



Family Handbook

2024

sandcastleschildcare.com.au

Our commitment to you

There's more to early learning than simply care - the early years are fundamental to a child's emotional, cognitive and social development. Research suggests that quality early childhood education sets a child up for success throughout their school years and even later in life. That is why we are focused on providing our families with quality programs to support children's learning and development from birth right through to school age.

Our children and our families are at the heart of our service. Our commitment to you and your child is that we take the time to invest in our centres and our people so that they can best support your child, nurture them, empower them and help them to grow. We know that doing this goes a long way to ensuring that the children in our care can flourish.

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Helping children and families feel welcome and settle into the centre environment is one of our top priorities.



Settling into care

Ensuring your child feels safe and secure is one of our top priorities. Starting at a new early learning centre can be full of emotions for both families and children. To support you in this transition, we can arrange some 'stay and play' days prior to your child beginning care which will encourage them to form attachments and bonds with their educators.

Building strong a relationship with your family is very important to us and makes a real difference to the early learning outcomes for your child. It's best for us to know your child's interests, likes, dislikes and any special needs they may have.

This will become integral as our team incorporates your child's interests into our educational programs, so please take the time to share information about your child with their educators regularly.

On your child's first day in care, educators will make immediate connections with your child to make the transition process run more smoothly. We want to establish an environment in which meaningful and lasting relationships can develop between educators and children as well as between educators and families. You are encouraged to call at any point of the day to discuss your child's learning and activities with their primary educator. Communication is fundamental in helping all parties adjust.

The settling-in process is a unique journey for each individual child and although we'd like to say the process only takes two weeks, in reality, it could be shorter than this – or longer. We'll reach that destination when your child arrives into the care environment feeling confident and ready to learn. That's when we'll know we've made strong, lasting connections.

The importance of early learning

Our services are guided by the National Quality Framework, which is inclusive of the National Quality Standard, the Early Years Learning Framework, and for school-aged services, My Time Our Place. These frameworks guide and shape the curriculum for all education and care services for children under the age of 12, across Australia.

Children's neurological pathways multiply and develop faster in the first five years than at any other time in their life. The architecture of a child's brain is shaped by high-quality interactions with trusted adults and peers. The foundation of a strong relationship with educators and teachers is fundamental for future success.

Our educators and teachers understand the impact relationships have on a child's learning journey and are committed to ongoing professional development to stay current in their knowledge of how to best program and plan to meet every child's interests and needs.

For a child, playing and learning are interrelated and our team of educational professionals embrace this in their daily practices. Each day, our teams provide interactive learning experiences for children to engage and explore concepts such as sustainability, science, technology, engineering, maths (STEM), the arts, literacy and numeracy, consistently using their interests as a vehicle for learning.

A holistic approach to your child's development is prioritised through our focus on social and emotional well-being. Concepts such as confidence, resilience, getting along and self-care are embedded throughout the day and explored individually, and in small and large groups, as well as during spontaneous conversations with educators.

Information about the daily program and observations of your child and their involvement in learning experiences will all be available to you in real-time via our Xplor Home app. This helps to keep you connected to your child's learning journey and share in their wonder and joy as they explore and discover.

We encourage parents/caregivers to schedule meeting times with their child's educators and teachers to discuss specific details about their child's learning, development, and wellbeing.

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Children learn more quickly during their early years than at any other time in their life. They need love and nurturing to develop a sense of trust and security that turns into confidence as they grow.





Working together is the best way to ensure a high-quality education for our children, helping to build the foundations for their success not only in the centre and the early years but also in life.



Helping your child on their journey

As the adage goes, it takes a village to raise a child. That is why it is so important for us to work together right from the start.

We want to ensure our centre becomes an extension of your home life and that the relationships, cultures and activities that are important to your child are recognised. This creates an environment where they feel safe, secure, and ready to learn.

By building a strong relationship with us and your child's primary educator, we can support you to build on your child's learning and development at home.

We encourage you to do this by asking questions, getting involved and continuing the learning activities at home.

Working together, engaging in your child's interests and learning and discovering with them is the best way to ensure a high-quality education for your child. It also helps to build the foundations for their success not only in the centre but throughout their school years and beyond.

Payment of fees

It is our policy that the family's weekly fees must be paid one week in advance (this includes the current week plus one). The parent/caregiver must then continue to pay the weekly fee in advance in order to maintain a credit balance equivalent to one week of fees.

All payments are made via Debitsuccess, which is a direct debit childcare payment solution integrated with the Xplor Home app. Through Debitsuccess, you can set up scheduled payments from a credit card or bank account or process real-time payments from a credit card or debit card through Pay Now. The Debitsuccess set-up will need to be completed prior to your child's first day with us. This is done via the Xplor website home.myxplor.com in the Auto Debit Setup (under the Finance tab). For alternative payment methods, please speak to our centre manager.

If you are planning holidays, a Holiday Discount form is available from the office. This form must be completed two weeks prior to the holiday absence to receive a 25 per cent discount off your fees for up to four weeks (pro-rata to the number of days your child attends) each financial year.

All children's booked days, including public holidays and absent days, must be paid to retain your child's place. Late fees are charged if children remain in the centre after closing times.

Two weeks' notice is required if you wish to cancel a booking. Failure to do so will require parents/caregivers to pay two weeks' full fees. All accounts must be finalised within seven days and any outstanding accounts will be forwarded to debt collection agencies.

Please refer to the fee policy for all conditions of fee discounts including holiday bookings and cancellation of bookings.

Signing in and out of the centre

Each child must be signed in and out of the centre every day they attend. This is a legal requirement and is in the interest of your child's safety.

These records are used in case of emergencies and for the calculation of the Child Care Subsidy (CCS).

If a child is away, ill or on holiday the corresponding days must be logged using the Xplor Home app.

On arrival at the centre, you are required to:

- Sign your child into the centre using the Xplor Home app or in the centre's Xplor Hub.
- Present your child to the educator in charge.

When you collect your child, you are required to:

- Come into the room and greet your child.
- Collect your child's belongings.
- With your child, say goodbye to the educator in charge of the group.
- Sign your child out of the centre using the Xplor Home app or the Xplor hub.

To ensure the safety of all children, no child will be released into the care of any persons not registered as authorised by the parent/caregiver in the Xplor web portal.

If team members do not know the person collecting your child by appearance, the person must be able to produce some form of photo identification to prove that they are authorised to collect the child as per the Xplor authorised information.

If a child has not been collected 15 minutes after closing time then the parent/caregiver will be contacted on the emergency telephone numbers provided.

If the child has still not been collected 30 minutes after closing time, then staff will follow the Department of Communities Abandoned Child Procedures including contacting the Child Protection and Crisis Centre 24-hour service.

Open door policy

You're welcome to drop in and see your child or speak with an educator. You don't need to call and tell us you are coming, you are welcome at any time.

We'd love for you to come in and join our programs - your participation is valued.



Early Years Learning Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework is a National Early Learning Framework for children from birth to five years. As the early years are a vital time for children to learn and develop, the framework has been developed to ensure your child receives a quality, play-based educational program.

Educators will use the framework in partnership with families to develop learning programs responsive to children's ideas, interests, strengths and abilities and recognise that children learn through play.

The Early Years Learning Framework describes childhood as a time of belonging, being and becoming.

- Belonging is the basis for living a fulfilling life. Children feel they belong because of the relationship they have with their family, community, culture and place.
- Being is about living here and now. Childhood is a special time in life and children need time to just 'be' – time to play, try new things and have fun.
- Becoming is about the learning and development that young children experience. Children start to form their sense of identity from an early age, which shapes the type of adult they will become.

Through the Framework's five learning goals, educators will assist your child to develop:

- A strong sense of their identity.
- Connections with their world.
- A strong sense of well-being.
- Confidence and involvement in their learning.
- Effective communication skills.

Our centre also offers an extensive Kindergarten/Preschool and School Readiness program based on the Framework. The Framework has a strong emphasis on play-based learning as play is the best vehicle for young children's learning providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development. We aim to guide your child in becoming an effective learner by creating age appropriate environments that are challenging and stimulating. The overall aim of our programs is to help your child in developing all areas necessary for success now and in later years.

Watching your child's progress

Using the Early Years Learning Framework, educators will observe your child's learning so they can build on it and plan the next steps. They will do this by listening, watching, and talking to your child. Each child will have their own digital portfolio or collection of learning. This may contain photos and children's work to show what your child is learning. This learning journey is available for you to view at any time.

To ensure you are connected to your child's early education, parents/caregivers have access to the Xplor Home App and will receive notifications to their smartphone or email with details of their children's day, including photos and the learning outcomes they're achieving. Ask our centre manager for more details.

Your child's room will also show ongoing learning through daily journals/books, photographs, project work, learning stories and a program documenting the day's progress.



Play activities planned by our educators allow children to naturally develop and have the opportunity to guide their own learning.



National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework is a government initiative that sets a National Quality Standard creating greater consistency for early childhood education and care services across Australia.

This initiative aims to improve educator-to-child ratios in services, increased skills and qualifications, national regulations and a quality ratings system that will help you to make informed choices about the education and care you choose for your child.

Our centre's aim is to exceed the National Quality Standard across all areas of our service and each centre has a Quality Improvement Plan in place to show what is happening in our centre to achieve this. This will look at areas such as educational programs and practice, children's health and safety, physical environment, staffing arrangements, relationships with children and collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

For more information about the National Quality Framework, please speak to our centre manager or visit www.acecqa.gov.au

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Our centre has a number of policies and procedures pertaining to the care of your child to ensure they are in the very best of hands.



Environments and routines

Our routines provide for individual play and learning as well as small and large group play and learning experiences. Children's language and literacy skills are further developed during these times as children are involved in storytelling, drama and play. Music also plays a large part during these sessions as children are able to experiment with dancing, singing and exercising their bodies.

Spaces are made available for children to engage in rest and quiet experiences. Educators and teachers provide a range of active and restful experiences and support children to make appropriate decisions regarding participation.

Each of our centre's rooms is individual and unique and is tailored to suit the age and development stage of your child, the diversity of the educators, teachers, children, families and the wider community and are filled full of laughter, fun and educational resources.

All aspects of children's learning, development and wellbeing are catered for including physical, social, emotional, creative, cognitive and communication. Children's learning is dynamic and complex, and the centre's environments are designed for this.

As your child grows and develops so will their needs, interests and abilities. To cater for this, your child will gradually transition to the next room, where their skills and development can be extended.

Our transitioning approach includes communication with families and involves a careful assessment of your child's records to ensure they are ready for the next step. This process also includes short visits to the new room to build familiarity and ensure a smooth transition.

Sustainable practices

Our educators, teachers and children work together to learn about and promote sustainable practices and communities. They engage in sustainable practices relating to developing and implementing positive changes for the planet.. Our centre has an environmental strategy including recycling, use of recycled resources, energy efficiency, water conservation and more. Find out how you can be involved by asking our centre manager or your child's educators.



Child care policies and procedures

Our centre has several policies and procedures pertaining to the care of your child. Our policies are located in the centre foyer and are available to review at any time. For more information on our centre policies please speak with our centre manager.

ACCIDENTS AND INCIDENTS

Our educators take a proactive approach to safety and conduct thorough risk assessments of all play areas so that each child can feel safe and free to explore their environment.

A team member who holds the relevant first aid, asthma and anaphylaxis qualification is present at all times. Should an accident or sudden illness occur, educators will immediately commence first aid and you will be contacted to collect your child. In emergency situations, you will be advised of the plan of action regarding further medical treatment.

During an emergency, if you or your authorised nominee cannot be contacted, the nominated supervisor will provide the ambulance officers with information regarding your child and a team member known to the child will accompany them to the hospital and stay until you arrive. Full documentation of the incident will be made available.

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Children and educators are actively encouraged to practice good personal hygiene to minimise the instances of illness. We also believe that if your child is ill, the best place for them is to be at home where they can recover faster.

If your child presents at the centre with signs of illness, the nominated supervisor may advise that they are not well enough to participate in the day's activities. You will be asked to make alternative arrangements until they are well, or the exclusion period has ended (you may be asked to provide a medical clearance letter before your child can return). Although this can be inconvenient for families, it is in the interests of all children and families at the centre to minimise the risk of infection.

Should your child become ill during the day, documentation and first aid will commence and you may be contacted to collect your child from the centre and seek further medical advice (please note that paracetamol is not regarded as a first response and can only be administered in emergency situations and with parent/caregiver consent). It is important that you read the centre's Medication and Medical Management Policy carefully to know when educators can administer medications.

A list of common infectious illnesses, their exclusion periods and policies and procedures related to illness and minimising the spread of infectious diseases are available in the foyer.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Emergency evacuations, as well as lockdown procedures, are regularly practised and the centre has individual plans for local emergencies including cyclone, flood and bushfire. Fire extinguishers are strategically located throughout the centre. As part of our fire safety measures all children in attendance are noted from the electronic sign-in device in the event of a drill or evacuation. This is why it is important to ensure that you sign your child 'IN' and 'OUT' of the centre each day.

IMMUNISATION

As part of your enrolment process, you will be asked to provide details of your child's immunisation status. In the event of an outbreak of an infectious disease, it may be necessary to exclude any children who are not immunised for their health and wellbeing. State-specific immunisation requirements are available on request.

MEDICATION

If your child requires medication while in care, a medication record must be filled in and signed by a parent/caregiver. The medication must be in original packaging and accompanied by a prescription label/doctor's letter which states who the medication is for and the dosage. Medication must be handed to the Nominated Supervisor or Responsible Person and will be stored safely out of reach of children. Under no circumstances is any type of medication to be left in children's bags. Please refer to the Medication and Medical Management Policy for further information.

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We have a commitment to assist families who provide their children's meals to develop healthy food attitudes and habits.



NUTRITION

We understand the important role we play in supporting the nutritional needs of children while in care. In the instance where meals are provided, children who attend a full day of long day care will be offered at least 50 per cent of their recommended daily dietary intake while in care.

We also have a commitment to assist families who provide their children's meals to develop healthy food attitudes and habits. Guidelines around healthy eating can be found in the foyer or by asking a friendly team member.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

We recognise that our centre is culturally and linguistically diverse and we want to ensure all families experience a sense of belonging. To achieve this, we provide opportunities for all children to develop an understanding of different cultures and help foster in each child an awareness and acceptance of these cultures by integrating multiculturalism into our programs.

We aim to help foster in each child an awareness and acceptance of other cultures by integrating multiculturalism into our programs. This can be achieved through providing and offering a range of books, music, cooking, activities, singing, clothing, play equipment and more.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF CENTRE RECORDS

We value your privacy and have several initiatives in place to ensure the protection of your data. For more information on our Confidentiality of Centre Records policy, please visit our centre's website or ask our centre manager for more information.

SUN PROTECTION

Our centres take care to protect children and team members from direct exposure to the sun by all state regulations and the childcare building code in regard to the amount of manufactured and natural shade available in the playgrounds.

We recommend that families pack clothing for children that will protect them from the sun, including a hat, long-sleeved t-shirts and loose clothing which covers all of their body (i.e. no midriffs, singlets or bare backs).

At enrolment, you will be required to sign your consent that sunscreen can be applied to your child, or you may decide to opt-out and provide the centre with an alternate brand. Sunscreen will be applied to children 20 minutes before going outside and regularly reapplied.

Literature on sun care is available at the centre. For more information on the centre's Sun Protection and Weather Safety Policy, please ask our centre manager.

CLOTHING

Please dress your child in play clothes that wash easily. In choosing what your child should wear to the centre, please consider the following:

- Your child will be working with messy materials such as paint, glue, water and sand so clothing must be able to stand a little wear and tear.
- Clothing must provide some protection and be comfortable for both indoor and outdoor experiences.
- Children will be climbing, running, jumping and swinging so they will need clothes that neither restrict their activity nor reduce their safety (e.g. slippery shoes, long skirts)
- Children will need clothes that allow for growing independence i.e. pants that can come off easily for toileting.
- Please name all clothing and footwear.



Our centre takes care to protect children and team members from direct exposure to the sun.



PRIORITY OF ACCESS

The Australian Government funds child care to support working Australian families and ensure all children have access to quality early childhood education and care. However, the demand for child care sometimes exceeds the supply in some areas. When this occurs, it is important for services to allocate places to those families with the greatest need for child care support.

To ensure that our centre adheres to the guidelines issued by the Australian Government, priority of access to child care will be given according to children in the following categories:

- Priority 1: A child at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Priority 2: A child of a single parent/caregiver or of parents/caregivers who both satisfy the work/training/study test under section 14 of the New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999.
- Priority 3: Any other child.

In relation to priority three, there are some circumstances in which a child who is already in a child care service may be requested to give up their place or change days at the service in order for the service to provide a place for a higher priority child, but only if the parent/caregiver is notified of this policy upon enrolment AND the service gives parents/caregivers 14 days' notice of the requirement for their child to give up their place or change days.

Within the main categories, priority is also given to children in:

- Families with low incomes.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- Parents/caregivers or children with disabilities.
- Families from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- Single-parent/caregiver families.
- Socially isolated families.

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