ANIMAL AND PET POLICY

Having a relationship with a pet and/or animal can help children develop a caring disposition and skills such as nurturing, responsibility, empathy and improved communication. Having a pet in an early childhood environment enables children who are not otherwise exposed to animals learn these skills. The pet will become part of the daily educational program and lead to activities and learning about other animals. The safety of children, however, is always our first priority. Our Service will ensure that no animal poses a health or safety risk to children, staff or visitors of the Service.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY		
2.1	Health	Each child's health and physical activity is supported and promoted.
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected.
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard
QUALITY AREA 3: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT		
3.1.2	Upkeep	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.
3.2.3	Environmentally responsible	The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible.

EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL LAW AND NATIONAL REGULATIONS	
168	Education and care services must have policies and procedures
170	Policies and procedures to be followed

RELATED POLICIES

Educational Program Policy	Physical Environment Policy
Environmentally Responsible Policy	Snake Awareness Policy
Hand Washing Policy	Supervision Policy
Managing Unidentified Dogs Policy	Work Health and Safety Policy

PURPOSE

Having a pet at our Service can be a valuable part of children's education enriching their learning about nature, ecology and relationships. Our Service aims to provide a safe, hygienic and humane environment

for all animals and pets that visit or reside at the Service, educating children in the proper care of animals.

SCOPE

This policy applies to children, families, staff, educators, management, approved provider, nominated supervisor, students, volunteers and visitors of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

The National Quality Standard (NQS) encourages educators to understand and appreciate the natural environment and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land. Pets help children from a young age learn to care for other living things. They can teach a sense of responsibility, caring and tolerance. They can offer many opportunities for developing observational skills and provide basic natural science experiences. If the educators wish to have a pet in the Service, they must make all the decisions in consultation with the nominated supervisor and families.

Whilst there are several benefits to keeping animals within the Service, there are also a range of concerns which educators need to consider when maintaining the safety and wellbeing of both the children and the animals. Encouraging direct contact and developing bonds with animals can help children to develop empathy. Providing children with access to animals within our Service will help them learn about life cycles and relationships and improve communication skills. We feel role modelling of appropriate behaviours with animals and guidance in caring for the needs of animals are beneficial for children.

ASSISTANCE DOGS

Assistance dogs provide invaluable support to individuals with disabilities, enhancing their ability to navigate daily challenges and improve quality of life. The Langwarrin Community Centre may request registration documentation to validate a dog's status when accessing the community centre.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER PRIOR TO HAVING A PET AT THE SERVICE

- Who will pay for the care and upkeep of the animal, including feeding, health care and cleaning?
- How will the animal be cared for on weekends and during Service closure periods?
- What physical space is available in the Service? Is it adequate for the animal you are considering?
- Are all educators and families happy with the decision to keep an animal at the Service?
- What time will be available throughout the day to care for the animal or will educators be asked to give up some personal time for this?
- Are there any children or educators at your Service who are allergic to, or have phobias of animals?

- What changes to your Service's policies and procedures need to be considered? For example, your hand washing policy will need to be updated to include washing hands after having contact with the animal.
- What are the health and safety risks?

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- Some animals, such as lizards, turtles, snakes, spiders and tropical fish may not be an appropriate choice. Check with a veterinarian if you are unsure whether an animal is suitable for children and check with the local health department for regulations and advice regarding animals in the Service Some states and territories require a license for keeping certain animals
- Animals that may be more likely to be suitable for the Service may include goldfish, hermit crabs, stick insects, caterpillars, ant farm or worm farm. All these animals are relatively low maintenance and can be left safely over a weekend if they are provided with enough food and water.
- If there are voluntary carers available to take the pets home over weekends and holidays, then the Service may consider guinea pigs, rabbits, chickens, mice or rats.

ASSESSING AND MANAGING RISKS

Whilst there are many benefits to providing children with access to animals and keeping pets at the Service, there are issues that approved providers and educators need to consider for the safety and wellbeing of both the children and the animals concerned prior to choosing a pet or having an animal visit the Service.

A comprehensive risk assessment should therefore be conducted when deciding the type of animal and the way the children engage with it.

Potential risks may include:

- diseases- from birds (Parrot fever -psittacosis) and other animals
- injury due to biting, kicking or pushing a child over (e.g., farm animals)
- scratching (e.g., chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs)
- pests and vermin (snakes, rats, mice)
- allergies (e.g., bees, wasps, ants)

DISEASE

As animals can spread disease, access to animals at the Service requires special consideration to prevent

this. Health authorities identify that germs can be present on the skin, hair, feathers and scales, and in the faeces, urine and saliva of animals. While these germs may not cause disease in the animal, they may cause disease in humans.

EFFECTIVE HAND WASHING AND CLEANING

Children and adults should employ effective hand washing after touching or feeding animals, or cleaning their bedding, tanks, cages or enclosures. However, it is important to engage children with these tasks as they learn responsibility through 'hands on' learning experiences.

APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION and CLOTHING

Children should also be appropriately supervised when they have contact with animals to avoid potential injury or harm to the child or the animal.

Ensure children wear appropriate clothing and footwear when handling animals and pets. Be aware of children who may have allergies to insects such as bees, wasps and ants that may be more apparent when animals are kept in an educational setting.

SERVICE PETS

- Management and educators should prepare children for the animal visit, gaining perception into how the children may react to the pet
- Management, educators, children and families should consider the rationale for having a pet and long-term implications of such a decision prior to getting the pet
- All pets and their enclosures are to be kept clean and hygienic with appropriate bedding and water
- Food will be made available for all pets and animals but kept out of reach of children at all times
- Any animal or pet kept at the Service will be regularly fed, cleaned, vaccinated, and wormed (as appropriate), and checked for fleas and diseases
- Animals including pets will not be allowed in the sand pit or any other play area. In event that this happens, educators will refer to and adhere to the *Sand Pit Management Procedure*
- Animals including pets will never be taken into the food preparation area nor will they have access to the eating or sleeping areas, toys, bedding, eating surfaces and/or utensils
- Anyone who has handled the animal or pet will immediately wash their hands
- Children's animal or pets will only be allowed in the Service when the nominated supervisor has granted permission
- The educational program will include how to properly care for animals and how to treat them appropriately.

UNINVITED ANIMAL VISIT

There are situations that may spontaneously occur, involving animals. For example, there may be a situation where an animal or bird has made its way into the Service. Depending upon the type of animal or bird, educators may use this as a spontaneous learning experience for the children. At all times the highest priority will be to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children.

If an animal or bird is potentially dangerous such as a snake or spider, educators will contact an appropriate authority for assistance.

Victoria: Wildlife Victoria: Australian Wildlife Emergency Response 03 8400 7300
National Parks and Wildlife Service - 1300 361 967 (8.30am – 5.00pm)

A professional should monitor the animal's movements to ensure a speedy and efficient capture, but priority is to be given to educator, child and family safety. At no time is the potentially dangerous animal, insect or bird to be approached or touched by educators, children or families.

If an unidentified dog enters the Service premises educators will refer to the *Managing Unidentified Dogs Policy*.

VISITS FROM CHILDREN'S PETS

Occasionally a child may have a new pet such as a puppy or kitten that they wish to bring to the Service to show their peers and educators. Whilst this provides a wonderful learning experience for children, families must be advised to seek permission from the nominated supervisor prior to bringing in the pet. A risk assessment should then be completed before giving permission to the family. Families should also be advised that pets visiting the Service that are not confined (for example, in a fishbowl or bird/mouse cage) must not be left at the Service but be taken with the family member at the conclusion of their visit.

PESTS AND VERMIN

- Pest control will occur at the Service on an annual basis as a minimum
- Educators will monitor any occurrences in the Service to determine the success of control measures
- If pests and/or vermin are seen, or evidence of pests and/or vermin such as droppings, educators will advise the nominated supervisor
- The approved provider is responsible for arranging additional pest control visits as required
- Where appropriate, educators will discuss safety issues relating to dangerous products, plants, vermin and objects with the children

- Educators will thoroughly clean all areas that pests have accessed with disinfectant
- If the remains of an animal, or animal faeces have been found, the remains will be disposed of according to the local Council guidelines and the area where the remains were found will be thoroughly disinfected
- Educators are responsible for assessing any situation where animals are involved to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children, families and animals. (See Snake Awareness Policy)

SOURCES

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REVIEW

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