

# Childcare

## and Children's Health

A national program developed by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne with support from Johnson & Johnson. This publication promotes current expert advice on child health and wellbeing and current policies and practices for those who work with young children and their families.

## Environmental Sustainability in Early Childhood Settings

All early childhood education and care is concerned with the wellbeing of the young. It focuses on the present and the future: enhancing the lived, everyday experiences of the child, while providing opportunities to build the best future outcomes for children.

The experiences of early childhood build lifelong attitudes and values, and shape enduring patterns of behaviour, including those related to the natural environment and use of resources.



Carers have a special responsibility to ensure that the whole environment is beneficial to children's growth and development. This includes physical materials and the built environment, as well as the relationships between children, adults and the natural environment. Carers also share a responsibility to protect our planet

for future generations. Decisions we make now will directly affect children now and in the future.

Environmental sustainability addresses all of these considerations.

Building sustainability into care settings is not just a responsibility we all share; it is an opportunity to engage in innovative practices that will carry benefits into the future. Early childhood is a time of growth and wonderment during which children feel a special affinity with the natural world. Actively involving children in sustainability and engaging them as active, creative thinkers and problem solvers, who are forming ideas about the world and their place in it, can make environmental sustainability a rewarding focus for all early childhood services.

*Sustainable practice at the early childhood level is not about a few ad hoc outdoor experiences with plants and animals, but a holistic approach that integrates all aspects of sustainability into early childhood services.*  
(Early Childhood Australia Environmental Sustainability Policy)

Carers' attitudes towards and use of resources such as water and energy provides models for children that may be carried into later life.

'Reduce, reuse, recycle' is a useful starting point to thinking about how we can make more environmentally sustainable choices in early childhood settings. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts has added two more 'Rs' – *repair* and *rethink*.

These 2 additions add more opportunities for creative responses to the care environment. As carers who are modelling sustainable practices for children, maybe we can add yet another 'R' – **refuse**.

#### **Reduce:**

- Water use
- Energy use
- Waste of resources, including food.

#### **Reuse:**

Reuse materials and products when ever possible. Sometimes an object can be reused for a different purpose – for example, newspaper can be used as garden mulch. Packaging materials can be reused in play.

#### **Recycle:**

Recycle glass, plastics and paper products through local recycling services. Recycling can also involve passing on things you no longer need or use.

#### **Repair:**

Repair rather than throwing things away. Children can be involved in some basic repair activities and gain valuable practical and problem-solving skills, while learning that things do not automatically become rubbish if they break or are damaged.

#### **Rethink:**

Practices that use excessive energy or are wasteful in terms of resources need rethinking. Is there a more environmentally friendly way of doing things? Do we really need to do this? Rethinking may also apply to the way we introduce experiences of the natural world.

Some of the materials that have been used in buildings, furnishings and even toys, also need rethinking. For example, some chemicals used for treating timber are toxic and should not be used in settings where children are present. Copper, chromium and arsenic (CCA) treated woods can be toxic and young children are particularly susceptible to the effects of this toxicity. Soft toys made from Polyvinylchloride (PVC) may present a health risk, so they should not be provided in care settings for young children. Other synthetic or manufactured materials that may need rethinking include paints, adhesives, upholstery and carpet. These materials may emit toxic gases, particularly when they are new. Low emission, water-based paints and upholstery and floor coverings

made from natural fibres are better choices for young children and the environment. (reference: City of Melbourne "Childcare Centres draft Strategy for Environmental Sustainability", 2004)

#### **Refuse:**

Refuse unnecessary packaging and single use products when reusable products are available. We can also consider refusing to become part of the seemingly endless cycle of purchasing new things and resist pressures from commercial advertising – so perhaps 'resist' is another of the 'Rs' that guide our philosophy on environmental sustainability! Perhaps you can think of more 'Rs'?

**Carers make individual decisions about how they can best provide for the children in their care, and decisions about sustainability are no different. However, many services begin with an audit of energy, water and the use of other resources. This allows services to identify what is being used, and helps them plan ways to 'reduce, reuse, recycle, repair and rethink' better ways to use finite resources in sustainable ways. Whether you are a Family Day Care provider or work in Long Day Care, there are many easy steps you can take to help preserve and protect the environment.**

#### **Easy steps:**

- Conserve water – see *Childcare Australasia* vol 4, Issue 2, March 2008 for really useful, simple tips for everyday use, including soaking paint brushes in water before cleaning, and emptying water trays onto garden beds
- Replace ordinary light globes with long-life, energy efficient lighting
- Use biodegradable 'green' cleaners, instead of toxic chemicals
- Use tap water for drinking rather than buying water in single-use bottles that may have been transported long distances
- Toilet paper made from recycled paper saves trees and buying paper that has not been bleached reduces the use of harmful chemicals
- Minimise the use of plastics, including plastic bags and wraps

- Reduce food waste by serving smaller portions and offering 'seconds' only if the initial serve has been eaten
- Buy locally grown and produced food and products, where possible. Consider the energy use and environmental costs involved in transporting food and goods from distant locations
- Establish a compost system for food scraps (not animal products) and garden materials
- Minimize the use of clothes dryers
- Dress appropriately for the weather, for example wearing warm clothing on cold days, rather than relying automatically on heating or cooling
- Use sunshades and blinds to keep heat out and open up rooms to the outside air when the heat of the day is reduced.

Many of these tips can be used when you are planning experiences for children, eg:

- Children might enjoy helping to sort recyclable products while learning about different materials. A visit to a recycling facility could add an exciting element to the experience.
- Hanging clothes on a clothes line provides the opportunity for learning about the effects of natural energy sources of the wind and sun. You might like to find songs or other activities to support the experiences: for example, the song 'Wet washing, hanging on the line, drying very quickly when the weather's fine...' is fun and it carries a practical message.

Much of what we see and hear about the environment from the media is negative and possibly frightening with its focus on the devastations of climate change and environmental degradation. It's important that children hear positive messages about the environment and nature and that they receive positive messages about what can be done. Children need to experience the wonders of nature and feel that they can have a positive impact on their environment. Carers have a responsibility to "support children to retain the sense of awe and wonder that they are born with, to add to that a desire to nurture and protect what is beautiful, and to encourage them to appreciate that there are many possibilities for

honouring life and the wonders that the world holds." (Stonehouse, quoted in *Climbing the Little Green Steps*\*)

#### Some additional ideas to consider include:

- Replacing disposable nappies with cloth
- Establishing a garden where children can grow vegetables or herbs that can then be used in their meals
- Buying organic food
- Establishing a worm farm
- Using wood from renewable, plantation sources (or recycled timber) rather than rainforest timbers.

Installing a rain water tank for garden use (not for drinking water), and/or installing solar panels are larger projects that may involve considerable initial costs and planning. Government rebates or grants can help offset these costs, and reductions in water and energy use can compensate for the initial costs.

In considering all of these ideas, it's important to include families in decision making, determining priorities and considering the implications for fees.

"We borrow the earth from our children, we do not inherit it from our ancestors"

(American Indian proverb)

#### References and resources:

\*A useful, practical guide developed specifically for early childhood services is *Climbing Little Green Steps*. A PDF version can be downloaded from [www.gosford.nsw.gov.au](http://www.gosford.nsw.gov.au) Click on 'Environment' from the menu on this webpage.

Davis, Julie and Elliott, Sue *Early Childhood Environmental Education making it mainstream Every Child*, vol. 13, no 1, 2007 is focused on sustainability.

Kinsella, Rachael *Greening services: practical sustainability*

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/sustainability](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/sustainability)

*QIAS: Quality Area 4*

*FDCQA: Quality Area 3*

The Parent Fact Sheet accompanying this article is available in different community languages and can be downloaded from the Early Childhood Connections website [www.ecconnections.com.au](http://www.ecconnections.com.au)

## Case Study – Environmental Sustainability

In Victoria, Laverton Community Children's Centre Inc.'s commitment to environmental sustainability is written into its mission statement and supports its vision of "A great start for the children in our community".

The Centre has built this commitment into all facets of its programme, service operations and use of resources and materials. Environmental features are designed to reduce the impact of the building on the environment and children are provided with a clean, healthy and stimulating environment in which to learn, grow and prosper.

Children are encouraged to actively discuss and contribute to the sustainability of the various programmes that are offered. One such programme is "Gardening – more than just digging in the dirt". This project commenced with the support of Hobsons Bay City Council and the children have developed a no dig vegetable garden, a worm farm, green house and seed propagation. The programme has direct links to sustainability and food security as children are learning about the values of planting and growing and tending to gardens. Children are engaged in preparing a raised garden bed in the 2-5 year old area. Carers are currently working on a small orchard proposal that will be transportable into the various playgrounds.

Water is regarded as a precious resource and water storage is a key part of the centre's design. Rainfall is captured in tanks accessible to children so that it is available for play and learning – including irrigating the garden beds. The play-based learning experiences are recorded through photos and narratives in the children's portfolios. Water storage is used for the laundry operation and also for the flushing of toilets. With reduced rainfall in the area and a lack of water catchment, the systems revert to town supply, when necessary. The water storage tanks also provide a continuous water supply to the gas furnace which is a complimentary unit to the generating of hot water and the wall mounted hydronic heating and

evaporative cooling systems. There are energy-passive installations that include overhead ceiling fans, solar panels and verandahs: these methods all assist in the use of natural resources and heating and cooling of the children's service and gathering areas.

Carers are regarded as role models for communities, families and children and this consciousness is carried into planning, decision-making and everyday actions. Another staff decision that supports environmental sustainability involves actively using recycled and recyclable resources. This new initiative was developed due to the limited financial resources available to the children's service to extend its resources, so the centre is proactively seeking out restored, recycled and refurbished items to compliment service delivery.

An active Parent Advisory Committee works collaboratively with staff and management. These members provide significant insight into the services they need, the usefulness of projects to individuals and the community. They provide the foundations for 'best practice' and sustainable projects.

The centre's mission statement is wholly supported by a collective approach to provide the foundations for better partnerships and collective agreements that are meaningful to its community. The centre believes that this will ensure that people successfully access its programmes and be provided with care, health and education.

The centre actively promotes its service delivery and welcomes interest from other agencies, children's service providers and interested parties. The sustainability of the children's service is meaningful as the partnerships that have been developed with children, families, staff and the wider community are complimentary to a viable and ongoing community vision.

# Fever in Babies and Children

## What is normal temperature and what is a fever?

A normal body temperature for a child is about 37°C, but will vary slightly (by about 1°C) according to the age of the child and the time of day, with body temperature being a bit lower in the morning and higher at night. Fever is when the temperature remains at 38°C or above.

Fever is common in children, but it is rarely harmful. Fever is not an illness: it is a symptom, or sign, of an underlying problem. The most common cause of a fever is an infection, which can be either viral or bacterial.

A slightly raised temperature can be associated with teething and immunisation. Exercise can lead to a small increase in body temperature, too. Young babies are less able to regulate their body temperature, so overdressing in a hot environment may also increase their body temperature. But teething, immunisation, exercising or over-dressing are not causes of anything more than a small and short-term increase in body temperature.

## Taking a child's temperature

Taking a baby's or child's temperature accurately can be difficult. It is important to know how to use a thermometer and to be aware of some of the problems associated with their use. Not all thermometers are equally reliable, and temperatures recorded may vary according to what part of the body is being tested (eg underarm testing can give a lower reading). How the thermometer is used may also affect the reading. A false high reading can be obtained if an oral thermometer is used shortly after a child has had a warm drink, for example. The Raising Children Network website\* provides detailed information on the different types of thermometers, their use and relative accuracy.

**Do not use an old style mercury thermometer as there is a risk of breaking the glass and releasing the highly toxic mercury.**



## Is medication or medical help needed?

As a higher temperature is the body's way of dealing with an infection, medication to reduce the temperature (eg. paracetamol or ibuprofen) is not normally advised, unless the child is very uncomfortable.

### Do not give aspirin to infants or children

If a child has a fever but otherwise appears well, there may be no need for treatment/medication or consulting a doctor. A fever on its own may not need any treatment. The best advice is to **observe and assess the overall condition of the child**, rather than to make a judgment based solely on temperature. Contact the family to advise that their child is unwell, to discuss options and to gain further information about the child.

Indications that a child's fever is probably not serious are, if the child generally looks well and is:

- alert
- drinking well and urinating normally
- eating well (or normally) is also a good indication that the fever is not serious, but a reduced interest in eating is quite commonly associated with infection and, on its own, is not a cause for alarm

- still interested in playing (or other normal activities)
- has good (and even) skin colour.

If all of these indications are present, the child does not require medical intervention, but should be regularly checked or observed and can be made more comfortable by dressing in light, loose clothing and being given clear fluids, such as water or diluted juice. Paracetamol or ibuprofen may help a child who is very uncomfortable. Sponging with cool water or placing a child in front of a fan is not advised and may make the child more uncomfortable.

### When to seek medical help

**A baby of 3 months or younger, who develops a fever, should be seen urgently by a doctor. If the baby is younger than 12 months, medical advice should be sought. Fever in infants may indicate a more serious underlying problem.**

The following symptoms for children of any age may indicate a more serious health problem. Contact the family and arrange for the child to see a doctor if a child has:

- difficulty breathing or rapid breathing
- stiff neck
- rash or blotchy patches on skin
- persistent headache

- vomiting
- continuing diarrhoea
- cramps

or, if the child is

- affected by bright lights
- drowsy
- floppy
- unresponsive.

It is important to look for and recognise these symptoms as a child needs to see a doctor urgently if they are present.

### References and useful websites:

\*Raising Children Network:

<http://www.raisingchildren.net.au>

The National Childcare Accreditation Council website has a useful guide for services to develop policies for 'Illness' and 'Medication'.

[www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)

Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne: [www.rch.org.au](http://www.rch.org.au)

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

*QIAS 5.5, 6.6*

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