

Bush Kids Philosophy

Bush Kids believes that children need the natural world and that it looks after them. They are biologically designed to be in it and therefore thrive by being in intimate, everyday contact with it. It provides the most generous and powerful learning environment, with great affordance for child-led learning and development. Bush Kids believes that "unstructured outdoor nature play is a critical foundation of early childhood, to develop lifelong health, cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing". The Service believes that "nature play is fundamental to expanding children's natural wonder, imagination and curiosity to embed a lifelong interest in investigating and discovering their natural world." Every child has the right to outdoor play and to experience the wonders of nature, in order to develop an appreciation and respect for nature. Bush Kids believes that if children can develop a relationship and make a connection with nature, they are more likely to take steps towards more sustainable practices to care for the world they live in. They can work towards developing a deeper connection to the land and our Cultural heritage and to reconciling our relationship with the land and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At Bush Kids we strive to create a culture of respect for land and waterways and respect and value for our precious resources.

Bush Kids recognises and values the many benefits of natural and outdoor play for children. Bush Kids strives to provide beautiful outdoor spaces with many natural elements; fresh air, water, dirt and fire, that engage children and provide vast learning opportunities through:

An acknowledgment that education and care is founded on values. At Bush Kids we aim to create a community where children will respect and value their families and the society in which they live; where children respect, know and value themselves and are comfortable with the challenges that lie ahead. Therefore, there is an emphasis on the development of interpersonal skills and self-regulation, understanding and valuing social justice and mutual respect in everything that is undertaken. Bush Kids values the outdoors, the natural environment and our natural resources which is reflected through the Centre's Program and embedded practices.

Our Centre values the principles of trust, respect for diversity, equity, fairness and social justice. We aim to promote a strong sense of identity in our children that is fostered by engaging learning experiences that encourage success, affirming relationships, resilience and strength in personal and cultural identity. Our rooms are inclusive environments for children to learn and allow for a flexible approach to address individual needs within the group. Bush Kids values the rich and long history of Australia including our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture. Bush Kids recognises that the "interdependence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the land is based on respect - while the land sustains and provides for the people, people manage and sustain the land through culture and ceremony". To sustain and show our respect towards these values, towards our Cultural heritage, Bush Kids promotes and embeds through our practices with the children, families and wider community, respect for land and waterways. We believe children who learn outdoors develop a deep understanding of conservation and environmental issues. Through our program, the children can make enhanced connections with nature and we promote environmental sustainability: through growing our own vegetables, recycling and composting. Through taking opportunities in the early years to foster intimate, meaningful and positive connections with the natural environment, if we want the next generation to create a sustainable future.

At Bush Kids we show respect and honour for the history of our land and waterways, and the traditional custodians before us through embedding the practice of respect to the Wagyl through our Centre program. We do this by throwing a small handful of sand into our creek, just like the Noongar people would do at the commencement of our play in our creek. The Centre through a collaborative process, set goals for on-going learning, models leadership, respect, responsibility and accountability and continually monitors and reflects on policy and practice in order to uphold these values. Educators recognize and promote the critical importance that culture plays in developing children's sense of belonging, being and becoming.

Bush Kids provides an authentic outdoors and nature-based program that is built on the principles, practices and outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework. Bush Kids recognises that for children to learn, they need a meaningful holistic outdoors program that integrates all learning areas and allows children to demonstrate their learning through many 'languages' (100 Languages- Malaguzzi). Unstructured outdoor play has holistic benefits for children and those connected to them: it develops the whole child – physically and mentally. All ages, cultures and abilities can engage with nature to make sense of their world. Natural Play focuses on what matters to the children – what their big ideas are and what they want to know – and enables these enquires to emerge over time. It focuses on ideas and theorymaking (how do things work), through experiences such as growing and eating, schematic play, taking things apart, caring for the setting's environment, and interacting with humans and nature. Natural Play seeks to feed children's curiosity, fascination, wonder, awe and to provide satisfaction of their deep drive to learn and make meaning.

Time

Bush kids identifies the need for young children to have time to think, to repeat, to return to things and to be able to revisit experiences and interests. Bush Kids values extended periods of time for the children to engage in natural and outdoor environments to develop knowledge, love and respect for the outdoors.

Weather

Engaging with the outdoors during all the seasons. We believe "there is no such thing as bad weather only bad clothing", we therefore play outside in all weather, all seasons. All weather has different experiences to provide from the heat of summer and playing in the shade and water, cooler autumn days and playing in the leaves that have fallen and winter with the rain, puddles and cooler days. We encourage families to dress appropriately for the weather. Educators plan for the weather and provide suitable experiences and time spent outside based on weather reports.

Natural Play stresses the importance of physicality, movement and doing. We seek to provide a multi-sensory and movement-rich environment and curriculum. Providing a variety of nature play experiences expands children's sensory capabilities and improves vestibular sense for development of movement - balance, spatial orientation, head position, eye control and coordination. Bush Kids believes that outdoor play is vital for children's mental, physical, and emotional health and through its program uses the outdoors to promote physical activity to encourage children to stay active and to ensure they are getting the recommended requirements of exercise and physical activity in order to live a healthy lifestyle as outlined by the Australian Government Department of Health. Bush Kids also believes that the outdoors can be used to embed healthy lifestyle practices such as good nutrition through creating vegetable gardens and providing experiences for children to learn where their food comes from. Bush Kids recognises the learning opportunities that its vegetable gardens offer the children. They provide experiences for the children to learn and observe about the life cycle of a vegetable - seed to maturity. Bush Kids runs a Kitchen Garden program where the children use produce from our garden - herbs and vegetables to cook healthy recipes. This program is a great way to encourage children to eat healthy foods and try new foods they might not try at home. Families and the wider community are also encouraged to be a part of and educated about our Outdoor programs in order to embed healthy lifestyle practices outside of our Centre.

A belief that the environment is crucial in the child's development and learning: The outdoor environment plays a crucial role in the learning/teaching process. Environments are thoughtfully designed and prepared by the educators in collaboration with stakeholders to optimize small and larger group interaction, social learning and constructive play. The space is well defined for children to guide their exploration and invite social and cognitive experiences. Bush Kids values the outdoor space as a place for children to explore and learn through the miracle of nature. Providing outdoor environments that engage the senses provide opportunities for risk taking. Risk and challenge can offer a powerful medium for personal growth and development by building resilience, self-esteem and selfconfidence and in a group situation it can foster the development of trust, leadership and judgement.

Bush Kids provides a variety of outdoor environments including:

Outdoor spaces - Our spaces provide many natural elements; fresh air, water, dirt and fire. We have a large vegetable patch that we plant with seasonal herbs, fruits and vegetables. The children enjoy watering and watching as the vegetables grow and change. When the veggies are ripe and ready the children pick them with great excitement and anticipation, Our garden is alive and unique, it is always evolving and never finished. This makes it an exciting space for the children, because with each new day there are new discoveries. Our garden is an extension of the indoor classrooms, with lots of opportunities from our core curriculum areas, as well as encouraging exploration and interaction with our natural environment. Our outdoor space actively engages and supports children's creativity, imagination, language and social skills. It also provides vast teaching and learning opportunities and we therefore spend long unhurried time outdoors. Research shows that children with significant time outside have greater development in concentration, play, creativity, physical development and social skills.

Nature locations around the centre and in the community - We believe that children should have natural places and spaces to play. Nature play provides a "wilder" space that provides opportunities to care for animals, observe native wildlife and insects and have ample natural elements - trees, plants, dirt, sticks. It also provides opportunities for the children to engage and connect with nature within the local community.

A belief that place-based and nature-based education plays a critical role in children's learning. It is increasingly recognized that providing children with positive experiences within their local community and natural surroundings (place based; nature based) can serve to promote the health and well-being not only of our children but our communities both locally and globally. As much as possible we connect our children with the local community. We see the community as a vital partner in the collaborative learning process so we take the children out into the community and bring the community into the Centre on an ongoing basis through excursions and incursions. We connect and encourage children's investigations and research into their immediate natural world. These experiences are fostered through an integrated approach to learning in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Through STEM children develop key skills including problem solving, creativity, critical analysis, teamwork, independent thinking, initiative, communication and digital literacy.

A belief that a culture of inquiry is developed through collaboration and reflective practice. The Centre values opportunity for staff, children and families to participate in collaboration sessions. Opportunities are provided for children and staff to work together; planning, sharing ideas, reflecting; helping their peers and in turn being helped by peers. Children are encouraged to work in collaboration as opposed to competition. In turn through reflective practice, staff and children become increasingly thoughtful about their work and are motivated to look deeper and explore new ideas and approaches.

The value of recording, documenting and displaying children's work and Learning Stories: Educators will record children's theories and learning processes both as individuals and in the context of the group. Children's learning will be made visual where possible to enhance learning. Educators, families and community members are encouraged to use learning stories in a collaborative approach. Families are invited at the conclusion of each project to share in their child's journey. Individual portfolios are just that: individual to each child and very different from the next.

A belief that educators are researchers and the link between home and the Centre. Bush Kids is staffed by a team of qualified professionals who are selected for their ability to relate to children, families and other staff and have the skills to develop a program which meets all the individual needs of children in their care. They work together as co-educators to provide a social constructivist environment for each other and the children to explore the power of learning. We see our educators as researchers, who model life-long learning as a way of life. In support of this, our Staff is encouraged to pursue further training and participate in personal and professional development courses. Our

staffs are valued members of a team who strive towards maintaining a child focused, welcoming and friendly Centre of living and learning.

A belief that establishing a genuine partnership with parents and the community, characterized by mutual respect and confidence, provides a collaborative learning process. We see the community, families, educators and children as equal partners in the learning process and need all parties to contribute to our Centre community in a positive and engaged manner through a variety of forums. Bush Kids attempts to forge close links and to create and maintain a strong dialogue with the community and parents in a partnership of mutual respect for each other's unique role in the education of the child.

Advocate:

We believe.... it is our job and privilege to share the importance of nature play for children. We have opportunity to share our knowledge and passion with the young families we work with and other early childhood educators, through our program at Bush Kids. The Centre will advocate the importance of nature and outdoor play for children through connecting with community through celebrating Outdoor Classroom Day and International Mud Day and other significant Nature and Outdoor Based days. Bush Kids will make a commitment to educating, promoting and endorsing the importance of nature-based play and outdoor play for children through social media as a powerful networking tool.

Sources: Theorists: Friedrich Froebel, David Soebel Niki Buchan Tom Bedard <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/pioneers-our-fieldfriedrich-froebel-founder-first-kindergarten/> <https://www.natureplaywa.org.au/programs/early-years/early-years-for-teachers> <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/exercise-and-physical-activity> <https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/connection-to-country> Nature Play Developed November 2017, Reviewed February 2018, Reviewed June 2019, Reviewed January 2020, January 2023 May 2024