

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

Mandatory – Quality Area 2

PURPOSE

The educators, staff and management acknowledge the importance of safe environments, which contribute to overall health and wellbeing.

This policy confirms our commitment to:

- ensure the service environment is safe, inclusive and empowering for children, families, educators, staff, volunteers and visitors
- embed social and emotional learning and safety education in the educational program
- ensure families, children, educators and staff are key partners in safety initiatives
- engage in partnerships with community networks
- Ensure all reasonable steps are taken by the GKA as the Approved Provider, educators and staff to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children attending the service

As a health promoting service we will promote safe environments for children, educators, staff and families through learning, policies, creating a safe and healthy physical and social environment and developing community links and partnerships.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. VALUES

Geelong Kindergarten Association has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that all children are safe in their care, and will provide training, resources, information and guidance to support this. A GKA service is committed to:

- ensuring that the health, safety and wellbeing of children at the service is protected at all times while also promoting their learning and development
- ensuring that people caring for children at the service act in the best interests of the child, and take all reasonable steps to ensure the child's safety and wellbeing at all times
- supporting the rights of all children to feel safe, and be safe, at all times
- developing and maintaining a culture in which children feel valued, respected and cared for
- encouraging active participation from parents/guardians and families at the service, and ensuring that best practice is based on a partnership approach and shared responsibility for children's health, safety, wellbeing and development
- promoting children's development and wellbeing.

2. SCOPE

It is recognised that every member of the service impacts on children's health and can contribute to creating an environment that promotes safety. All members of our service including educators, staff, children, families and volunteers will be supported in implementing this policy.

3. BACKGROUND

The focus of a child safe organisation is not simply to create an environment free from risk or danger. Rather it is about building an environment which is both child-safe and child-friendly, where children feel respected, valued and encouraged to reach their full potential. 1

Providing safe environments is important in preventing injuries. Children are explorers and always want to explore the environment they are in, which also increases the risk of injuries, particularly if children are trying out new skills. The challenge is to minimise the potential for injury so children can explore and be challenged to take some risks in a safe environment.2

“Every child has the right to live a full and productive life. It is up to all of us to ensure our children grow up in environments that build confidence, friendship, security and happiness, irrespective of a person’s family circumstances and background” (*Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people – refer to Sources*).

The *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* require that approved services protect children from any harm and hazards, and to adequately supervise children at all times. Adult supervision is a key factor in creating and maintaining child safe environments. Active supervision together with risk minimisation strategies can prevent or reduce the risk of injury to children (refer to *Supervision of Children Policy*).

Risk minimisation strategies, supported by clear policies and procedures for specific areas of child safety, will help ensure the environment and practices at the service are child safe. Policies and procedures must be developed in relation to all matters specified in Regulation 168(2), including emergency and evacuation, water safety, sun protection, delivery and collection of children, and incident, injury, trauma and illness. Risks in the child’s physical environment can be minimised by ensuring the safety of buildings, grounds, equipment, materials and furniture used at the service, and the safe storage and use of dangerous substances such as cleaning products and chemicals.

4. 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.

Bullying: repeated verbal, physical, social or psychological aggressive behaviour by a person or a group directed towards a less powerful person or group that is intended to cause harm, distress or fear. 3

Child: In Victoria, under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, a child or young person is a person under 18 years of age.

Harm: any detrimental effect of a significant nature on a child’s physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing.4

Discrimination: the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex. 5

Harassment: aggressive pressure or intimidation. 5

5. SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

Sources

Belonging, Being & Becoming. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Commonwealth of Australia, 2009 www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx#key_documents

Healthy Together Achievement Program <http://achievementprogram.healthytogether.vic.gov.au>

Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people – A joint protocol of the Department of Human Services Child Protection, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Licensed Children’s Services and Victorian Schools: www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/protecting_children_protocol_27_5_10.pdf

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework For all Children from Birth to Eight Years. Department of

Related Policies

- Active play/physical activity
- Emergency and evacuation policy
- Excursions and service events policy
- Hygiene policy
- Incident, injury, trauma and illness policy
- Inclusion and equity policy
- Interactions with children policy
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Occupational health and safety
- Participation of volunteers and students policy
- Staff Health and Wellbeing policy
- Sun protection
- Supervision of children policy
- Water safety policy
- Child Protection policy

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic), as amended 2012

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (Vic): Sections 165, 166, 167

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (Vic): Regulations 84, 85, 86, 99, 100, 101, 102, 168(2)(h)

National Quality Standard, Quality Area 2: Children's Health and Safety

Standard 2.3: Each child is protected

Element 2.3.1: Children are adequately supervised at all times

Element 2.3.2: Every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and any hazard likely to cause injury

Element 2.3.4: Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are aware of their roles and responsibilities to respond to every child at risk of abuse and neglect

National Quality Standard, Quality Area 3: Physical Environment

Standard 3.1: The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service

Element 3.1.1: Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose

Element 3.1.2: Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained

National Quality Standard, Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Management

Standard 7.1: Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community

Element 7.1.5: Adults working with children and those engaged in management of the service or residing on the premises are fit and proper

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)

Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic)

Working with Children Regulations 2006 (Vic)

PROCEDURES HEALTHY POLICIES

- Educators, staff, families and children are active participants in the development, implementation and review of the whole service safe environments policy.
- Educators, staff and families are provided with information about policy requirements.
- The nominated supervisor, educators, staff, contractors, volunteers and students are kept informed of any relevant changes in legislation and practices in relation to this policy
- If child safety issues are identified the service is required to.....
 - Offer support to the child and their family, and to educators and staff in response to concerns or reports relating to the health, safety and wellbeing of a child at a GKA service.
- Parents and guardians are responsible for reading and complying with this policy

HEALTHY PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- The service environment is inclusive and safe.
- The diversity and interests of the children, families and staff are reflected in the welcoming physical environment.
- Outdoor and indoor spaces, furniture, play equipment and resources are safe, secure, well maintained and meet relevant safety standards, and enable access and active participation for every child, enhancing the quality of children's learning and experiences
- The physical environment enables appropriate supervision of children and visitors to the service.
- Action has been taken to minimise road traffic hazards around the service, particularly at drop off and pick up times around the service, and the service is up to date with current legislation on child restraints in vehicles if transporting children
- organising/facilitating regular safety audits of the following: emergency equipment, playgrounds and fixed equipment in outdoor environments, cleaning services, horticultural maintenance and pest control.
- conducting risk assessments for excursions and considering children's safety when leaving the service premises
- Harmful substances such as chemical and first aid kits are kept in labelled, child-proof locked cupboards
- A clean environment is maintained daily, and tripping/slipping hazards are removed as soon as these become apparent (refer to *Occupational Health and Safety Policy*)
- A regular cleaning schedule for all equipment to avoid cross-infection is followed (refer to Hygiene Policy)
- A daily check of the building is conducted, ensuring all children are signed out of the service, doors and windows are closed and locked, and appliances are switched off etc

HEALTHY SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

- The service provides a safe, inclusive and empowering social environment, through:
 - a culture of respect, fairness and equality
 - a sense of belonging and connectedness being created through inclusive and participatory practices
 - children, families, educators and staff contributing to a positive service environment
 - respectful and supportive relationships being fostered between children, educators, staff and families
 - strategies promoting positive and responsible behaviour, and preventing and responding to bullying, discrimination and harassment
 - Discussions about event and situations where the children have felt uncomfortable to educate and empower them.
- As role models, educators, staff and families are encouraged and supported to demonstrate behaviours that promote safety.

LEARNING AND SKILLS

- Social and emotional learning is embedded in the service program and practice through:
 - spontaneous and planned learning opportunities supporting the development of self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management and relationship skills
 - learning activities which actively engage, challenge and support children to recognise and appropriately respond to hazardous situations
 - active play activities designed to ensure the safe participation of all children.
- Where possible the service undertakes walking excursions within the local community, as part of the educational program to promote safe active travel.
- Educators are supported to access resources, tools and professional learning to enhance their knowledge and capacity to promote safe environments and behaviours.

ENGAGING CHILDREN, EDUCATORS, STAFF AND FAMILIES

- Families, children, educators and staff are key partners in developing and supporting safety initiatives.
- Information, ideas and practical strategies are provided to families, educators and staff on a regular basis to promote and support safety in the service and at home.
- Educators and staff engage children and families in developing and implementing safety initiatives.
- Families and children from culturally diverse backgrounds are engaged to ensure cultural values and expectations about children's safety are respected.
- Families are made aware of the support services available to them and the assistance these services can provide

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- The service engages local health professionals, services and other organisations to increase educator and staff capacity to deliver safety initiatives and promote safe environments.
- The service has established links with local health professionals, services and other organisations including emergency services and child safety agencies to support safety initiatives.
- The service has information available about child safety, safe active travel and emergency services.
- This service identifies and implements appropriate programs and practices to support the principles of a child safe organisation, in consultation with GKA, the Nominated Supervisor and educators/staff at the service
- This service cooperates and develops relationships with other services and/or professionals in the best interests of the children and their families.

Evaluation

This safe environments policy will be monitored by staff, families, management and the health and wellbeing team. It will be reviewed as part of a policy review schedule.

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Geelong Kindergarten Association as the approved provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from educators, educators, parents/guardians, children, management and all 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 change to this policy or its procedures.

Monitoring and review

This Safe Environments Policy for children will be monitored by educators, staff, families and management. It will be reviewed, and if necessary revised, as part of a policy review schedule by the Staff Advisory Group and the Risk and Compliance Committee. **Next review date: May 2017**

Adopted by: GKA Risk and Compliance Committee Date: 13.05.2015

Appendices- Additional Information

- Appendix 1: Child safe organisations
- Appendix 2: Child safety review checklist
- Appendix 3: Guidelines for the recruitment of staff and volunteers

References

1. Government of South Australia. Child safe environments <http://www.families.sa.gov.au/pages/protectingchildren/CSEHome/>
2. National Childcare Accreditation Council. Safety in children's services http://ncac.acecqa.gov.au/educator-resources/factsheets/qias_factsheet_%202.pdf
3. www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers
4. Child Protection Act 1999
5. oxfordictionaries.com