



PLAY BENEFITS AND RISK POLICY

Bush Kinder Specific

Purpose:

This policy aims to:

- Detail the benefits of outdoor play in the Bush Kinder environment, including the types of activities to be undertaken.
- Give Parents/Guardians comfort that while aiming to develop the children's self-awareness in managing risks and undertaking challenges, that appropriate supervision is provided to ensure the safety and wellbeing of participants at all times.
- Detail procedures for staff and volunteers to ensure that children are appropriately supervised and assisted during play and to ensure the safety of participants.

Values

- Maribyrnong Kindergarten is committed to delivering a Bush Kinder program which:
 - Offers children opportunities to safely explore rich, diverse natural play environments while developing self-confidence, teamwork and social skills and an understanding of their environment.
 - Allows children, through play, to experience challenges and develop self-awareness in managing risk according to ability and confidence.
 - Fosters child-led play at the child's pace.
 - Gives participants freedom to explore using multiple senses which are fundamental for encouraging creative, diverse and imaginative play.

Scope:

This policy applies to children, parents/guardians, staff, committee members, authorised persons, volunteer helpers and students on placement with Maribyrnong Kindergarten.

Background and Legislation

In modern society, opportunities for free, outdoor play can be limited and the valuable experience of free play in the outdoors, learning to accept challenges and taking considered risks is one that is not available to all children. Some educational leaders feel that we have developed an over reliance on digital and electronic sources for recreation, learning and socialising.

Maribyrnong Kindergarten's Bush Kinder program will support young children to develop responsibility for themselves and others. It will encourage early risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the consequences of their actions, for themselves and for others and will support the children in taking on challenges and accepting responsibility. This program will support the children in becoming independent, responsible and motivated learners.

Under this policy, climbing, running, rolling and balancing will all be available to children, with such support and guidance as is deemed necessary for safety. At all times, the staff will be guided by the expert knowledge of the Piemaker's Park Rangers in relation to hazards. In a Bush Kinder

setting children learn important lessons – what is slippery, will I trip over that, is that safe to climb, how many of us can fit on that log?

Relevant legislation includes but is not limited to:

- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (The Regulations) and the National Quality Standard (Schedule 1 of the Regulations).

Procedures - General

The Committee is responsible for:

- implementing and maintaining a Play Benefit & Risk Policy which provides clarity to parents/guardians and staff as to types of activities the children may be undertaking in Bush Kinder, while highlighting the benefits of these activities, including improved self-esteem, co-operation and ability to assess and respond to risks.
- providing a safe environment for all participants in the Bush Kinder program;
- ensuring that all parents/guardians are aware of this policy and are provided access to the policy at orientation sessions, in written Bush Kinder material and on the Bush Kinder website, and made available upon request.
- ensuring staff and volunteers are appropriately educated on procedures detailed in this policy.

Staff are responsible for:

- supervising children at all times and ensuring their safety;
- assessing potential tree climbing trees for sturdiness in liaison with Park Rangers.
- ensuring all use and storage of tools during play is in accordance with the Safe Use of Tools Policy;
- ensuring strategies to mitigate the risks and hazards of tree climbing (as set out in Attachment 1) are carried out as required;
- Educating the children on water risks, providing an awareness of bodies of water and associated risks, and teaching them appropriate behaviour around water. Ensure strategies to mitigate risks and hazards in relation to water (as set out in Attachment 2) are carried out as required;
- encouraging the children to do things for themselves e.g. putting on clothes, climbing and holding back branches, assessing risk through conversation with staff;
- talking and listening to the children as much as possible;
- offering help and encouragement during play whenever needed (for example, a more timid child may need support when tree climbing for the first time);
- encouraging the children during play to help each other, share and to solve problems together, and give praise when this occurs;
- encouraging children during play to reflect on how they have changed (for example, how they can now walk along a log by themselves);
- pointing out features, insects, plants, weather, sounds etc. that children may not have noticed;
- taking opportunities to reinforce safety routines applicable to play wherever possible.

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- ensuring protective and appropriate clothing is worn to Bush Kinder by their child in line with this policy, including closed toe footwear with a flexible sole to facilitate effective tree/log climbing and balancing on uneven surfaces;
- reinforcing appropriate safety and behaviour strategies;
- reading and being familiar with the policy; bringing relevant issues to the attention of both

staff and committee.

Evaluation

In order to assess whether the policy has achieved the values and purposes the proprietor (committee) will:

- seek feedback regarding this policy and its implementation with parents/guardians of children participating in the Bush Kinder program. This will be facilitated through discussions and the annual parent survey;
- ask staff to share their experiences and observations in relation to the effectiveness of this policy;
- regularly review the policy and centre practices to ensure they are compliant with any new legislation, research or best practice procedures.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Play benefits

Attachment 2: Tree Climbing Risk Benefit Analysis and Strategies to Mitigate Risk.

Attachment 3: Exposure to Water Risk Benefit/Analysis

Definitions

Appropriate clothing: (refer Protective Clothing Policy)

Footwear: It is important that children wear appropriate footwear (closed toe with a flexible sole to facilitate effective climbing, balancing). Refer to Protective Clothing Policy.

Play:

Play activities at Bush Kinder are diverse but typical activities and goals may include (though not limited to): **See Attachment 1**

Tree climbing: See Attachment 2 for Risk Benefit Analysis and Strategies to mitigate Risk. Note this activity has been singled out as it is an activity likely to cause unease amongst parents/guardians.

Water play:

Water play during Bush Kinder will take place from time to time in cases where water occurs naturally e.g. looking at and playing with puddles; play in the rain and on walks (rainproof clothing to be worn). There are some bodies of water in the Pipemaker's Park which the children may encounter during supervised walks. Children will be taught an awareness of bodies of water and associated risks and will learn appropriate behaviour around water. See Attachment 3 for Risk Benefit Analysis and Strategies to Mitigate Risks for Water.

Sources

- Westgarth Kindergarten - Bush Kinder Program
- Balnarring Preschool - Beach Kinder Program
- Somers Preschool – Bush Kinder program
- South Mornington Preschool Bush Kinder program

- Benefit-Risk Assessment of Tree Climbing – Mind stretchers Pty. Ltd. (Oct. 2009)
- 'A Marvelous Opportunity for Children to Learn' O'Brien & Murray, Forestry Commission (2006)
- Nature Kindergartens – Claire Warden Centre Policies
- Extreme Weather (Bush Kinder Specific)
- Protective Clothing (Bush Kinder Specific)
- Communication
- Hygiene
- Inclusion and Equity
- Program participation
- Supervision
- Excursions and centre events

Authorisation

- This policy was approved by the Committee of Management of Maribyrnong Kindergarten on: 9 October 2025.

Next review date: 9 October 2028

Attachment 1: Play benefits of Bush Kinder

Activity	Developmental benefit
Playing imaginative games using the resources nature provides.	Open ended learning allows children to explore at their own pace and with their own challenges
Role Play	Shared imagination, drama, working with others, sharing ideas, recollection of models of behaviour
Building shelters or other large structures from branches, with the help of peers and adults	This requires setting goals, planning, teamwork
Counting found objects, categorising found objects, finding patterns in nature	Exploring mathematical concepts, visual discrimination
Observing changes in nature	Making observations, predicting patterns and outcomes
Arranging items to make an ephemeral picture or installation	Using natural materials creatively; creating with an emphasis on the “doing” rather than the outcome; Using photography to record and display outcomes
Photography	Using digital technology to record and share their learning experiences
Drawing from life	Creative; observation of flora, fauna and natural surroundings
Climbing trees, walking on logs and rocks	Gross motor co-ordination; body awareness in space and movement; understanding risk and considering actions
Walking within the parkland	Improve physical fitness and stamina; Making choices about activities for the day
Exploring or reflecting alone	Benefits of personal reflection and self-awareness
Play involving effects of water on our environment e.g. puddles, mud play	Awareness of effects of weather on environment; science: changes; properties of mud, soil.
Using found items as tools	Transferring knowledge from one context to another; manipulating objects while revising and building on an idea

ATTACHMENT 2

Tree Climbing Risk Benefit Analysis:

Source: 'Benefit-Risk Assessment of Tree Climbing' Mind Stretchers Pty Ltd (October 2009)

Benefits of Tree Climbing

1. Knowledge: tree characteristics (bark/wood/branches), seasonal changes, weather implications
2. Develop physical motor skills
3. Build self-confidence
4. Group co-operation
5. Group awareness
6. Aesthetics/spirituality

Risks/Hazards and Strategies to Mitigate:

Hazard	Precaution
Material on the floor beneath the tree	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inform the children of the hazard to allow self-evaluation• Remove where appropriate (staff/children)
Dead wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove dead wood branches when found• Inform children of the fragility of dead wood – likely to break, encourage children to monitor
Slippery surfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check condition of climbing surfaces prior to activity• Evaluate weather conditions linked to hazard and desist if necessary• Inform children of the hazards and allow self-monitoring
Drop heights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children self-assess abilities• Children and staff monitor landing spaces for obstacles and remove or change landing location as required• Staff support children as required/requested – holding hands etc.
Protruding branches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children self-assess climbing location• Change climbing location or remove branches if deemed too high a risk

**ATTACHMENT 3
EXPOSURE TO WATER RISK/BENEFIT ANALYSIS**

Source: 'Benefit-Risk Assessment of Pond and stream in Auchlone woodland', Mind Stretchers Pty Ltd (October 2010)

Benefits of Exposure to Water (Wetlands, Puddles 'Dip', River)

1. Children become aware of open water and associated risks and learn appropriate behaviour around water.
2. Awareness of seasonal and weather changes to still water and running water.
3. Group care and awareness
4. Children self-risk assess open water
5. Raised awareness and appreciation of wildlife on and near wetlands, river,
6. Calming effect of being near open water
7. Group co-operation
8. Group awareness

Risks/Hazards and Strategies to Mitigate:

Hazard	Precaution
Open water – Wetlands, River, Puddles (dip area): Falling in the water, drowning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff discuss the dangers of deep water with children • Staff have a raised awareness of the risks of wetlands, river, large puddles of water (dip area) Children have an awareness of the risks having done their own risk assessments of the wetlands, river, dip area • Children are monitored and supervised by staff who are extra vigilant in the vicinity of water and staff/child ratios are strictly adhered to • Adults count children at regular intervals while children are engaged in activities in the vicinity of water
Slippery banks near 'dip' and potential for the area to fill with water after heavy rain: Children falling in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of slippery surfaces near water's edge • Ration of 1 adult to 2 children near wetlands/dip area when full of water • No access to banks after heavy rain or flooding, and on recommendation by park ranger
Contaminated water: Illness when consumed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have limited access to wetlands or dip area when filled with water. Staff raise awareness of contamination. • Children wash hands in clean running water after contact with puddles/dip, wetland water.