



Bush Kinder Program

Handbook 2023

Kangaroo Group

BUSH KINDER OVERVIEW

At De Garis Kindergarten we believe that children learn and develop best when engaged in play and an important part of this play is being outside in nature.

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.

Bush Kinder will provide your child with 3 hours of play in the bush, using what nature has provided as learning materials and an ideal environment for them to learn in. Educators will support your children as they take risks and face challenges essential to well rounded learning.

Bush Kinder will be a special part of your child's total Kinder experience. It will compliment our daily curriculum at De Garis Kindergarten through the use of natural materials and provocations in the learning environments.

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
- It encourages early risk self-assessment strategies to ensure young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and others, leading to children taking on challenges and accepting responsibility.
- Opportunity to be in nature seeking adventure, exploring, connecting with nature and our earth – play in the rain, balance on logs, build with sticks, get muddy, plant trees, find insects, draw with sticks on the ground, identify local flora & fauna.

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 ect. 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

At times we will seek knowledge and skills from local elders and environmental programs to share their knowledge and experiences with the children.

References:

<http://www.wgkg.vic.edu.au/bush-kinder>

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/australasian-journal-early-childhood/indexabstracts/>

[ajec-vol-39-no-4-december-2014/forest-preschool-bush-kinder-inspirational-approach-preschoolprovision-australia-full-free-text-available/](http://www.ajec-vol-39-no-4-december-2014/forest-preschool-bush-kinder-inspirational-approach-preschoolprovision-australia-full-free-text-available/)

LOCATION – Etiwanda Wetlands

We have chosen Etiwanda Wetlands as our Bush Kinder location. It is situated at the top end of Etiwanda Avenue towards the river end of town, about a 5-minute drive from the kindergarten.

Etiwanda Wetlands was chosen as our bush kinder setting for reasons including:

- Close proximity to preschool (5 minute drive)
- A variety of natural play spaces away from traffic hazards
- Facilities including toilets and shelter
- It provides a variety of flora, fauna and natural habitats for children to explore
- Provides walking tracks with natural boundaries that can be easily identified by children, staff and volunteers
- Bush setting reflective of the philosophy of Bush Kinder
- Parking and a drop off and pick up area away from the road.

BUSH KINDER TIMES

Kangaroo Kinder group will have a 3 hour Bush Kinder session once per week on a Wednesday.

Bush kinder will run in terms 1, 2, 3 and 4.

The allocated times for Bush kinder are as follows:

Wednesday 8.45am- 11.45am

CONSENT FORM

To participate in Bush Kinder parents/guardians must complete a “Bush Kinder Regular Excursion Form.” This form will be distributed by the teachers at interview day and must be Signed on the day or returned prior to first session of Bush Kinder.

DROP OFF AND PICK UP PROCEDURE

The drop off and pick up location for Bush Kinder will be Car Park of the Etiwanda Wetlands. 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 Kangaroos will be under the shelter.

During drop off Parents/Guardians need to ensure they:

- Arrive no earlier than 8.45am as the site will not be ready.
- 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
- Ensure a hat and high visibility vest are placed on the child

During pick-up Parents/Guardians need to ensure they:

- Meet the group at the meeting point for the session finish time
- 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
- Collect the child's belongings (bag, food containers, rubbish)

Toilets

We will be using the toilet at Etiwanda wetlands and will not have a camping toilet. Please ensure your child has been toileted prior to the Bush Kinder session.

There will be no nappy change facilities so your child will need to be toilet trained to participate in the Bush Kinder Session or will remain in their nappy for the duration of the session.

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 10 minutes before venturing to their chosen Bush Kinder site.

The natural boundary markers of the Bush Kinder site will be pointed out and discussed with the children as required.

A group meeting may take place together with the educators to outline the days intentions if going on a walk, introduce visitors or discuss any hazards or changes noticed in the environment.

The children will then be free to engage and explore in play and learning within the boundaries of the Bush Kinder site.

After approximately an hour the children will be encouraged to eat their snack and have a drink if they have not already before re-engaging in their play.

Session will conclude with a brief group reflection on the mornings learning before walking together to the meeting point.

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

SESSION CANCELLATION

Cancellation of sessions will be unlikely, however will occur in the following circumstances:

- Forecast temperature of 40 degrees Celsius or above (during session time)
- Forecast wind speed in excess of 40km per hour
- Forecast of electrical storm activity
- BOM weather warnings of extreme storm activity or excessive rainfall
- Restrictions from MRCC

If sessions are cancelled ahead of time, the following notifications will apply

Reason for Cancellation	Notification	Contact Person
Extreme weather		Bush Kinder Leader or
Sudden extreme weather		Kinder Teacher

Emergency Evacuation	Broadcast SMS and	
MRCC advice	Class Do Jo Notification	

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

Where the group has been cancelled the session will run back at De Garis Kindergarten.

Note: If on arrival, Bush Kinder is not set up on-site, this means the session has been cancelled. Where the group has been evacuated or relocated, the broadcast SMS message to parents/guardians will specify the location for pick up.

Weather

This information will be obtained from the Bureau of Meteorology website and app:
<http://www.bom.gov.au/vic/forecasts/mildura>

STAFF

Our regular teachers and educators of our Bush Kinder Program are:

Kylie, Chantal, and Linda,

They 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.

PARENT VOLUNTEERES

Parent helpers can attend Bush Kinder sessions. Please speak with a staff member if you would like to do this. We do not encourage this in term 1 as we are still establishing group routines and establishing relationships with the children.

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.

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 and wear a high vis vest supplied by the Kinder and are under the direct supervision of the educators at all times throughout the session.

To ensure that the children are given the freedom to play and engage with nature, we ask that adults are respectful of their space at all times and only engage if invited to do so by the children.

Unfortunately due to the nature of the program, siblings are unable to attend.

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 when necessary and aware of any updates throughout the session.

Parents will also be given a De Garis Kindergarten mobile phone number to allow a direct line of communication with staff.

Important: Although Bush Kinder staff will have a mobile phone on-site, we ask for parent cooperation to only use this number in emergencies, as supervision of children is the educator's highest priority. For general updates, we ask that parents send a text message to the Bush Kinder mobile eg if you are running late for dropping off your child or if your child will be absent.

Please only call the Bush Kinder mobile if you are running late to pick up your child, or if you need to collect them earlier than anticipated or in an emergency.

Contacts for Bush Kinder in session

Bush Kinder Leader	Kylie Loveridge	General messages 50231819 Text Messages (Mobile) 0407231819
De Garis Kindergarten	Kylie Loveridge	50231819 de.garis.kin@kindergarten.vic.gov.au
De Garis Bus Driver	Chantal Allford	0407231819

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 Kindergarten session.

If your child will not attend Bush Kinder please notify the staff 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. A medical Management plan (completed by a registered medical practitioner) must be supplied prior to your child commencing at De Garis Kindergarten.

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.

Any other medications may be signed in on arrival at Bush Kinder in accordance with our Administration of Medication policy, using a Medication Record Sheet, a supply of which are kept in the Bush Kinder Medication Bag.

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

Remember there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing choices! It is possible to have fun in all weather conditions...including rain. Children will learn to be resilient and adaptable.

The following provides examples of recommended clothing, clothing which is not recommended and unacceptable clothing.

	WARM WEATHER	COLD WEATHER/RAIN
Recommended clothing and footwear	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Light, loose-fitting, long sleeve tops & long pants,• broad brimmed hat or legionnaires hat,• closed toe shoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waterproofs pants (supplied by De Garis on-site)• Long pants, long sleeved tops & jumper• Warm jacket/waterproof• Beanie• Waterproof gloves• Gumboots
Not recommended	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Singlets• Long skirts or dresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skirts or dresses
Unacceptable clothing and footwear	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open toe shoes, sandals, thongs, crocs• Singlet tops/dresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non waterproof outer clothing

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

Change of Clothes

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
- A plastic bag to put wet clothing into

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

- Named water bottle with fresh water
- A snack in a sealed container. As it will be an active session we ask that you send a substantial healthy snack. A piece of fruit should be included as well as either plain popcorn, dry biscuits, nuts. Please no yoghurts or foods that need refrigeration. We ask that you

consider the environment by not including any packaging (any empty packaging will be sent home at the end of the session)

The Kindergarten will provide:

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

On high UV days (especially term 1 & 4), please ensure you apply sunscreen prior to the beginning of a session.

Please ensure all clothing and footwear is clearly named.

SAFETY AND AWARENESS

De Garis Kindergarten 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 at the Kindergarten 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 Kindergarten policies already in place, all of which apply to Bush Kinder as well.

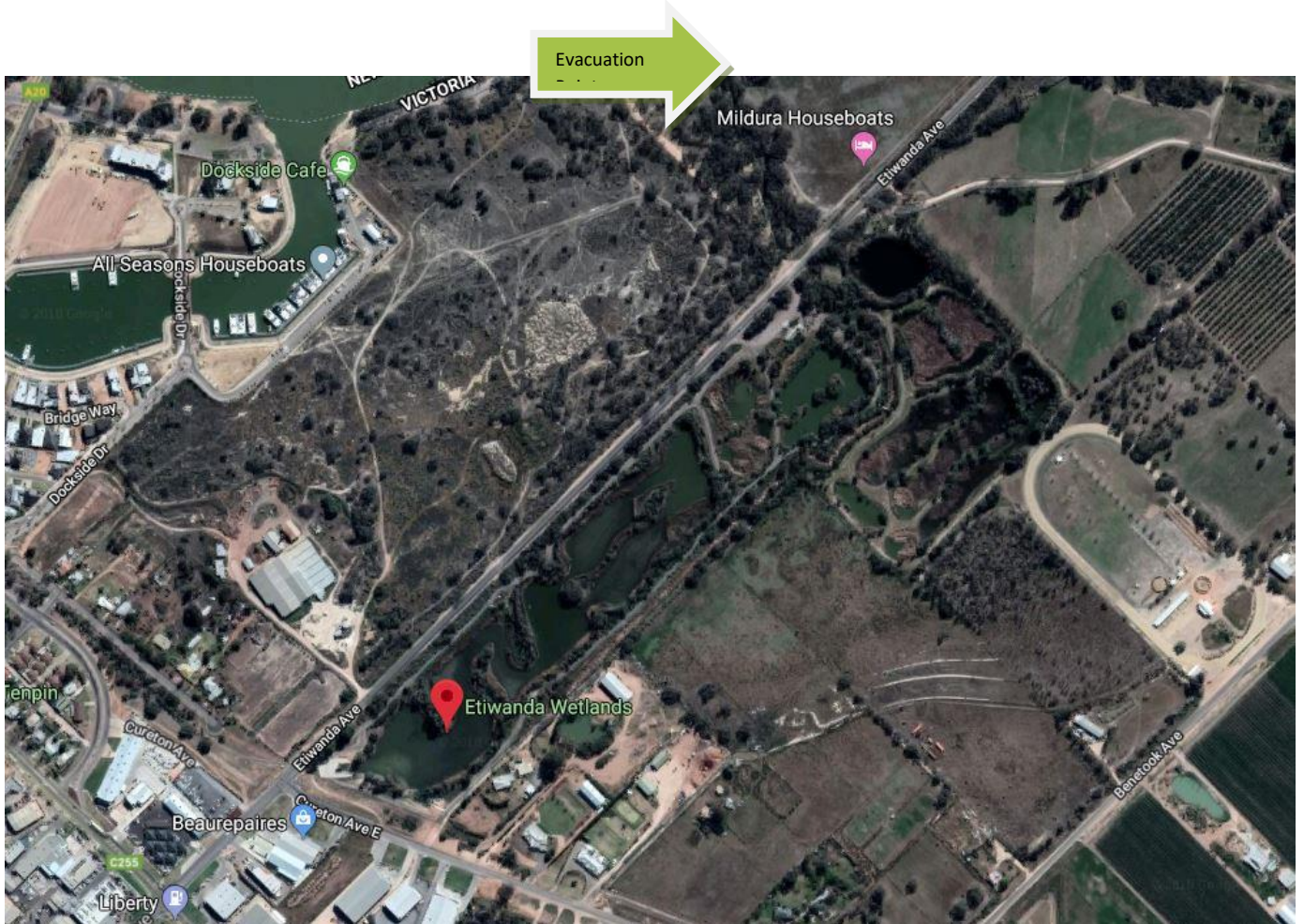
During Term 1, specific Bush Kinder training will be run during normal Kindergarten sessions in order to prepare the children for Bush Kinder. These information sessions will include topics such as, dog awareness and what to do if a dog is off lead in the park, snake and other wildlife awareness and 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 De Garis Kindergarten 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

de.garis.kin@kindergarten.vic.gov.au

Emergency Evacuation

Should an emergency situation arise, Bush Kinder participants may be required to evacuate to a safer location to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the group. In this event Bush Kinder educators will follow procedures set out in the Bush Kinder Emergency Evacuation Policy to move the children to the designated safe areas and assembly points as detailed in the emergency evacuation maps.



Attachment 1: Maps

