

## SECTION 3

### HEALTH & SAFETY POLICIES

#### 5.13 Outdoor Play Policy

##### **Rationale:**

The Gums acknowledges the benefits and value of Outdoor Play. Outcomes for children are enhanced when learning can occur indoors and outdoors in a variety of circumstances so that children are able to learn through intentional teaching as well as experience the wonder of the natural environment through all seasons.

Children's opportunity to engage with natural materials and explore the outdoors is essential for building their connection to the world around them and understanding the importance of working towards sustainable futures for the land and its people.

##### **Aim:**

1. To ensure the physical environment will contribute to children's wellbeing, happiness, creativity and developing independence.
2. To ensure the environment is free from hazards, is clean and well maintained.
3. To provide a physical environment that will support children's learning, levels of engagement and access to positive experiences and inclusive relationships.
4. To provide outdoor play spaces that encourage children to explore and experience the natural environment. Where possible, gardens will reflect the local natural habitat and encourage native wildlife.
5. To provide an outdoor play space that supports each child's sense of being and belonging, as well as facilitating their growth and development
6. To provide adequate space for solitary play, and for children to work, play and talk together in small and large groups
7. To provide outdoor spaces with shaded areas that meet the recommendations of relevant recognised authorities for protection from the sun
8. To provide outdoor environments that are designed to assist educators to supervise children in an age and developmentally appropriate way, and group children in ways that minimise the risk of injury and conflict.

##### **Processes:**

###### **1. Fixed and Moveable climbing equipment**

###### Moveable Play Equipment

Moveable play equipment includes trestles and attachments, portable forts, climbing apparatus, ladders and many more play accessories. The maximum free height of fall for moveable play equipment is 1.5 m eg. The highest foot support and/or platform on moveable play equipment should be no higher than 1.5 m.

### Fixed Play Equipment

The maximum height of fall for fixed playground equipment is 1.8m above ground level. eg. The highest foot support and/or platform on moveable play equipment should be no higher than 1.8m.

### Impact Areas

Playground injuries often occur when a child falls from play equipment onto a hard surface. Playground equipment (both fixed and moveable) that measures 0.6 m or more above the ground level requires a falling space and impact area. The falling space and impact area is a safety zone that surrounds the equipment and should be free of obstacles that could injure in the event of a fall.

For equipment items less than 600mm above ground level that are designed for climbing, rocking or spinning, set up on a soft surface such as well-maintained grass or softfall.

For fixed equipment with platforms 0.6m – 1.5 m above ground level the impact area is 1.5 m around (AS 4685:2014) The impact area between fixed and moveable equipment can overlap. A tape measure or length of dowel should be used to check the required falling space and impact area.

Specific impact areas apply for equipment with forced movement such as swings. The impact areas for equipment with forced movement may not overlap with those for other equipment items.

### Soft fall requirements

Both fixed and moveable playground equipment with a fall height 0.6m or more above ground level and specific equipment items such as slides and swings should have an impact attenuating surfacing (softfall) beneath and around (impact area) it to minimise serious head or other injuries on the event of a fall.

At The Gums, pine wood chip is used as softfall. This product has been supplied by Jamestown sawmill to meet Australian Playground standard AS 4685.0:2017.

It should be installed at a minimum depth of 30 cm and maintained at not less than 20 cm. Loose-fill material is easily displaced and should be retained by a border or edge that is constructed of an appropriate material and does not present trip hazards or sharp protrusions.

## **2. Bikes, Scooters and Ride-on toys**

Bikes, Scooters and wheeled toys are an active way of encouraging social and imaginative play. However, providing a suitable pathway or track within a play space requires careful consideration to minimise potential conflicts of use.

Encourage bike track use in a one-way direction to help minimise the occurrence of collisions. Bike tracks require a hard surface for good traction. Ensure the track is free from obstacles and kept free from debris.

Provide bikes, scooters and ride-on toys that are age appropriate, see manufacturers recommendation. At The Gums only three or four wheeled pedal bikes, scooters and ride ons are offered as helmets are not provided. Bikes, scooters and ride-on toys should be regularly inspected for wear and tear.

### **3. Sandpits and Digging Patches**

#### Sandpits

To ensure children gain the best experience from the sandpit areas it is important to consider the following construction and maintenance guidelines.

- Sandpit depth should be a minimum of 40 cm of sand.
- Sharp edges of boulders or rocks must be rounded off.
- Ensure sandpits are adequately shaded.

#### Maintenance

Inspect the sandpit daily or before use. The sand must be raked over to remove debris (sun and fresh air are good disinfectants), turned over monthly to aerate the sand and replenished when the sand level drops 10 cm below the top edge of the sandpit. It is recommended that the sand is replaced annually or as required.

Remove sand contaminated by food or other materials, human or animal faeces, blood or other bodily fluids. Where extensive contamination has occurred, all sand should be replaced.

#### Covers

Sandpits should be protected with a tight-fitting animal and vermin proof cover such as a tarpaulin or shade cloth when not in use. Shade cloth utilised as cover allows water to permeate through without pooling on top of the cover. Aeration and sunshine is the most effective way of sanitising sand.

At The Gums the Babies and Toddler sandpits should be covered when not in use.

#### Digging Patches

At The Gums the ELC patches considered “digging patches” and therefore do not need to be covered when not in use. The digging patches should be raked over daily as sun and fresh air are good disinfectants. Ideally the digging patches will be a 50:50 sand soil blend.

### **4. Trampolines (less than 600mm above surface level)**

#### Safety Guidelines

- Place the trampoline on a flat surface. Ensure the trampoline is level and stable.
- Secure the trampoline legs with pegs to the ground to increase stability and prevent it being moved.
- The area underneath and around the trampoline should be clear from obstacles such as concrete, bikes, tools, rocks, overhanging trees, electrical wires, walls or other structures.
- Never use the trampoline on concrete or pavers because the user could be severely injured from landing heavily on a hard surface.
- Position the trampoline on well-maintained grass or on a surface with impact attenuating material such as bark or mulch.
- Ensure a minimum 1.0m impact area is provided beyond the edge of the trampoline frame.
- Provide at least 5m clearance above the trampoline bed (mat).
- Ensure the trampoline bed (mat) is high enough to prevent the bed from touching the ground while the user is bouncing.
- Check that padding covering the suspension system (springs) is wide enough to completely cover the entire top surface of the springs and is installed following the manufacturer’s instructions.

## 5. Tree Climbing

At The Gums children are provided with opportunities to climb trees that are suitable to their climbing ability. A suitable climbing tree needs to have strong branches that are not brittle and branches that can hold the weight of a child.

A risk assessment of suitable trees is conducted annually and includes assessing;

- Type of tree (species)
- Impact of climbing activities on the tree
- Position of the tree (proximity to buildings, fences etc)
- Age of the children who will be climbing the tree
- Determine the appropriate number of children to be in the tree at one time
- Supervision plan
- Rules/limitations of the activity
- The benefits of climbing a tree for children

Once a tree is deemed suitable to climb, educators should;

- As part of opening staff's morning routine, inspect the climbing trees - a thorough inspection of the tree to determine its health, and for any potential hazards. A tree that shows signs of wear or weakness is not suitable for climbing.
- Remove obstacles- ensure that loose parts, toys, and any hazardous items are removed from around the base of the tree. Children need to be able to independently access the tree without assistance from things such as ladders, steps, or stairs.
- Always be alert, unforeseen circumstances, such as a sudden gust of wind, breaking tree limb or an attack from a protective wildlife parent, make it imperative that you are always alert to danger. Always make sure an educator is in the near vicinity when children are climbing a tree.
- Discuss with children the maximum climbing height on the tree branches.

## 6. Loose parts

Loose materials are items and/or natural materials that are portable and can be moved, carried, combined and manipulated by either an individual child or group of children.

Loose materials are an integral element of an outdoor learning environment and can include but are not limited to the following;

- Stones, pebbles, stumps, fabric, twigs, sticks, wood, balls, buckets, baskets, crates, boxes, logs, rope, shells, seedpods, tyres.

It is recommended that loose materials are;

- Regularly inspected for sharp edges, rust and degradation
- Regularly maintained and are disposed of when useful life is reached or as hazards related to their use becomes apparent.

## 7. Bushblock

International and national evidence demonstrates that unstructured free play in nature benefits our children in many ways including improving health and wellbeing. The Gums Bushblock provides opportunities for children to engage in an ever-changing natural environment that encourages rich learning and play opportunities.

Written annual risk assessments and a verbal risk assessment is completed prior to each visit to the Bushblock.

## **8. Outdoor Play in Winter**

We recognise that throughout the year, the outdoor environment and weather changes, however at The Gums we strongly believe in the value of yearlong experiences.

There are sometimes concerns from parents about play outside during cold wintry weather. Requests to keep children indoors can be a source of dilemma for educators. Research shows that exposure to cold weather will not give you a cold because colds are caused by viruses. There is an association between cold weather and the winter season and common colds because transmission of cold viruses is much higher in cold weather. It's likely that colds and influenza outbreaks peak in winter because we tend to huddle together in small, often stuffy, unventilated spaces.

Educators are asked to dress appropriately for outdoors so they are able to interact with children and facilitate intentional teaching opportunities in all weather. Educators should role model appropriate outdoor clothing for children, and support children to begin to look after their well being, for example, removing wet clothing or putting on a jumper.

Families are asked to provide jackets and gumboots for children so they have appropriate clothing for cooler weather. This will help to minimise wet socks, shoes and pants.

## **9. Shade**

In Australia, UV radiation levels remain high throughout most of the year. At The Gums shaded areas are provided in all gardens by both natural (trees and shrubs) shade or built shade (verandahs and shade sails).

A Sunsmart Shade audit ( <http://www.sunsmart.com.au/shade-audit/> ) will be completed in March and October each year as to be aware of how the shade will change with the seasons.

## **10. Risk Benefit Analysis**

Children need to encounter some real risks if they are to respond positively to challenging situations and learn how to deal with uncertainty. This can not be achieved by limiting children to supposedly safe environments. Therefore, at The Gums we believe we have no choice but to offer situations which children can experience real, not make-believe, hazards.

Risk is inherent within our education, care and everyday activities. The aim of managing risk is to minimise negative outcomes, NOT to eliminate risk and challenge for children.

Risk is measured in terms of a combination of the consequence/impact and the likelihood of a positive or negative impact balanced against the benefit (learning outcomes).

A Risk Benefit Assessment is completed annually for each of our three outdoor play areas. These Risk Benefit Assessment reports are kept in the office.

Relates to Quality Area 3 of the National Quality Framework – Physical Environments.

Relates to the following regulations from the Education and Care Services National Regulations:

Regulation 114 Outdoor space—shade

Regulation 108 Space requirements—outdoor space

Regulation 115 Premises designed to facilitate supervision