BUSH KINDER

PARENT HANDBOOK

2017
BUSH KINDER OVERVIEW

Bush Kinder was developed in response to research that shows outdoor activities in a natural environment are extremely beneficial to children’s health, wellbeing and development. Many Victorian preschools have already implemented Bush Kinder into their kindergarten program with great success.

Originating in Scandinavia in the 1950’s, the forest preschool approach has been used as a framework for Bush Kinder in Australia, where children are encouraged to play in, and learn from, our natural environment.

Key features of the Bush Kinder approach include:

- Children spend long and regular periods of time in unstructured or semi-structured play in natural environments all year round
- Children experience the daily and seasonal fluctuations in weather and seasons
- No toys, tools or art supplies, the Bush Kinder experience enables children to play with whatever nature has provided, and leaving only a footprint behind

Current research on children who regularly play in outdoor natural settings has concluded that they have:

- Increased confidence, motivation, concentration and resilience
- Increased social, physical and language skills
- Deeper conceptual understanding and respect for the natural environment
- Mud, sand, water, leaves, sticks etc. can stimulate children’s immune systems making them sick less often
- Children are more physically active and more likely to be a healthy weight
- Children are more resistant to stress, have lower incidence of behavioural disorders, anxiety and depression, and have a higher measure of self-worth
- Bush Kinder deepens children’s understanding of community and where they fit in and offers better opportunities for children to be present and authentically engaged in real life
- Encourages a well connected, cohesive community that is environmentally aware

References:
http://www.wgkg.vic.edu.au/bush-kinder
LOCATION – BRAESIDE PARK

We have chosen Braeside Park as our Bush Kinder location. It is situated just off Lower Dandenong road, about an 8 minute drive from the kindergarten. It can also be easily accessed via a public bus.

Braeside park was chosen as our bush kinder setting for reasons including:

• Close proximity to preschool (8 minute drive)
• A variety of natural play spaces away from traffic and rail hazards
• Facilities including toilets and shelter
• It provides a variety of flora, fauna and natural habitats for children to explore
• Provides play spaces with natural boundaries that can be easily identified by children, staff and volunteers
• Bush setting reflective of the philosophy of Bush Kinder
• Ample parking
• Ability to form a relationship with the Friends of Braeside Park, and Rangers from Parks Victoria, strengthening students connection with the community

BUSH KINDER TIMES

Both 4 year old preschool groups (Seastars and Penguins) will have a 3.5 hour Bush Kinder session once per week on a Wednesday. Bush kinder will run in terms 2,3 and 4. There will be no Bush Kinder in term 1 to allow children to settle into routines and build relationships with staff and other children in the group.

The allocated times for Bush kinder are as follows:

**Seastars**  Wednesday  8:15am - 11:45am

**Penguins**  Wednesday  12:30pm – 4:00pm

CONSENT FORM

To participate in Bush Kinder parents/guardians must complete a “Routine Excursion Form.” This form will be distributed by the teachers and must be returned to the kindergarten prior to the end of term 1.

DROP OFF AND PICK UP PROCEDURE

The drop off and pick up location for **Seastars** will be Car Park 1 (Swallow). Car park 1 is the first car park after you enter Braeside park from Lower Dandenong Road, please refer to the map at Attachment 1. There is ample parking within the car park to allow you to park and drop your child off. Please note that Car Park 1 is one way, you will need to drive past the exit to the car park in order to enter. The “meeting point” for Seastars will be on the grass opposite Car Park 1.

The drop off and pick up location for **Penguins** will be Car Park 6 (Robin). Follow the circuit road to car park 6 which is on the far side of the park, please refer to the map at Attachment 1. There is ample parking within the car park to allow you to park and drop
your child off. The “meeting point” for Penguins will be under the open shelter opposite Car Park 6.

During drop off Parents/Guardians need to ensure they:
• Take their child to the “meeting point” and ensure a teacher/educator is aware they are present
• Sign the child in on the attendance sheet remembering to record the exact time of arrival
• Place the child’s bag on the picnic rug
• Ensure a hat (term 4), high visibility vest and a Mentone Preschool bracelet are placed on the child

During pick-up Parents/Guardians need to ensure they:
• Sign the child out using the attendance book
• Collect the child’s belongings
• Ensure the teacher/educator is aware you have collected your child
• Are mindful of not distracting/speaking with staff until all of the children have been collected
• Are responsible for the supervision of your child once they are signed out even if still at the Bush Kinder site

SESSION OVERVIEW

Prior to the commencement of a session, teachers will scan the bush space for any safety hazards and areas of potential interest. Each Bush Kinder session will begin with all children assembling at the meeting point. The teachers will remain at this meeting point for 20 minutes before venturing to their chosen Bush Kinder site.

Sessions will run with a similar routine to sessions run in the centre and will include a snack time, circle time and exploration time.

STAFF AND PARENT VOLUNTEERES

Our regular teachers and educators, Jenny, Michelle, Josie, Halina and Michelle S, are all extremely excited to be implementing our Bush Kinder program. During Bush Kinder sessions two staff members will be in attendance at all times.

We will also require one parent helper to attend each Bush Kinder session. This will allow us to achieve an adult to child ratio of 1:8. At times, extra helpers may be required for the safe running of the program. Teachers will ask for parent volunteers to roster themselves to days that suit best. Please note that with a class of 22, parents will only be required to volunteer for approx. 2 sessions per year.

Whenever you attend a Bush Kinder session you are required to sign in and out via our attendance book. All helpers will be required to be clearly identifiable by wearing a Bush Kinder high visibility vest (provided by the preschool).
COMMUNICATION

Whilst a Bush Kinder session is running, parents/guardians must always have a mobile phone turned on and with them so that they are easily contactable. Parent/guardians are also required to download the TiqBiz application. A guide to downloading and using TiqBiz can be found at Attachment 3. Tiqbiz will be used to notify parents of updates, cancellations, reminders and all other Preschool communications.

Parents will also be given a Mentone Preschool mobile phone number to allow a direct line of communication with staff.

ATTENDANCE

We ask that parents/guardians exercise their own judgement in assessing whether it is appropriate for their children to attend Bush Kinder. Children should not attend Bush Kinder if they are unwell, excessively tired, or if a parent/guardian is concerned about their well-being due to forecast weather conditions. This also applies to any preschool session.

If your child will not attend Bush Kinder please notify the staff by either filling out an absence on Tiqbiz or by calling them directly.

Parents/guardians are always welcome to stay and be involved in sessions, and are asked to indicate their intention to do so at the commencement of the session. Please also sign yourself into the attendance book.

MEDICAL CONDITIONS AND MEDICATIONS

Parents/Guardians of children with allergies or other medical conditions must discuss their emergency plans with staff prior to commencing the first session. Staff will take individual children’s medication and action plans with them to each Bush Kinder session. Teachers are also required to carry full medical/first aid pack which will contain emergency medications and equipment including epi-pen and ventolin puffer.

CLOTHING

Parents/Guardians are required to determine appropriate clothing based on the weather forecast, and appropriate for their child’s Bush Kinder time. It is recommended that children wear clothes that:

• Allows them to move freely and undertake activities such as climbing, balancing and running
• Keeps them warm in winter and cool in summer
• Protects them from the damaging effects of the sun and from bites, scratches and stings
• Footwear that is enclosed, flexible and safe to climb/run in
• Provide waterproof barrier, such as light rainproof jacket, to be used during times of rain
The table below provides examples of clothing that is recommended, and that which is not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weather Conditions</th>
<th>Warm/Hot</th>
<th>Cold/Wet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommended clothing and footwear</strong></td>
<td>Light, loose fitting long sleeved top and long pants. Broad brimmed hat or Legionnaires hat. Closed toe shoes. T-shirts are also acceptable if sunscreen has been applied to arms</td>
<td>Waterproof jacket, raincoat, long pants, long sleeved top, beanie, waterproof gloves, warm socks and gumboots. Thermals are recommended in very cold weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Recommended</strong></td>
<td>Short sleeved tops, long skirts or dresses and shorts.</td>
<td>Skirts and dresses – so as to enable waterproofs to be worn over clothing,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unacceptable</strong></td>
<td>Open toe shoes, sandals, thongs, crocs and singlet tops.</td>
<td>Non-waterproof outer clothing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Children will be unable to attend a Bush Kinder session if they arrive with unacceptable clothing and have no suitable alternative to change into.**

All children participating in Bush Kinder are required to bring a full change of clothes in their backpack. Spare clothing should include:

- Spare top and bottoms
- Spare underpants (and singlet in winter)
- 1 pairs of socks
- A spare pair of shoes if gumboots not likely to be worn all session (it is not recommended that gumboots are worn during times when the weather is dry due to the restrictions they impose
- Lightweight, waterproof jacket

Other things to pack in your child’s backpack include:

- Named water bottle with fresh water
- A snack in a sealed container

The Preschool will provide:

- Puddle pants (for use during wet weather)
- Hats
- High visibility vests
- Identification wrist band

On high UV days (especially term 4), please ensure you apply sunscreen prior to the beginning of a session.

Please ensure all clothing and footwear is clearly named.
CANCELLATIONS

Bush Kinder sessions may be cancelled ahead of time, at short notice or during a session due to extreme weather, lack of parent volunteer, staff illness or for any other reason at the discretion of the teachers. In the instance that Bush Kinder is cancelled, a normal kinder session will be held at the preschool.

Monitoring of weather conditions will be undertaken by the teachers using the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) website. Parents will be notified of a cancellation via Tiqbiz by 6pm the night before a kinder session, or by 7:30am (for morning session) and 9am (for afternoon session) on the day of Bush Kinder. Bush Kinder sessions will be cancelled if any of the below determinants are met:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEATHER CONDITION</th>
<th>EXTREME WEATHER DETERMINANT CAUSING CANCELLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forecast Temperature</td>
<td>Greater than 34 degrees Celsius. Note: there is no pre-set minimum temperature. Thermals and clothing layers should be worn on very cold days (refer to Protective Clothing Policy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forecast wind speed</td>
<td>&gt;40km per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forecast electrical storm activity</td>
<td>Thunder storm / electrical storm forecast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounds flooded near or at Bush Kinder site</td>
<td>On inspection of the Bush Kinder site by educators, or alert from Parks Victoria ranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOM weather warnings of extreme storm conditions and excessive rainfall</td>
<td>On warning issued by the Bureau of Meteorology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other reasons for a Bush Kinder session to be relocated or cancelled include, but are not limited to:
- Fire
- Missing child
- Aggressive dog off lead
- Uninvited person causing nuisance or unease for staff and/or children
- Medical emergency or accident

In the event that a group has to be evacuated, relocated or cancelled mid session for any reason, staff will send both a broadcast SMS and notification via Tiqbiz specifying the nature of the emergency and the location for pick-up. Please familiarise yourself with Braeside Park, as shown in Attachment 1, and with the designated emergency evacuation points as shown in Attachment 2.

SAFETY AND AWARENESS

Mentone Preschool recognises that several potential safety hazards exist for our Bush Kinder program. Whilst it is highly unlikely that any of the identified risks or events will occur it is our responsibility to ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are in place in the event that something should occur.

For a full analysis of risk vs benefit, please refer to our extensive risk evaluation available in the Preschool foyer, or ask our teachers and they will gladly provide a copy.
Other policies developed specifically for Bush Kinder in accordance with Department of Education and Training Regulations include:

- Bush Kinder Delivery and Collection of Children
- Bush Kinder Dog Awareness
- Bush Kinder Emergency Evacuation
- Bush Kinder Extreme Weather
- Bush Kinder Safety and Hygiene
- Bush Kinder Snake Awareness

These policies provide an adjunct to Preschool policies already in place, all of which apply to Bush Kinder as well.

During Term 1, specific Bush Kinder training will be run during normal Preschool sessions in order to prepare the children for Bush Kinder. These information sessions will include topics such as, dog awareness and what to do if a dog is off lead in the park, snake and other wildlife awareness and what to do if you see a snake, hygiene including washing hands, road safety, stranger awareness and more.

Evaluation of the Bush Kinder program will be constant and ongoing. We ask that all participating families of the Mentone Preschool Bush Kinder program be actively involved in this process. Parent/Guardians are encouraged to provide feedback, raise concerns and highlight any areas for improvement at any time, either via discussion with the teachers directly, or via the Committee of Management using the email info@mentonepreschool.com.au.
ATTACHMENT 1
BUSH KINDER MAP – BRAESIDE PARK

Drop off and pick up point for Seastars

Drop off and pick up point for Penguins
ATTACHMENT 2
EMERGENCY EVACUATION ASSEMBLY POINTS AND ROUTES

The safe zone assembly points will differ depending on the nature of the emergency and the location of the Bush Kinder site:

A. TORRENTIAL RAIN, HAIL, ELECTRICAL STORM

Assembly Point: Group to move safely to closest assembly point A, B, or C as shown on map, until torrential rain and/or hail, and/or electrical storm has passed and it is safe to resume normal activities. Shelter may be sought inside the Visitor Centre if the weather shows no signs of abating (see Assembly Point B below).

Route: Take shortest safe route possible

B. EXTREME WINDS

Assembly Point B: Visitor Centre
Group to wait here until storm passes and safe to resume activities (recommend 30 minutes after electrical storm activity has ceased)

Route: Take shortest safe route possible

C. ALL OTHER EMERGENCY EVACUATION SITUATIONS (when NOT necessary to evacuate Braeside Park altogether)

If it is not necessary to evacuate Braeside Park altogether:

Assembly Point C: At the closest ESTA Emergency marker point (see note at end of this attachment)

Route: Take shortest safe route possible
D. OTHER EMERGENCY EVACUATION SITUATIONS
(when NECESSARY to evacuate Braeside Park)

If it is necessary to evacuate Braeside Park:

**Assembly Point D:** Lower Dandenong Road at the entrance or exit (whichever is closer)

**Route:** Take the shortest and safest route possible
ATTACHMENT 3
HOW TO DOWNLOAD AND USE TIQBIZ APPLICATION

Here’s how to set up tiqbiz

Phone and tablet.
Search tiqbiz in your app store.

For Apple:
Select ‘allow’ notifications.

Computer
Access the web version of tiqbiz.
Go to web.tiqbiz.com then register/log-in

Add us

Log-in
Open tiqbiz and register/log-in.

Search
Select the ‘Search’ icon and type in our name.
Select us from the results.

Add
Click the ‘Add’ icon beside the boxes that apply to you.

Return to search
Click the back arrow to return to search.

Home
Click the ‘Home’ icon to view.

Please email for technical support: support@tiqbiz.com