourage child-centred learning, exploration and investigation.

The design of the centre is based on the premise of enabling relationships between children and educators and promoting secure attachments. This not only allows for small and large group play and learning areas but also smaller, quiet spaces for children's own solitary learning, "providing

opportunities for autonomy and independence but also a secure base to which they can return or retreat, as and when necessary” (Deniz and Akman, 2012, p. 2035).

The service provides environments that meet the fundamental requirements of being healthy and safe. Learning spaces are maintained in such a way that children can successfully engage with the environment, acquiring and developing knowledge and skills, whilst maintaining the safety of themselves and others. The design of the environment serves children’s learning needs, yet is functional to support embedded everyday practices, routines and rituals such as supervision, cleaning, children’s hygiene, nutritional needs, safe sleep procedures, and the management of illness and injuries on both a group and individual level.

USE

Our team complete regular risk assessments of environments and learning experiences, to effectively manage risks without reducing the benefit and integrity of children’s learning and development. Involving children in this process allows them to better understand the opportunities and challenges in the world around them, and how to be safe. In addition, educators enlist the help of children in maintaining safe and healthy environments to foster a sense of shared responsibility and belonging.

Partnerships are fostered with the local community to encourage wider involvement in the upkeep of the centre. This encourages the parent and local community to take greater ownership in the centre and promotes a strong service network. We value parental and community contribution to the maintenance of the service, and view this as an important way for families to be involved. This is integral to our service operations and contributes to our ongoing quality improvement.

Our service recognises a responsibility to promote social and individual equity, to diminish disparities through the provision of accessible resources and environments for all children and families.

Our environments are contextualised to reflect the diverse cultures within our local communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and ways of learning. The furniture and accents reflect the notion that children are active participants in a world outside the educational setting. Through doing so an environment is created where children, family members and educators feel safe, welcome, and valued.

We carefully select materials, resources and equipment to facilitate the participation of all children in a play-based curriculum. Montessori provides children with opportunities for active exploration that is process oriented and self-motivating, leading to intellectual and cognitive benefits.

We acknowledge that children are better able to foster a sense of belonging when they are provided with a consistent and predictable environment. Our practices reflect this view and afford children the opportunity to meaningfully engage with resources in a play-based environment to build upon skill acquisition and a range of divergent thinking abilities.

Our educators use their knowledge of children’s strengths and interests to support and use resources in a manner which challenges thinking, and scaffolds independent and collaborative problem-solving. Through the provision of such flexible and open-ended environments children can investigate, imagine and explore ideas. They become active participants in driving their own learning and are engaged and self-confident learners.

Our learning environments promote each child's sense of agency as an active contributor to their learning. Through the provision of resources, appropriate tools, technologies and media, children exercise control and expand their sense of independence through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials. For children to develop their capacity and ability to take responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing, our educators provide a wide range of resources that cater for the individual needs of children. This allows children to develop and consolidate skills as they manipulate equipment and manage tools with increasing competence.

Our education and care setting places emphasis on fostering children's appreciation and care for the natural environment and encourage all those within our centre community to act in a manner that is environmentally responsible. Through the provision of a range of natural materials in our physical environments we provide opportunities for children to understand the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land.

We acknowledge that children's agency and their active citizenship are well supported when we provide opportunities to engage and participate in environmental stewardship and civic responsibility. The provision of such opportunities can be facilitated through the development of relationships between community adults and children, in particular *"embracing of Aboriginal pedagogies and ways of learning and such approaches align well with constructs about sustainable living and learning"* (Elliott, McCrea, Newsome and Gaul, 2016, p. 40).

Our service values a culture of sustainability, as demonstrated through applying sustainability thinking and practices to aspects of our teaching, operations, environment and relationships. We develop, foster and maintain relevant partnerships within the community to ensure environmental outcomes are more likely to be achieved.

We place importance on a culturally inclusive approach to sustainability as essential for improved citizenship and social responsibility in children. To support this approach, we place emphasis on educators' developing specific skills and appropriate learning environments to respectfully explore these values with all stakeholders.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Agency - being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world (DEEWR, 2009).

Curriculum - all interactions, experiences, activities routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development (DEEWR, 2009).

Program – the documentation showing children's educational goals, the learning opportunities that are provided by our educators to achieve these, and the related educator practices to support learning.

Wellbeing – being comfortable, healthy, or happy.

LINKS TO STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS

This policy relates to the National Quality Standard (NQS) Quality Area 3: Physical environment.

Standard/ Elements	Concept	Descriptor
QA3		Physical environment
3.1	Design	The design of the facilities is appropriate for the operation of a service.
3.1.1	Fit for purpose	Outdoor and indoor space, buildings, fixtures and fitting are suitable for their purpose, including supporting the access of every child.
3.1.2	Upkeep	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.
3.2	Use	The service environment is inclusive, promotes competence and supports exploration and play-based learning.
3.2.1	Inclusive environment	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.
3.2.2	Resources support play-based learning	Resources, materials and equipment allow for multiple uses, are sufficient in number, and enable every child to engage in play-based learning.
3.2.3	Environmentally responsible	The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible.

This policy relates to the following law and national regulations:

Standard/ Elements	Concept	Related law and national regulations
QA3		Physical environment
3.1	Design	The design of the facilities is appropriate for the operation of a service.
		Regulation 104 Fencing and security Regulation 106 Laundry and hygiene facilities Regulation 107 Space requirements—indoor space Regulation 108 Space requirements—outdoor space Regulation 109 Toilet and hygiene facilities Regulation 110 Ventilation and natural light Regulation 111 Administrative space Regulation 112 Nappy change facilities Regulation 114 Outdoor space—shade Regulation 115 Premises designed to facilitate supervision Regulation 116 Assessments of family day care residences and approved family day care venues Regulation 117 Glass (additional requirement for family day care) Regulation 103 Premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair <i>Jurisdiction specific provisions</i> NSW – Regulation 274 Swimming pools Tasmania – Regulation 345 Swimming pool prohibition

3.2	Use	The service environment is inclusive, promotes competence and supports exploration and play-based learning.
		Regulation 113 Outdoor space—natural environment Regulation 105 Furniture, materials and equipment

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

Date Reviewed	Modifications	Next Policy Document Review Date
Month year	Reviewed and created new policy document	Qx, year