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## 1. Purpose

This policy provides a clear set of guidelines to ensure:

- the development of responsive, warm, trusting and respectful relationships with children that promote their wellbeing, self-esteem, sense of security and belonging at MKS
- each child at MKS is supported to learn and develop in a secure and empowering environment

## 2. Values

Meli Kindergarten Services (MKS) is committed to:

- maintaining the dignity, agency and rights of each child at the service
- promoting fairness, respect and equity
- encouraging children to express themselves and their opinions, and to undertake experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem
- considering the health, safety and wellbeing of each child, and providing a safe, secure and welcoming environment in which they can develop and learn
- maintaining a duty of care (*refer to Definitions*) towards all children at MKS
- considering the diversity of individual children at the service, including family and cultural values, age, gender, and the physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child
- building collaborative relationships with families to improve learning and development outcomes for children
- encouraging positive, respectful and warm relationships between children, families and educators/staff at the service.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to MKS as the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others attending the programs and activities of MKS, including during offsite excursions and activities.

## 4. Background

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is founded on respect for the dignity and worth of everyone, regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, wealth, birth status or ability. When children experience nurturing and respectful reciprocal relationships with educators, they develop an understanding of themselves as competent, capable, and respected. Relationships are the foundation for the

construction of identity, and help shape children's thinking about who they are, how they belong and what influences them [Early Years Learning Framework, p. 20; Framework for School Age Care, p. 19].

'Constructive everyday interactions and shared learning opportunities form the basis of equitable, respectful, and reciprocal relationships between educators and children. Educators who are actively engaged in children's learning and share decision-making with them, use their everyday interactions during play, routines, and ongoing projects to stimulate children's thinking and to enrich their learning. These relationships provide a solid foundation from which to guide and support children as they develop the self-confidence and skills to manage their own behaviour, make decisions and relate positively and effectively to others.' (*Guide to National Quality Framework*)

*Child Safe Standard 3* requires MKS to have strategies in place that to empower children about their rights, ensure children can participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously. When children feel respected and valued, they are much more likely to speak up about issues of safety and wellbeing. Enabling and promoting empowerment and the participation of children within a service has multiple benefits in addition to enhancing the safety of children, including demonstrating a commitment to upholding the rights of children, checking that what the service is doing is what children want, and building the communication and leadership skills of children.

This policy has been developed in accordance with Meli's purpose and values, with a specific focus on early childhood education and the development of positive relationships with children. This policy is informed by and strongly supported by the Meli Code of Conduct, and should be reviewed and implemented with consideration for this link in policy and practice.

## 5. Definitions

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy.

**Adequate supervision:** requires all children in all areas of the service to always be in sight and/or hearing of an educator, including during toileting, sleep, rest and transition routines. Services are required to comply with the legislative requirements for educator-to-child ratios. Supervision contributes to protecting children from hazards that may emerge in play, including hazards created by the equipment used.

Adequate supervision refers to constant, active, and diligent supervision of every child at the service. Adequate supervision requires that educators are always able to observe each child, respond to individual needs and immediately intervene if necessary. Variables affecting supervision levels include:

- number, age and abilities of children
- number and positioning of educators
- current activity of each child
- areas in which the children are engaged in an activity (visibility and accessibility)
- developmental profile of each child and of the group of children
- experience, knowledge and skill of each educator
- need for educators to move between areas (effective communication strategies).

**Behaviour guidance:** a means of assisting children in a positive and effective ways to help children gain understanding and learn skills that will help them learn to manage their own behaviour.

**Behaviour guidance plan:** A plan that documents strategies to assist an educator in guiding a child with diagnosed behavioural difficulties or challenging behaviours to self-manage their behaviour. The plan is developed in consultation with the nominated supervisor, early childhood teachers, educators, parents/guardians and families, and other professional support agencies as applicable.

**Challenging behaviour:** behaviour that can be described as:

- infringes on the rights of others
- disrupts others or causes disputes between children
- causes harm or risk to the child, other children, adults or living things
- is destructive to the environment and/or equipment
- inhibits the child's learning and relationship with others
- a child presenting as shy, withdrawn or excessively passive in a way which is inhibiting their learning and/or development
- is inappropriate relative to the child's developmental age and background.

**Inclusion Support Program (ISP):** is a key component of the Government's Child Care Safety Net. The program provides support for eligible mainstream Early Childhood Education and Care services to build their

capacity and capability to include children with additional needs, alongside their typically developing peers, so all children have genuine opportunities to access, participate and achieve positive learning outcomes. For more information visit: [www.dese.gov.au](http://www.dese.gov.au)

**Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program (KIS):** Supports funded kindergartens to plan and implement a program that is responsive to the individual abilities, interests and needs of children with a disability, developmental delay or complex medical needs. Long Day Care services can apply for the KIS program for their Victorian Government-funded kindergarten programs.

**Program Support Groups (PSG):** A program support group brings together key people to support the inclusion of children with disability or developmental delay, or complex medical needs, from the time of enrolment at kindergarten until they move to school. The group may include:

- the early childhood teacher
- the child's parent/carer(s)
- early childhood intervention professionals
- a preschool field officer
- medical practitioners, therapists, or other allied health professionals
- a support person – if the child's parent/carer(s) chooses to use one.

**Mental health:** In early childhood, a child's mental health is understood as a child's ability to 'experience, regulate and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children. Infant mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development. <https://beyou.edu.au/>

**Preschool Field Officer (PSFO) Program:** The role of the PSFO Program to support the access and participation of children with additional needs in their kindergarten program. For more information visit: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

## 6. Responsibilities

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider (Meli) and persons with management control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators, and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers, and students
R indicates legislation requirement					
Develop and implement the <i>Interactions with Children Policy</i> in consultation with stakeholders, and ensure it reflects the philosophy, beliefs and values of the service	R	√	√	√	√
Ensure all stakeholders are provided with a copy of the <i>Interactions with Children Policy</i> and comply with its requirements	R	√	√	√	√
Ensure staff are aware of service expectations regarding positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour, acceptable responses, and warm, trusting and reciprocal interactions when working with children and families ( <i>refer to Code of Conduct Policy</i> )	R	√			
Always ensure children are adequately supervised and educator-to-child ratios are maintained ( <i>refer to Supervision of Children Policy</i> )	R	√	√		√
Ensure the service environment is safe, secure, free from hazards ( <i>National Law: Section 167</i> ) ( <i>refer to Child Safe Environment Policy, Occupational Health and Safety Policy and Supervision of Children Policy</i> ) and promotes the active participation of every child	R	R	√		√
Ensure the size and composition of groups is considered to ensure all children are provided with the best opportunities for quality interactions and relationships ( <i>Regulation 156(2)</i> ). Smaller group sizes are considered optimal to promote intentional teaching strategies and responsive engagement opportunities.	R	√	√		√
Develop and implement educational programs that are delivered in accordance with an approved learning framework, are based on the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child, and	R	R	√		√

take into account the individual differences and strengths of each child (refer to <i>Inclusion and Equity Policy</i> )					
Ensure the educational program contributes to the development of children to have a strong sense of wellbeing and identity, and to be connected, confident, and effective learners and communicators ( <i>Regulation 73</i> ) (refer to <i>Curriculum Development Policy</i> )	R	√	√		√
Ensure the service provides education and care to children that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>encourages children to express themselves and their opinions</li> <li>allows children to undertake experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem</li> <li>always maintains the dignity and rights of each child</li> <li>offers positive guidance and encouragement towards acceptable behaviour</li> <li>respects cultural and family values, age, and the physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child at the service (<i>Regulation 155</i>)</li> </ul>	R	√	√		√
Ensure that MKS provides children with opportunities to interact and develop positive relationships with each other, and with staff and volunteers at the service ( <i>Regulation 156(1)</i> )	R	√	√		√
Recognise the importance of friendships and encourage support from peers, to help children and young people feel safe and be connected	√	√	√		√
Ensure records of the assessment and evaluation of each child's: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>developmental needs, interests, experiences and participation</li> <li>progress against the outcomes of the educational program (<i>Regulation 74</i>) (refer to <i>Curriculum Development Policy</i>)</li> </ul>	R	√	√		√
Ensure procedures are in place for effective daily communication with parents/guardians to share information about children's learning, development, interactions, behaviour, and relationships	R	√	√		√
Support educators and staff to access resources and gain appropriate training, knowledge, and skills for the implementation of this policy, including promoting social, emotional, mental health and wellbeing	√	√			
Ensure staff members understand that it is an offence to subject a child to any form of corporal punishment, or discipline that is unreasonable or excessive in the circumstances ( <i>National Law: Section 166</i> )	R	R	R	√	√
Ensure notification of serious incidents are made to the regulatory authority (DET) through the NQA IT System as soon as is practicable, and not later than 24 hours after the occurrence ( <i>National Law: Section 174(2)(a), Regulations 176 (2)(a)</i> )	R	√			
Notify DET within 24 hours of becoming aware of a notifiable complaint or allegation regarding the safety, health and/or welfare of a child at the service ( <i>National Law: Section 174(2)(b), Regulations 176 (2)(a)</i> )	R	√			
Ensure that where the service has been notified of a court order prohibiting an adult from contacting an enrolled child, such contact does not occur while the child is at an MKS location	R	R	√		√
Ensure staff, volunteers and contractors use positive and respectful strategies to assist children to manage their behaviour, and respond appropriately to conflict and the behaviour of others	R	√	√		√
Develop links and referral pathways to services and/or program support groups to support children and their families who are experiencing social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties	√	√	√		√
Ensure a behaviour guidance plan is developed if there is concern a child's behaviour may put the child, other children, staff or others at risk	√	√	√	√	
Ensure parents/guardians/support agencies are consulted if behaviour guidance plan hasn't resolved a child's challenging behaviour	√	√	√	√	
Work collaboratively with staff and support agencies (where applicable) to develop or review a child's behaviour guidance plan for their child.	√	√	√	√	√
Set timelines for review and evaluation of all behaviour guidance plans.	√	√	√		
Provide information, ideas and practical strategies to families and staff to promote and support health and wellbeing in the service and home	√	√	√		
Consult with, and seek advice from, DET if a suitable and mutually agreeable behaviour guidance plan cannot be developed	R	√	√		

Investigate the option of extra assistance by contacting the regional Preschool Field Officer, specialist children's services officers from DET or other agencies working with the child	R	√	√		
Ensure that additional resources are sourced, if required, to implement a behaviour guidance plan	R	√			
Ensure staff are provided with appropriate training to guide their actions and responses to a child(ren) with challenging behaviour.	√	√			
Inform staff of concerns, events or incidents that may impact a child's behaviour at the service				√	
Maintain confidentiality ( <i>refer to Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> )	R	√	√	√	√

## 7. Evaluation

To assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, MKS as the approved provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints, and incidents in relation to this policy and ensure satisfactory resolutions have been achieved
- 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
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk (*Regulation 172 (2)*).

## 8. Related MKS Policies

- Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Compliments and Complaints Policy
- Curriculum Development Policy
- Inclusion, Equity and Anti-Bias Approach Policy
- Occupational Health and Safety Policy
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- Supervision of Children Policy

## 9. Sources

- Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia: [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)
- Child Safe Standards: [www.cryp.vic.gov.au](http://www.cryp.vic.gov.au)
- Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)
- Guide to the National Quality Framework, ACECQA: [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)
- Inclusion Support Program: [www.dese.gov.au](http://www.dese.gov.au)
- Kids Matter, an Australian mental health and well-being initiative set in primary schools and early childhood education and care services: <https://beyou.edu.au>
- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (DET): [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)
- Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA): [www.viac.com.au](http://www.viac.com.au)