



Sustainable Play Preschool

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# BUSH KINDY GUIDE

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for Educators and Parents





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



**SUSTAINABLE PLAY PRESCHOOL  
ACKNOWLEDGES THE ABORIGINAL AND  
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE AS THE  
TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND  
UPON WHICH WE LEARN AND EXPLORE.**

**WE PAY OUR RESPECTS TO THE THE ELDERS  
PAST AND PRESENT WHO HAVE LIVED IN  
HARMONY WITH AND CAREFULLY MANAGED  
THE AWABAKAL LAND TO WHICH THEY HAVE  
A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION.**



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## **SUPPORTING OUTDOOR LEARNING IN EARLY EDUCATION**

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Connection with nature is critical for our physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. It has positive effects on our ability to concentrate, to learn, to solve problems, to relax and to be creative.







## **OUTDOOR LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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Outdoor learning in early childhood involves visiting a local green space such as a park, reserve or bushland during regular teaching hours. The activities involved in outdoor learning are incredibly varied, ranging from free play, climbing and experimenting, to guided walks or more structured activities e.g. nature eye spy. Despite differences in delivery style, unifying principles of outdoor learning are to encourage child-led learning, enquiry and play. This guide is designed to help early childhood educators, plan activities for minimum environmental impact.



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**"Nature is a tool to to get children to  
experience not only the wider world but  
themselves."**

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Stephen Moss



# WHY TAKE THE CLASSROOM OUTDOORS



Outdoors provide the perfect place for children to run, jump, explore and learn. Research shows it's good for them. Children who learn outdoors are less disruptive, show improved social skills, motor skills and physical health. Outdoors they develop resilience, self-awareness, self-esteem and independence.

Globally, there are growing concerns regarding the reduction in the amount of time people spend in nature and the impact on their health. Children are spending more time inside and less time playing outdoors. The reasons for this are many and varied, including increased parental and societal fear, reduced access to natural areas, increased screen time and concerns with risk and liability.





## THE SUSTAINABLE PLAY APPROACH

Our Bush Kindy program  
is supported by five  
principles:

1. Connect with nature  
and the land
2. Support child-led play  
and exploration
3. Encourage children to  
assess their own risks
4. Intervene as little as  
possible
5. Leave no trace and  
have a minimal impact on  
the environment



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# THE EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

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**Identity.** Children develop a sense of security with familiarity. Regular sessions learning outdoors helps children build and explore their identity.

**Community.** Through firsthand experience children develop an awareness of their impact on the local environment and can get involved in caring for nature.

**Wellbeing.** Regular contact with nature relieves children's minds and ignites curiosity. Outdoor environments allow children to expand and refine their abilities, mentally and physically.

**Learning.** Ever-changing outdoor environments invite hypothesising, imagination, interaction, problem solving and experimentation.

**Communication.** Children can share stories, use natural materials to create art and interact with each other and their surroundings to create drama and music.





## THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS

A child's ability to access nature and learn outdoors is fundamental within the National Quality Framework. Learning outdoors promotes a child's health (Quality Standard 2) through relaxation, physical activity and spontaneous experiences. By placing children in a natural outdoor setting (Quality Standard 3), they have the opportunity for independent exploration and to participate in real-life projects and care for the environment in which they live.





## **WHEN THE BENEFITS OUTWEIGH THE RISK**

Outdoor learning and nature play does involve risks. These risks, however, are not unmanageable and are weighed against the long-term health, learning, development and wellbeing benefits for children, their families, communities and nature itself.

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Always have a suitable first aid kit available.



## RISK

## MITIGATION STRATEGY

Insect bite or sting

Reduce skin exposure with long sleeves, pants, socks and closed toe shoes. Stay on designated paths and tracks, don't walk through undergrowth. Always keep hands and fingers where you can see them. Apply insect repellent.

Weather exposure

Check weather conditions before departing. Ensure everyone has adequate water and appropriate clothing. Consider group placement in relation to sun, strong wind or rain.

Scrapes or sprains

Ensure appropriate shoes are always worn. Identify areas of uneven or unstable terrain, apply caution when in these areas.

Fall from tree

Identify trees suitable for climbing that minimise risk of high fall. Closely supervise children while climbing trees. Allow only a small number of children to climb a tree at the same time.

Hit by falling branch

Trees can drop limbs at any time. For this reason, avoid being stationary under trees. Listen overhead for cracks and groans from tree branches. As wind speed increases, so does the risk of falling branches.

Harm from wildlife

Enjoy wildlife from a distance. Do not feed wildlife.

Lost group member

Regularly conduct a head count and move together as a group. Position supervisors at the front, middle and rear of the group. Wear highly visible clothing while in the bush.

Stranger interference

Maintain constant supervision of children. Listen carefully for other visitors - motor bikes, cars.


Drowning

Choose a site away from immediate water risk. Maintain constant supervision of children, especially near puddles.




# DID YOU KNOW?

2016 Planet Ark Tree Day Research Report found:




**Students who take part in outdoor learning programs perform better in reading, writing, maths and science with 77% of teachers reporting student improvement in standardised tests.**

2015 Planet Ark Research report, Needing Trees – The Nature of Happiness, found:




**Children who engage in just one third more outdoor activities than their peers grow up to be happier adults.**

2016 Planet Ark Tree Day Research Report found:



**Time in nature reduces a person's chance of developing a range of diseases including diabetes by 43%, cardiovascular disease and stroke by 37% and depression by 25%.**

2013 Planet Ark study, Missing Trees: The Inside Story of an Outdoor Nation, reports:



**Just over 1 in 4 (29%) of children have never planted or cared for a vegetable garden. Nearly 1 in 3 (31%) children have never planted or cared for trees or shrubs.**



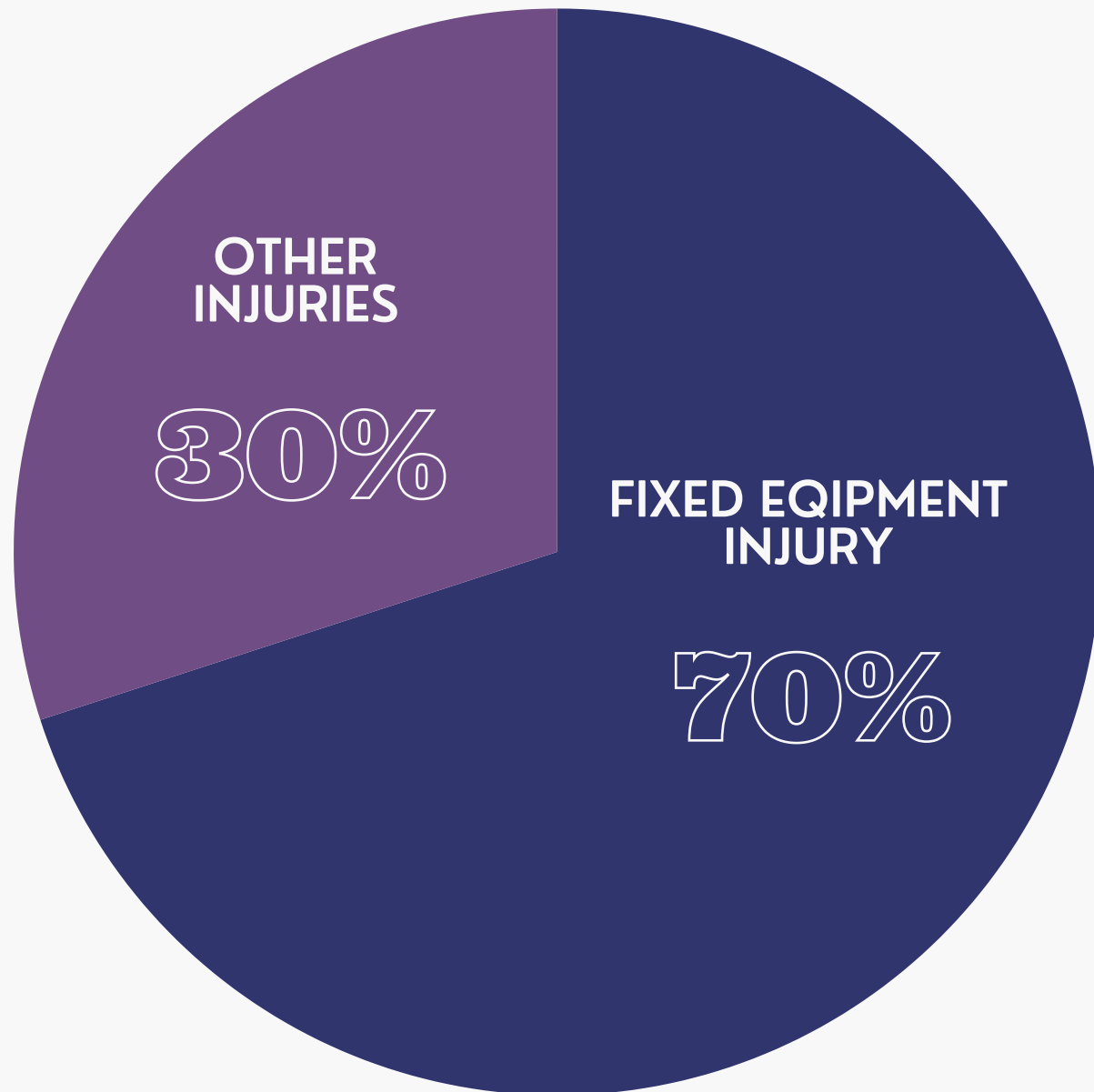
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## NATURAL PLAYSPACES VS. TRADITIONAL

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Catastrophic injuries are lower on natural features compared to plastic post and platform playgrounds. In SA, during 2015 and 2016, 847 playground injuries presented to the Women & Children's Hospital. Of these, approximately 70% are from falls from fixed equipment (monkey bars and slides).

## Injury Statistics





# BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

Benefits for children	Links to EYLF	Links to NQS	Links to other references
Children experience the emotional and physical benefits of playing outdoors.	<b>Outcome 3</b> - Children have a strong sense of wellbeing' - Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing'	<b>Element 2.1</b> - Health - Each child's health and physical activity is supported and promoted	<p>'Surveying teachers in 50 South Australian schools, the study found that the benefits of nature-based play and learning for children included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better mental health (98%)</li> <li>• improved cognitive development (96%)</li> <li>• learning about risk-taking (96%)</li> <li>• spending time outdoors/in nature (96%).</li> </ul> <p>'University of South Australia - 'Teachers want support to embrace nature play in primary education'</p> <p>'Light is the most important synchronising agent for the brain and the body. "Proper synchronisation of internal biological rhythms with the earth's daily rotation has been shown to be essential for health." says Ivy Cheung Mason, Harvard Neuroscience Research Fellow. Sunlight has also been shown to increase the production of white blood cells in the body, helping to fight infection and keep children overall generally healthy. As children grow and explore, they're exposed to all kinds of viruses and bacteria – so exposing them to sunlight (safely) can help ensure their bodies are better able to handle anything that comes their way. It can even drastically improve heart health. When sunlight hits your skin, your body releases nitric oxide into your blood, which has been seen to bring down blood pressure.'</p> <p>Sustainable Play Preschool Blog - Let the sun shine! The benefits of morning sun for a healthy life</p>
The bush provides ample resources for play and flexible learning environments, be it the bush environment holistically or simply a mud puddle, a log, a grassy area, a gum tree grove etc.	<b>Outcome 4</b> - Children are confident and involved learners' - Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials'	<b>Element 1.1.3</b> - Program learning opportunities - All aspects of the program, including routines, are organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning.	<p>'Roles become different in outdoor settings for example, children's play using natural resources, which may be considered unscripted inquiry, allows the educator to deal with different learning challenges or flexible learning environments, leveraging child-led experiences to be meaningful. Outdoor learning also enhances inclusivity and meets the needs of individuals in active participation.</p> <p>'Affordances for Science Learning in "Bush Kinders"</p>

# BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

Benefits for children	Links to EYLF	Links to NQS	Links to other references
Children have the opportunity to engage in risky behaviour with the bush environment of logs and large puddles.	<p><b>Outcome 1</b> - Children have a strong sense of identity' Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency'</p> <p><b>Outcome 4</b> - Children are confident and involved learners' - Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity'</p>	<p><b>Element 1.2.3</b> - Child directed learning - Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions that influence events and their world.</p>	<p>"Working with children aged between two and five, 'risks' such as a fire pit, real tools and high climbing apparatus were implemented at an early education centre and were ultimately found to improve children's confidence and promote a better assessment of risky behaviour." The University of Newcastle, Australia 'Open flames and real tools deter our toddlers from risky business'</p> <p>"By implementing risky play in a secure environment as part of early learning, we can ensure young children feel confident to engage with risk safely under supervision rather than on their own," Associate Professor Newman said.</p>
The bush kindy environment is an inclusive environment where all children can learn.	<p><b>Outcome 1</b> - Children have a strong sense of identity - 'Children feel safe, secure, and supported' 'Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency'</p>	<p><b>Element 3.2.1</b> - 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.</p>	<p>The most commonly reported benefits to staff and the organisation were reported to be engaging and developing relationships with students (reported by 90% of participants), development of personal practice (80%), developing a sense of community (74%) and improved staff wellbeing (74%). A total of five free-text responses were received and grouped into three categories. Connection to nature such as 'sustainable behaviour' and 'connection to land' (n = 3) was reported as a benefit, as well as inclusive space such as 'space for all to enjoy' (n = 1) and 'satisfaction in seeing benefits for students' (n = 1).'</p> <p>University of South Australia - 'The perceived benefits of and barriers to nature-based play and learning in South Australian public primary schools: A cross-sectional study'</p>
The bush kindy environment presents multidimensional learning opportunities.	<p><b>Outcome 4</b> - Children are confident and involved learners 'Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity"</p>	<p><b>Element 1.1.1</b> - Approved learning framework - Curriculum decision-making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.</p>	<p>'All 50 participants reported benefits of nature-based play and learning to students (see Table 2). The most commonly reported benefits were mental health (reported by 98% of participants), cognitive development (96%), connection to nature (96%), spending time outdoors/ in nature (96%) and risk-taking (96%). A total of four free-text responses were received and grouped into two categories, including learning benefits such as 'STEM activities' and 'learning to manage focus and self outdoors' (n = 4), and cognitive benefits such as 'refreshing environment' and 'freedom' (n = 3).'</p> <p>University of South Australia - 'The perceived benefits of and barriers to nature-based play and learning in South Australian public primary schools: A cross-sectional study'</p>





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## SOURCES

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Bush Kinder Handbook - Parks Victoria  
Statistics Supporting the need for change - Nature-Play-  
South Australia