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Custodian:	Executive Director - Services

1. Purpose

This policy establishes Meli Kindergarten Services' commitment to providing safe, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate in-nature programs that support children's learning, wellbeing, and connection to the natural environment. It ensures alignment with the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010, Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011, and the National Quality Standard, particularly Quality Areas 1 and 2.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all individuals involved in the delivery, oversight, and participation in Meli Kindergarten Services' in-nature programs, including:

- All management, staff and educators.
- Students, volunteers, and contractors.
- Parents/guardians of participating children.
- Children enrolled in or attending in-nature programs.
- Any other individuals engaged in or affected by the in-nature.

This policy ensures that everyone involved or impacted by in-nature programs is aware of their responsibilities and the standards expected, supporting a safe, equitable, and enriching experience for all participants.

3. Background

In-nature programs are outdoor educational experiences conducted in natural environments such as parks, bushland, and beaches. These programs support children's learning, wellbeing, and connection to nature through play-based exploration.

Outdoor learning is recognised in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) and the National Quality Framework (NQF) as essential for fostering physical health, emotional resilience, and risk awareness.

In-nature programs must be inclusive and accessible to all children, regardless of ability, medical needs, or financial circumstances. Risk management and road safety education are integral to ensuring children's safety and supporting their development as confident, capable learners in real-world environments.

4. Definitions

Adequate Supervision – refers to active and diligent supervision that ensures all children are within sight and/or hearing of an educator at all times. Supervision must enable educators to respond to individual needs and intervene immediately when necessary.

Attendance Record – refers to a record maintained by the service that documents each child's arrival and departure times, and the identity of the person responsible for delivering or collecting the child.

Authorisation – refers to written consent provided by a parent/guardian or authorised individual for a child to participate in an in-nature program, including all details required under Regulation 99 and 102(4).

Extreme Weather – refers to weather conditions that pose an immediate or long-term safety risk, including severe rain, lightning, wind, or heat, as defined by the Bureau of Meteorology.

In-Nature / Bush Program – refers to educational sessions for children that take place outdoors in nature. Children at bush kinders get to learn through play with natural materials outside. It's like a fun classroom in nature. These natural spaces can include:

- metropolitan parks
- regional parks
- local bushland
- local beaches
- visitor sites within national and state parks.

Regular Excursions / Outings – refers to an excursion that occurs at the same time, location, route, destination, has the same risks as part of the educational program, where the circumstances remain consistent each time. Authorisation for regular outings must be obtained at least once.

Risk Assessment – refers to a documented process to identify and evaluate potential risks to children's health, safety, and wellbeing during in-nature programs. It must outline strategies to manage or minimise each identified risk.

5. Policy

Meli Kindergarten Services is committed to delivering in-nature programs that enrich children's learning and development through meaningful engagement with the natural environment and broader community. These programs will be inclusive, accessible, and aligned with the approved learning framework, supporting each child's wellbeing, safety, and developmental needs.

Meli will ensure that in-nature programs:

- uphold the principles of the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations
- reflect the learning outcomes and practices of the National Quality Standard
- maintain adequate supervision and educator-to-child ratios at all times
- incorporate road safety education to promote safe and active travel
- are planned with consideration for equity, inclusion, and the diverse needs of children and families.

6. Delegations and Responsibilities

The **CEO** is responsible for:

- Ensuring Meli maintains organisational compliance with the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and National Regulations 2011 in relation to in-nature programs.

- Providing executive leadership to embed outdoor learning and child safety within Meli's governance, risk, and quality frameworks.
- Approving the In Nature Policy and ensuring it aligns with Meli's strategic objectives and child wellbeing commitments.
- Promoting a culture of inclusion, safety, and continuous improvement in relation to outdoor education.

The **Executive Director Services** is responsible for:

- Providing operational leadership to ensure in-nature programs are implemented consistently across all Meli Kindergarten Services.
- Overseeing the development and review of supporting procedures, risk management tools, and staff training related to in-nature programs.
- Monitoring compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements through internal audits, incident reporting, and service-level reviews.
- Ensuring the Children's Services Program Director manages risks associated with outdoor environments, including supervision, transport, and weather conditions.

Program Directors and Managers are responsible for:

- Supporting educators to plan and deliver in-nature programs that are inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and aligned with the approved learning framework.
- Ensuring staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities regarding supervision, risk management, and child safety during in-nature programs.
- Communicating with families about the purpose, educational value, and safety considerations of in-nature programs.
- Ensuring risk assessments and authorisations are completed and stored in accordance with regulatory requirements.

Early Childhood Teachers, Educators and All Other Staff are responsible for:

- Upholding the principles of this policy during the planning and delivery of in-nature programs.
- Maintaining adequate supervision and educator-to-child ratios at all times.
- Supporting children's learning and wellbeing through safe and inclusive outdoor experiences.
- Reporting any concerns or incidents related to in-nature programs to service leadership.
- Planning for a bush kinder. Services should consider the planning and development of a bush kinder program which includes:
 - consulting and communicating with parents and families
 - choosing a suitable outdoor site
 - reviewing service policies and procedures
 - conducting risk assessments
 - outlining program delivery requirements
 - developing an educational program.
- Ensure children have access to clean drinking water and follow SunSmart policy.

Parents/Guardians are responsible for:

- Providing written authorisation for their child to participate in in-nature programs, as required under the National Regulations.
- Informing the service of any medical conditions, additional needs, or other factors that may affect their child's participation.
- Supplying appropriate clothing, food, and other items as requested for in-nature programs.

Contractors, Volunteers and Students are responsible for:

- Complying with this policy and following staff instructions during in-nature programs.
- Participating in supervision and safety briefings as required.
- Reporting any safety concerns or incidents to a staff member immediately.

7. Policy Application

To ensure the values and objectives of this policy are upheld, Meli Kindergarten Services will:

- Monitor the implementation of in-nature programs across services to ensure consistency with this policy and alignment with the National Quality Framework.
- Seek feedback from educators, staff, families, and other stakeholders on the effectiveness, inclusivity, and safety of in-nature programs.
- Review incidents, concerns, or complaints related to in-nature programs to identify opportunities for improvement.
- Update the policy in response to changes in legislation, sector guidance, or emerging risks associated with outdoor learning environments.
- Undertake scheduled policy reviews every three years or earlier if required due to significant incidents or regulatory changes.
- Communicate any significant changes to this policy to affected stakeholders with appropriate notice, unless urgent action is required to manage risk.

8. Legislation, Acts, Standards

- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- National Quality Standard
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic)
- Road Safety Act 1986 (Vic)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)

9. Related Documents

Sources

- [ACECQA – The How and Why of In-Nature Play](#)
- [ACECQA – Risk Assessment and Management Tool](#)
- [Victorian Department of Education – Bush Kinders](#)
- [Child Health Promotion Research Centre – Road Safety Education](#)
- [Parks Victoria – Bush Kinder Handbook](#)
- [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework](#)
- [Early Childhood Australia – Outdoor Pedagogy Portal](#)

Related Policies

- Acceptance and Refusal of Authorisations Policy
- Administration of First Aid Policy
- Anaphylaxis and Allergic Reactions Policy
- Asthma Management Policy
- Curriculum Development Policy
- Dealing with Medical Conditions Policy
- Delivery and Collection of Children Policy
- Diabetes Policy
- Emergency and Evacuation Policy

- Enrolment and Orientation Policy
- Epilepsy and Seizures Policy
- Fees Policy
- Food Safety Policy
- Hygiene Policy
- Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy
- Inclusion and Equity Policy
- Interactions with Children Policy
- Nutrition and Active Play Policy
- Occupational Health and Safety Policy
- Participation of Volunteers and Students Policy
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- Road Safety and Safe Transport Policy
- Sun Protection Policy
- Supervision of Children Policy
- Water Safety Policy

10.Document History

Version	Approved By	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections Modified	Updated By
1.0	CEO	10/12/2025	10/12/2025	New policy	Cassandra Gallop