



# Physical environment

## Introduction

The Learning Frameworks picture the child within the context of their family and community, immersed in the environment they all share.

In the Guide to the National Quality Standard (ACECQA) it says:

*This quality area of the National Quality Standard focuses on the physical environment and ensuring that it is safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences that promote children’s learning and development.*

The national Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics is an important part of this work.

## Critical areas of concern

These policies are a requirement of all staff in the service without exception.

A critical area of concern is that there are many myths about the requirements for the environment in Quality Area 3. It is therefore important to ensure that all actions taken in this area are discussed and measured against the National Quality Standard.

## Implementation

The service philosophy guides the implementation of all its policies.

## Knowledge development

Staff in this service are required to have or be working toward the relevant baseline qualification and then continue their ongoing learning. In this area, it includes:

- Orientation
- Professional learning through staff meetings
- Ongoing reading, discussion and self-reflection
- External professional development as decided with the Director
- Professional development as decided by the service as being essential for all staff in the area:
  - ✓ National Quality Standards
  - ✓ The Learning Frameworks
  - ✓ Other: .....





## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Critical areas of concern .....	1
Implementation .....	1
Knowledge development.....	1
Contents.....	2
Policy: The environment we share.....	3
Statement: Our Environment.....	4
References .....	6

### Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the input from the staff and friends of Child Australia, the Professional Support Coordinator (the PSC) team, the Community Child Care Coop (NSW), Curtin University Early Learning Centre, the Directors and staff of the Early Learning Services and Outside School Hours Care Services and the members of the Educational Leaders Association who helped in the development of these policies.

## Policy: The environment we share

### Policy Statement

We will act to provide a safe and resourced environment suitable for providing the staff, families and the children with positive opportunities they need.

The service will ensure that the planning and design of the environment is consulted on, researched and coordinated to support the longer term development of the service overall and the maintenance of our environment to a high standard.

Educators will ensure that the children are engaged in experiences that build curiosity, knowledge and appreciation of the broader environment and its need for care and protection.

We appreciate that access to a healthy environment has a direct link to the health and well-being of our children. Our curriculum planning will demonstrate this.

The service will support Educators in their use of the environment through initial training and then ongoing support.

### Rationale

Meaningful play provides a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, (EYLF Page 4) (FSAC Page 46).

The service follows the principle that the environment in which play occurs is important and recognises the environment as the third educator.

### Definition: What do we mean by the 'Environment?'

We believe that the service environment encompasses the internal and external environments that the children and staff access each day.

We understand and support broader thinking about our global environment and seek to understand how the two interact.

### Related policies

Philosophy  
Curriculum  
Health and safety policies  
Centre environment plan

### Procedures related to this policy

Curriculum  
Health and safety  
Maintenance procedures  
Centre environment plan

### Centre forms related to this policy

Operational plan

### Related Centre publications

Curriculum  
Parent handbook  
Staff Handbook

### Related education

Parent orientation session  
Curriculum session

### Review schedule

2 years or at need

### Legal and professional requirements

Education and Care Services  
National Law - Section 167

Education and Care Services  
National Regulations - Regulation  
103-117

National Quality Standards QA 3.1,  
3.2, 3.3 and 6.3 as well as Quality  
Area

## Statement: Our Environment

### Professional practice note

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) raises environmental challenges in the specific context of child health and education (Article 29 CRC), providing Educators with the context to consider their practice within the environment:

Art. 29 (1) CRC: »States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:  
(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

From: [http://www.terredeshommes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/tdh\\_Environmental-Child-Rights\\_2012-11-final.pdf](http://www.terredeshommes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/tdh_Environmental-Child-Rights_2012-11-final.pdf)

A physical environment is characterised by both indoor and outdoor spaces. The physical environment underpins every aspect of development and learning.

The physical environment must both support and promote social development, exploration, experimentation and creativity through the provision and support of various areas which are easily accessible and easy to travel between.

Experiences in the indoor and outdoor environments are subject to equal focus and attention. We support children of all abilities and ages in the indoor and outdoor environments through planning for:

- Self-discovery
- Independent decision making
- Supporting interests
- Critical thinking
- Discussion
- Intentional teaching experiences, whether in small or whole group activities through a wide variety of learning media. (*from The Learning Frameworks*)

Access to open spaces develops vital social skills, for example:

- Relationship building
- Conversations
- Negotiation
- Team building
- Leadership skills.

According to the National Quality Standard (*Quality Area 3*), each service must take an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future. The practices we seek to embed are:

1. ... Care and respect for the immediate environment and beyond, as this develops positive attitudes and values within children especially if staff model the desired behaviours and responsibilities to sustain and care for the environment (*The little green steps, 2007*).
2. Experiences to promote the development of life skills such as growing and preparing food, waste reduction and recycling, energy efficiency and water conservation.

3. Opportunities to build knowledge and respect for natural and constructed environments.
4. Exploration of the natural environment. Our goal is that through their natural curiosity and play, the children develop an appreciation and awareness of the value to them, of the environment as a whole and that we encourage children to consider and act upon sustaining our future.

In doing so we seek to include:

1. Natural elements, for example: shells, sticks, wood, pinecones, tree blocks, bamboo rings and stones
2. Children have access to water, trees, garden, sand, rocks and mud; they maintain these areas as part of their daily routines and scientific learning
3. Messy exploration
4. Plants and flowers including children's eating spaces, such as the dining room
5. Animal care wherever possible.

Claire Waldon in *Daisy Chain, 2013*, claims activities like these will support dispositional learning; it builds a sense of wonder about the natural environment and about living and non-living things within it; thus increase their awareness of human activity.

**Write your main sustainability strategies here...**

1. Children to practice conserving water. Examples of this include:
  - a. Using waste water in the garden or grass
  - b. Not to run the water in the bathroom unnecessarily
  - c. Children consider the required level of water in their drinking cups.
2. Everyone conserving the amount of artificial light we use on a daily basis is another method of caring for our environment and reducing energy consumption, more natural light has a more calming effect on children.
3. ... ..

## References

Guide to the National Quality Standard (ACECQA) <http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/National-Quality-Framework-Resources-Kit/NQF03-Guide-to-NQS-130902.pdf>

Guide to the National Law and National Regulations (ACECQA)  
[http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/National-Quality-Framework-Resources-Kit/2014/NQF02%20Guide%20to%20ECS%20Law%20and%20Regs\\_web.pdf](http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/National-Quality-Framework-Resources-Kit/2014/NQF02%20Guide%20to%20ECS%20Law%20and%20Regs_web.pdf)

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (ACECQA)  
<http://www.acecqa.gov.au/ResourceCategory.aspx?pid=412&gcpid=2> (Useful Word Version and PDF)

My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care (ACECQA)  
<http://www.acecqa.gov.au/ResourceCategory.aspx?pid=412&gcpid=2> (Useful Word Version and PDF)

ACECQA Occasional Paper – Educational Program and Practice  
<http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Reports/2015/Occasional%20Paper%201%20-%20Educational%20Program%20and%20Practice.pdf>

Managing risk in play  
<http://www.playengland.net/resource/managing-risk-in-play-provision-implementation-guide/>

Child Australia  
<http://www.childdaustralia.org.au>

In our reading, we used and recommend the resources in the Early Childhood Resource Hub (Australian and state governments) <http://www.echr.edu.au/#/>

### Disclaimer

This resource is based on the most current information available in April 2016.

In developing this resource, we have referred to legislation and regulations, sought advice from professional organisations and reviewed contemporary research. This document should be used as a guide to compliment and develop a service's existing practices. Services should always check the currency of information at the time of use and consider the information in this resource in the context of their particular service.