

Animal and Pet

Having a relationship with a pet and/or animal can help children develop a caring approach and skills such as nurturing, responsibility, empathy and improved communication. Having a pet in an early childhood environment enables children who are not otherwise exposed to animals learn these skills. The pet will become part of the daily educational program and lead to activities and learning about other animals.

National Quality Standard (NQS)

Quality Area 2: Children’s Health and Safety		
2.1	Health	Each child’s health and physical activity is supported and promoted
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard

Quality Area 3: Physical Environment		
3.1.2	Upkeep	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained
3.2.3	Environmentally responsible	The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible

Education and Care Services National Regulations

Children (Education and Care Services) National Law NSW	
168	Policies and procedures are required in relation to health and safety

Related Policy

Environmentally Responsible Policy
 Physical Environment Policy
 Supervision Policy
 Hand Washing Policy
 Work Health and Safety Policy

PURPOSE

Having a pet at our Service can be a valuable part of children’s education. Enriching their learning about nature, ecology and relationships. Our Service aims to provide a safe, hygienic and humane environment for all animals and pets that visit or reside at the Service, which will educate children in the proper care of animals.

SCOPE

This policy applies to children, families, staff, management and visitors of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

The National Quality Standards encourages educators to understand and appreciate the natural environment and the independence between people, plants, animals and the land. Pets help children from a young age learn to care for other living things. They can teach a sense of responsibility, caring and tolerance. They can offer many opportunities for developing observational skills and basic natural science experiences. If the educators wish to have a pet in the Service, they must make all the decisions in consultation with the Nominated Supervisor and families.

Whilst there are several benefits to keeping animals within the Service, there are also a range of concerns which Educators need to consider when maintaining the safety and wellbeing of both the children and the animals. Encouraging direct contact and developing bonds with animals can help children to develop empathy. Providing children with access to animals within our Service will help them learn about the life cycle and relationships, and improve communication. We feel role modelling of appropriate behaviours with animals and guidance in caring for the needs of animals are beneficial for children.

Questions to consider prior to having a pet at the Service

- Who will pay for the care and upkeep of the animal, including feeding, health care and cleaning?
- How will the animal be cared for on weekends and during service closure periods?
- What physical space is available in the Service? Is it adequate for the animal you are thinking of?
- Are all educators and families happy with the decision to keep an animal at the Service?
- What time will be available throughout the day to care for the animal or will educators be asked to give up some personal time for this?
- Are there any children or educators at your Service who are allergic to, or have phobias of, animals?
- What changes to your Service's policies and procedures need to be considered? For example, your hand washing policy will need to be updated to include washing hands after having contact with the animal.
- What is the health and safety risks?

Other things to consider include:

- Some animals, such as lizards, turtles, snakes, spiders and tropical fish may not be an appropriate choice. Check with a veterinarian if you are unsure whether an animal is suitable for children and check with the local health department for regulations and advice regarding animals in the Service. Some states and territories require a license for keeping certain animals.
- Animals that may be more likely to be suitable for the Service may include goldfish, hermit crabs, stick insects, mice or rats. All these animals are relatively low maintenance and can be left safely over a weekend if they are provided with enough food and water.

Assessing and Managing Risks

Whilst there are many benefits to providing children with access to animals and keeping pets at the Service, there are issues that approved providers and educators need to consider for the safety and wellbeing of both the children and the animals concerned prior to choosing a pet or having an animal visit the Service.

A risk assessment should be conducted when deciding the type of animal and the way the children engage with it.

Disease

Access to animals at the Service requires special consideration to prevent the spread of infectious diseases because contact with animals can spread disease. Health authorities identify that germs can be present on the skin, hair, feathers and scales, and in the faeces, urine and saliva of animals. While these germs may not cause disease in the animal, they may cause disease in humans.

Effective hand washing and cleaning

Children and adults should employ effective hand washing after touching or feeding animals, or cleaning their bedding, tanks, cages or enclosures. It is important to engage children with the cleaning of animal bedding, tanks, cages or enclosures, as they learn responsibility through ‘hands on’ learning experiences.

Appropriate supervision

Children should also be appropriately supervised when they have contact with animals to avoid potential injury or harm to the child or the animal.

Service Pets

- Management and Educators should prepare children for the animal visit, gathering perception into how the children react to the pet.
- Management, Educators, children and families should consider the rationale for having a pet and long-term implications of such a decision prior to getting the pet.
- All pets and their enclosures are to be kept clean and hygienic with appropriate bedding and water.
- Food will be made available for all pets and animals, but kept out of reach of children at all times.
- Any animal or pet kept at the Service will be regularly fed, cleaned, vaccinated, and checked for fleas, diseases and wormed.
- Animals including pets will not be allowed in the sand pit or any other play area. In event that this happens, educators will refer to and adhere to the Sand Pit Policy.
- Animals including pets will never be taken into the food preparation area nor will they be allowed near the eating or sleeping area.
- Anyone who has handled the animal or pet will immediately wash their hands after they have finished handling the animal or pet.
- Children's animal or pets will only be allowed in the Service when the Nominated Supervisor has granted permission.
- We will include in the program how to properly care for animals and how to treat them appropriately.
- Pets will not have access to children's bedding, toys, food preparation areas, eating surfaces and utensils

Animal Visit

There are situations that may spontaneously occur, involving animals. For example, there may be a situation where an animal or bird has made its way into the Service. Educators may use this as a spontaneous learning experience for the children. At all times they will ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children.

If an animal or bird is potentially dangerous; such as a snake or spider, educators will contact an appropriate authority for assistance. In NSW this authority is the National Parks and Wildlife Service - 1300 361 967 (8.30am – 5.00pm) or NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service Inc. on 13 000 WIRES - 13 00 094 737.

A professional should monitor the animal's movements to ensure a speedy and efficient capture, but priority is to be given to Educator, child and family safety. At no time is the potentially dangerous animal, insect or bird to be approached or touched by Educators, children or families. It is important for management or Educators of the Service to complete a risk assessment prior to animals being brought to the Service.

Pests & Vermin

- Pest control will occur at the Service on an annual basis as a minimum.
- Educators will monitor any occurrences in the Service to determine the success of control measures.
- If pests and vermin are seen, Educators will advise the Nominated Supervisor.
- The Approved Provider is responsible for arranging additional pest control visits.
- Where appropriate, Educators will discuss with the children safety issues relating to dangerous products, plants, vermin and objects.
- Educators will thoroughly clean all areas that animals or pests have accessed in Service with disinfectant.
- If the remains of an animal or animal faeces have been found, the remains will be disposed of according to the local Council guidelines and the area where the remains were found will be thoroughly disinfected.
- Educators are responsible for assessing any situation in the Service where animals are involved to ensure the health, safety and well being of children, families and animals.

Source

- Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority.
- Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulation

- ECA Code of Ethics.
- Guide to the National Quality Standard.
- Kidsafe NSW Inc. – www.kidsafensw.org.au
- NSW Department of Health - www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/general/pettingzoo_fs.html
- Guide to the National Quality Standard (3) ACECQA (2011)
- Health and Safety in Children’s Services Model Policies and Practices – 2nd Ed. revised (2003) www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/childcare_model_policies.pdf
- Kidsafe NSW Inc. – www.kidsafensw.org.au
- Staying Healthy in Child Care – Preventing Infectious Diseases in Child Care – 5th Edition.
- Bone, J. (2013) The animals as the fourth educator: A literature review of animals and young children in pedagogical relationships Australasian Journal of Early Childhood 38(2) Deakin West ACT: Early Childhood Australia.
- Elliott, S. (2012) Sustainable outdoor play spaces in early childhood centres Investigating perceptions, facilitating change and generating theory. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of New England, Armidale NSW.
- Thompson, K. & Gullone, E. (2003) Promotion of empathy and prosocial behaviour in children through humane education. Australian Psychologist, 38 (3). Department of Psychology, Monash University: Victoria, Australia.
- Revised National Quality Standard

Review

Date Reviewed	Modifications	Next Policy Review Date
August 2017	Changes made to policy to assist management with direction prior to having an animal at the Service	September 2018
October 2017	Updated the references to comply with the revised National Quality Standard	September 2018
September 2018	Latest updates include terminology and grammar improvements. Added the section displaying related policies on page 1.	September 2019