



# NATURE PLAY... We are explorers of the world.

There has been much research in recent years about the importance of nature play for children and the statistics indicating that children are now spending less and less time in unstructured play in nature or in contact with "wild" nature beyond the fence. Spending time in nature helps children thrive

- \* Cognitively, by improving creativity, motivation, concentration, and academic performance (Murray & O'Brien 2002). Communication, observational skills, problem solving and working memory and interest for further enquiry are also enhanced.
- \* Emotionally by lowering levels of stress and depression and by increasing confidence and self-esteem (Peacock 2007) and by providing opportunities for developing social skills, collaboration and the executive functions of inhibition and self-regulation.
- \* Physically by reducing risks of obesity and myopia and by improving healing and recovery. Children who play in dirt have less allergies.
- \* Ethically by not just developing a respect for nature but by developing environmental stewardship and a stronger sense of concern and care for the environment in later life.

The Department for Education and Child Development is promoting Nature play and has developed policies on outdoor play. Forest Schools and Nature Kindies first evolved in the Scandinavian countries, then UK, New Zealand and are now gaining momentum in Australia. They have links to the Educational philosophies of Froebel, Steiner, Reggio Emilia approach, Te Whariki and more recently, post-modernist theories such as Guy Claxton's ideas on Building Learning Power. "To thrive in the 21st century, it is not enough to leave school with a clutch of examination certificates. You have to learn how to be tenacious and resourceful, imaginative and logical, self-disciplined and self-aware, collaborative and inquisitive." (Claxton 2002).

Ken Robinson also claims that creativity is the key to success in the modern world. Forest school philosophy supports the idea of the child as an individual, developing uniquely with different strengths and talents to be valued and nurtured. The focus is on a child-led approach. In Nature Kindy Children use found natural objects to inspire imagination and to problem solve and create and to play symbolically. It plays back into the rest of children's lives and provides stimulation for further exploration back at kindy.

The long term effects of nature play have been explored by Louv (2010) and Barnes (2007) "We need to find the wild in each of us for our own lasting health, but also for the health of the planet. Living a wilder life is a better way to live: it has more meaning. It is better for our minds, our hearts, our souls."

The ethos of Forest school is that

1. The setting is not the usual one (i.e. outside the centre)
2. The area is made as safe as is reasonably possible to facilitate children's risk taking.
3. It happens over time (not a one off visit, minimum 10 weeks of half a day each week)
4. There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad (inappropriate) clothing
5. Trust is central
6. The learning is play based and, as far as possible, child initiated and child led.
7. The blocks of time and sessions have beginnings and ends
8. Sessions are run by trained staff.

At Blackwood kindy we have a lovely outdoor environment with natural loose parts for children to play with. The staff have all read research, and attended Training and Professional Development sessions on Nature Play. We are strong advocates for the benefits of Nature Play to children, and we encourage outdoor play every day. In addition we are lucky enough to live in an area which is close to some wilder nature that we can easily access.

In 2014 Governing Council approved the proposal that we regularly attend Belair National Park for "Nature Kindy" sessions. The head ranger agreed to this proposal and agreed to waive the usual hire fees as well as waive the entry fees for parents driving in. We currently access the park on alternate Wednesdays in Terms 2 and 3, with children being dropped off and picked up from the park rather than our centre in the even numbered weeks of these terms. We meet in an area called Joseph Fisher, with toilets and a shelter for our own use.

Benefit/ risk assessments have been undertaken for all foreseeable circumstances as we do for all excursions outside our centre. These are available for parents. "In the Nature Kindergartens we remove hazards that

children do not see. But we do not remove challenges or risks that children do see and then choose to undertake. Children can choose to climb up a tree and determine for themselves how far they feel comfortable climbing. If we remove all challenges, children lose the ability to risk assess. Our philosophy is to be risk-aware and not risk-averse and to employ a sense of perspective when assessing risks."

Claire Warden explaining Forest School philosophy, adopted in our Nature Play.

## When I'm playing outside I'm learning

Absorption Arranging Adapting Action  
 Animals Autonomy Balance Belonging  
 Calculating Caring Change Cause and Effect  
 Chemical Reaction Community Classification  
 Creative thinking Construction Co-operation  
 Density Communication Creatures Culture  
 Connections Confidence Depth Conservation  
 Distance Evaporation Exploring Force  
 Experimenting Environment Friction Feelings  
 Friendship Gravity Height Identification  
 Inertia Insects Investigation Initiative  
 Independence Invention Light Listening  
 Language Manipulating Movement Matching  
 Measurement Mass Myself Negotiation Nature  
 Nurturing Number Observing Ordering  
 Patterning Physics Planning Problem Solving  
 Propulsion Plants Questioning Reaction  
 Risk Responsibility Self Control Size Shape  
 Speed Spatial Representation Suspension  
 Scent Seasons Scientific Method Touch  
 Temperature Team Work Texture Vibration  
 Volume Weight Weather and so much more!

**Playing outside makes me  
 happier, healthier, smarter**





All members of Blackwood Kindergarten staff have first aid training and we take first aid kits, Asthma puffers, Epipens etc and mobile phones as per usual excursion procedure. We can contact a Ranger in needed.

3 staff and interested parent helpers (with Police checks) supervise the children at above NQS staff: child ratios.

The Magpie Nature Kindy sessions begin at 8.45am to enable travel time to the park to fit in with school drop offs and give staff time to do a safety scan of the area and unpack cars and set up. They conclude at 11.30am. Rosella Nature Kindy sessions begin at 12.15pm and finish at 3pm. The slight difference in session times is made up during the year when staff provide out of hours kindy activities such as Family fun nights.

Children will probably get dirty (Nature Play includes mud and climbing logs), and may get wet (and remember there is no bad weather only bad/ unsuitable clothing) so we would advise play clothes and weather appropriate jackets (with waterproof coverall pants being supplied by kindy). Sneakers are best footwear, with gumboots and umbrellas brought for rainy day walks, and a change of clothes provided. You may like to purchase a secondhand rain jacket in an Op Shop so that children are not restricted by having to stay "clean". In addition there are safety vests to pull on over clothing to make children highly visible. Children need to bring food and water bottles in their backpacks, remembering they may be hungrier than usual in colder weather and in the open air.

Children will have pre-excursion training regarding safety rules, boundaries etc. The Nature Kindy area will be marked out by flags and children must be accompanied by an adult to leave the home base. There will be signs to indicate that the area is "hired" and not for public access.

Please find below some web links to gain a deeper understanding about Forest Schools and Nature Kindy. Ctrl /click

An article about Nature Kindy <http://naturekindergarten.sd62.bc.ca/proposal/>

An article by Claire Warden who is an inspiration for this pedagogy and well known internationally. <http://nurtureinnature.com.au/claire-warden-nature-pedagogy/>

This ABC recording is an interview with 3 international advocates for nature play who I have heard speak in Adelaide. <http://blogs.abc.net.au/wa/2013/07/nature-plays-a-big-role-in-childhood-happiness.html>

A more in depth interview with Claire Warden <http://www.mindstretchers.co.uk/nature-kindergartens.cfm>

**Belair National Park Websites:**

[http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/Find\\_a\\_Park/Browse\\_by\\_region/Adelaide\\_Hills/Belair\\_National\\_Park](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/Find_a_Park/Browse_by_region/Adelaide_Hills/Belair_National_Park)

<http://www.southaustralia.com/info.aspx?id=9000481>

Take the **virtual tour of Belair National Park**, courtesy of **Georama**.

More local information can also be found on the Nature Play SA website and Facebook page.

















