

Pets and Animals in the Environment

Policy Statement

At Meerilinga we believe involving pets and animals in our early learning programs provides many valuable experiences for the children. Encouraging animal interactions with children will enrich their learning about nature, ecology and relationships. Developing bonds with animals can help children build empathy, patience and skills such as nurturing, responsibility and improve their communication.

While there are many benefits of keeping pets in the service, there are also a range of issues and concerns to consider for the safety and wellbeing of both the children and the animals.

Policy Purpose

Providing children with access to animals at our service can be a valuable part of a child's education and care experience by observing, interacting with and learning how to care for animals. Our service aims to provide a safe, hygienic and humane environment for all animals and pets that visit or reside at the service.

Scope

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

Exclusions

Policy Review

Biennial or from time to time when the organisation may make changes to this policy to improve the effectiveness of its operations and customer service.

Policy Reviewed	4 August 2022	By	Advisor Policy & Compliance
Approved By	CEO		
Previous Review	31 July 2020		

Implementation

Educators play a crucial role in guiding children's learning, encouraging them to understand and appreciate the natural environment and the independence between people, plants, animals and the land.

Educators and staff will determine the purpose and benefit of introducing a pet or animal into the service and how it links to the children's development and curriculum. Consideration must also be given for the safety and wellbeing of the children and the animal, as well as the long term implications of caring for a pet.

Resident Animal

Resident pets are housed and cared for at the service. Through the risk management process, the Manager CCS will assess the risks and benefit to children when considering approval of a resident pet in the service. Housing a resident pet is a long-term commitment and care plans must be developed which include the upkeep and housing of the animal when the service is closed.

Animals that are relatively low maintenance and can be left safely over a weekend with enough food and water may be a more suitable resident pet.

Visiting Animal

Visiting animals may attend the service through planned incursions, educational programs, families or Meerilinga staff own pets or animals. Approval and risk management processes apply to visiting animals before they are allowed on the premises.

Approval

The CEO must agree to permit pets at any Meerilinga premise or service. Approval will be subject to specific operational requirements that must be complied with. No pet will be allowed on the premises unless approved in writing by the CEO. This includes staff members own pets or animals.

When considering the approval of a Pet Application and Agreement for a pet to visit or reside at the service, the Manager CCS and CEO will consider:

- National and State legislative requirements, including public health, animal welfare and health and safety.
- Risk management processes.
- Developing practices to support a safe environment and minimise risk.
- Any known potential allergies or illnesses that children may suffer as a result of coming into contact with animals.
- Consulting families, children and community users to provide them with the opportunity to express their view.
- The ages of the children, their skills and abilities.
- The value of children's learning and development.
- Maintaining hygiene where children and pets share the same space.
- The welfare of the pets, caring for them safely and humanely.
- Consultation with a veterinarian to determine whether a pet is suitable.

The Service may consider other ways of introducing children to animals. Educators and staff may facilitate and extend children's learning by planning community excursions and invite visitors or programs into the centre such as mobile farms, reptile keepers or egg hatching programs. Risk assessment will be conducted during the planning stage of the excursion or Service visits.

Assessing and Managing Risks

Our service has legal and ethical responsibility to provide a safe environment. Children will be adequately supervised and every reasonable precaution is taken to protect them from harm and any hazards that may cause injury.

Through the risk management process, the following will be considered when deciding the type of animal and the way the children will engage with it.

- **Infection**

Children are more vulnerable than adults to acquiring infections from animals. This is due to their age, having a lack of awareness of the risk of disease transmission and effective hygiene practices, their natural curiosity and attraction to animals. Children under five years of age are at an especially high risk due to their developing immune systems, frequent hand-to-mouth activities

Disease

Access to animals at the service requires special consideration to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Health authorities identify that germs can be present on the skin, hair, feathers, 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. Simple measures will minimise the health risk from contact with animals.

Infection Control

- **Hand Hygiene**

Hand hygiene is an important prevention measure to stop the spread of infectious diseases as hands can carry and spread germs. Children, Educators and staff will practice effective hand washing after interacting with animals. Guiding children to develop appropriate personal hygiene habits will become embedded as they grow and develop.

Refer to the Health, Hygiene and Infection Control Policy and Processes

- **Cleaning**

After activities with animals, all environmental surfaces in areas where animals have been present will be cleaned.

Bloodily fluids such as blood, urine, faeces and vomit from animals must be contained and the area cleaned immediately.

Refer to the Health, Hygiene and Infection Control Policy and Processes

- **Food Safety**

Specific areas will be designated for activities involving animals. Food and drinks will not be allowed in these designated areas. Animals will not be allowed into areas where food is being stored, prepared, served or consumed. Animal enclosures, as well as food and water bowls, will not be cleaned in food preparation, consumption or storage areas.

Refer to the Health, Hygiene and Infection Control Policy and Processes

- **Allergies and Asthma**

Hosting animals in the service has the potential to introduce high numbers of allergens into the environment. Animal hair, feathers skin flakes, saliva and urine can cause an allergic reaction or aggravate asthma symptoms in some people.

When children are introduced to animals, it is important to monitor them for the development of allergic symptoms such as wheezing, sneezing, and runny or blocked nose.

Refer to the Medical Conditions Policy and Processes

- **Supervision**

Children will be appropriately supervised at all times when they have direct contact with animals. Environments may need to be re-arranged to house animals and maximise supervision.

Refer to the Supervision Policy and Processes

- **Animal Health**

It is important that all animals visiting or housed at the service are healthy and clean. A health management plan must be in place for all approved resident and regular visiting animals. The health management plan will include examination by a licensed veterinarian to ensure appropriate nutrition, dental care, vaccinations and parasite management/prevention for each animal and must be updated every six(6) months.

An Approved Pet

All terms and conditions of the Pet Application and Agreement together with the risk management and pet profile and care plan for the pet must adhered to at all times. A pet register and individual pet file will be stored at the service.

All service users will be notified of an approved pet on the premises, prior to or at the time of visiting the early learning programs.

The person(s) responsible for the approved pet and educators will:

- Designate areas/housing for the pet.
- Guide quality practice for all service users with the care and handling of the pet.
- Practice appropriate supervision at all times.
- Encourage children's to engagement with pets and animals, provide many valuable experiences to enrich their learning and development.
- Ensure food and water is made available for all pets and animals but kept out of reach of children at all times.
- Ensure all enclosures are to be kept clean and hygienic with appropriate bedding.
- Ensure pets and animals visiting the service are never taken into the food preparation area nor will they be allowed near the eating or sleeping area.
- Demonstrate and promote effective handwashing immediately after touching or feeding pets or animals, or cleaning their bedding, tanks, cages or enclosures.
- Follow the services health and hygiene procedures.
- Keep the pets health management plan up date to ensure the six(6) monthly veterinarian checks are completed and the documentation filed in the pet's individual file.
- Inform the Nominated supervisor or Quality Advisor of any change in the pet's health or wellbeing.
- Review and update the risk assessment or pet care plan as required.
- Inform all service users if the pet is no longer residing or visiting the venue.

Education – Children, Educators, Staff, Student and Volunteers

Educators and staff will prepare families and children for an animal visit, gathering perception into how the children may react to the animal.

Prior to animal participation in the program, Educators and staff will read and acknowledge the risk management and pet profile and care plans for the pet or animals.

To ensure appropriate supervision at all times, Educators will discuss supervision strategies amongst their teams before any activities associated with animals. This includes monitoring handwashing after contact with animals.

Educators will teach children about the animals and how to interact gently and appropriately. The children will be encouraged to help care for the animals as they learn responsibility through 'hands on' experiences.

All persons having contact with an animal at the service will be educated on the services infection control measures such as and procedures when cleaning the environment where animals have been present and hand hygiene.

Unexpected Animal Visit

There may be situations where spontaneous events occur that involve animals (eg: a situation where an animal has made its way into the service). Educators may use this as a spontaneous learning experience for the children however they will ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children at all times.

If an animal is potentially dangerous; such as a snake or spider, educators will isolate the area and may initiate emergency procedures such as a lockdown. The appropriate authority will be contacted for assistance.

Refer to the Emergency Management Policy and Processes