

Early Years Hubs Parent Handbook



Acknowledgement of Country

Melbourne City Mission (MCM) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our services are located. We honour the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay our respects to all Elders, past and present.

MCM Early Years Hub Philosophy

MCM Early Years Hub acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin nation, on which we operate. We pay our respects to their elders, both past and present.

As a team of Early Childhood Professionals, we believe in the importance of providing our children, families, and educators with a friendly, warm, and safe environment at MCM Early Learning Hubs. We work to ensure our environment is clean, safe, and a place that invites growth, learning, and opportunities to thrive.

The principles and inspiration of Reggio Emilia guide our practices, meaning that we utilise the environment as 'the third teacher'. We recognise the importance of providing creative and engaging spaces to support children's learning and growth. The curriculum and learning experiences at MCM Early Learning Hubs are 'play-based' and our educators believe in inspiring children to discover, create, and be curious and courageous in their environment.

We believe that acknowledging and valuing each child's strengths, interests, needs, background, and family culture, is important. By understanding each child's unique abilities, we are best placed to cater to their individuality and implement relevant and meaningful experiences that are child centred.

The contribution that families, parents, and care givers make is vital as we work together in partnership for the best outcomes for all our children. We work collaboratively with the community to deepen our understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history. We believe in building strong, positive relationships with families, care givers, and the local community. We have an open-door policy, and we appreciate and welcome all feedback.

We believe that we are all lifelong learners and that we can build a sense of belonging through embracing diversity, honest and respectful dialogue, and valuing the knowledge of the wider community.

We believe that by working together we are united, and this enables a sense of community and teamwork which benefits everyone.

Our Values



Together



Courageous



Curious



Open



Accountable

Welcome to MCM Early Years Services

MCM is a widely recognised leader in the provision of services to the community. Established in 1854, MCM is dedicated to maintaining strong relationships with local communities to provide outstanding human services across Victoria. We provide services to people of all cultures and faiths, families are supported in a variety of socio-demographic and economic environments.

MCM currently operates two early childhood services across the Melbourne metropolitan area. These services are:

- **MCM Early Years Hub – Hartnett House**
- **MCM Early Years Hub – Doreen**

Each of our services operate under an integrated practice model and incorporate other specialist services such as Maternal Child Health, Early Childhood Intervention, supported play groups and local school networks to enrich the service we provide.

MCM's early learning programs are dedicated to providing best practice education and care services to children and families, where individuals are valued and supported to reach their full potential. Your child's time with us, will allow them to commence their formal learning journey in a supportive and nurturing environment. Our early learning programs promote the development of strong thinking and problem-solving skills, the development of appropriate social skills and the foundations upon which, a joy of academic learning will be established. By developing and maintaining quality, genuine relationships with each child and their family we ensure that every child's social and emotional development is nurtured and enhanced.

Our early learning programs respect the voice and values of the children we teach and as such, play is advocated as the most appropriate form of learning for children in the early years. We ensure that suitably qualified and experienced educators are engaged to support the individual needs of each child and each group. Our programs are based on the interests of children, their developmental needs, current research into best practice and a sound understanding of the Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

We strive to provide beautifully presented, easily accessible environments that allow children to explore their learning in both indoor and outdoor environments. All learning experiences are carefully planned to target the learning needs of each child, and our rich learning environments promote equity and allow each child to explore and make choices about their own learning.

We warmly welcome you to MCM Early Years Hubs and we hope that both you and your child enjoy being a part of our learning community. Please find enclosed, the information you will need to get settled with us. If you require any further information, please speak with one of our staff.

Settling into care

Ensuring your child feels safe and secure is one of our top priorities. Starting at a new early learning centre can be full of emotions for both families and children.

To support you in this transition, we offer three orientation days prior to your child beginning care which will encourage them to form attachments and bonds with their educators.

Building a strong relationship with your family is very important to us and makes a real difference to the early learning outcomes for your child. It's best for us to know your child's interests, likes, dislikes and any special needs they may have. This will become integral as our team incorporates your child's interests into our educational programs, so please take the time to share information about your child with their educators regularly.

On your child's first day educators will make immediate connections with your child to make the transition process run smoothly. We want to establish an environment in which meaningful and lasting relationships can develop between educators and children as well as between educators and families. Communication is fundamental in helping all families to adjust. We communicate on a regular basis throughout the day on Story Park and Xplore Playground where we document your child's daily routines and activities. These are live documents and you will receive updates as they occur.

Helping your child on their journey

We want to ensure our centre becomes an extension of your home life and that the relationships, cultures and activities that are important to your child are recognised. This creates an environment where they feel safe, secure, and ready to learn.

By building a strong relationship with us and your child's primary educator, we can support you to build on your child's learning and development at home. We encourage you do this by asking questions, getting involved and continue the learning activities at home.

Working together, engaging in your child's interests, and learning and discovering with them is the best way to ensure a high-quality education for your child. It also helps to build the foundations for their success not only in the centre but throughout their school years.

Funded Year of Kindergarten

Children who turn four by 30 April in the year prior to school are entitled to 15 hours of kindergarten funded by the Victorian Government. The Victorian Government provides a per capita grant to kindergarten service providers based on data submitted to the Department of Education and Training, which reduces the fees payable by parents/guardians.

If your child is attending more than one funded 4-year-old service, you will be asked by the service(s) to nominate which service you wish to receive the funding. Your child cannot access kindergarten funding at more than one kindergarten.

Am I entitled to government assistance?

The Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is a payment made by the Australian Government to help families with the cost of quality childcare and early education. This is paid directly to the service to reduce your weekly fees.

Three things will determine a family's level of Child Care Subsidy:

- A family's combined income will determine the percentage of subsidy they are eligible to receive.
- An activity test will determine how many hours of subsidised care families can access, up to a maximum of 100 per fortnight.
- The type of childcare service will determine the hourly rate cap.

Some basic requirements must be satisfied for an individual to be eligible to receive the Child Care Subsidy. These include:

- The age of the child (must be 13 or under and not attending secondary school).
- The child meeting immunisation requirements.
- The individual, or their partner, meeting the residency requirements.
- The number of hours of subsidised childcare that families will have access to per fortnight will be determined by a three-step activity test.
- In two parent families, both parents, unless exempt, must meet the activity test. In the case where both parents meet different steps of the activity test, the parent with the lowest entitlement will determine the hours of subsidised care for the child.
- Low-income families who earn under a government set threshold who do not meet the activity test will be able to access 24 hours of subsidised care per child per fortnight without having to meet the activity test, as part of the Child Care Safety Net.
- Under the Child Care Subsidy, families are allowed 42 absence days per child each financial year. These can be taken for any reason, including public holidays or when children are sick.

Step	Hours of activity*	Maximum number of hours of subsidy per child*
1	8-16 hours	36 hours
2	More than 16 hours to 48 hours	72 hours
3	More than 48 hours	100 hours

*Per fortnight. Source: www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy-activity-test

Flexible Hours and the Child Care Subsidy

We know that there is no one size fits all option for our families when it comes to early childhood education and care. That is why we are giving families the freedom to choose which hours best suit their needs.

Nine-hour, ten-hour and full day options are available to all families under the one associated flat fee, enabling them to make the most out of the Child Care Subsidy.

Designed to reduce out of pocket costs and increase access to subsidised hours, the new flexible model is part of our commitment to providing greater access to quality early childhood education and care.

Choose from our nine-hour, ten-hour or full day sessions and make the most out of the Child Care Subsidy.

	Full Day	Ten-Hour	Nine-Hour
Flexible care time frame	Full day centre operating hours	Any ten-hour period within the centre operating hours. Parents choose start and finish times.	Any nine-hour period within the centre operating hours. Parents choose start and finish times.
Grace period	Not applicable	One hour overall	30 minutes overall
Late fees and charges	Only applicable outside of centre operating hours. Existing fees apply.	None unless pick up or drop off falls outside of Centre's operating hours.	None unless pick up or drop off falls outside of Centre's operating hours.

Payment of fees

All payments must be made via EZIDebit and all families must complete EZIDebit application form upon enrolment. For other alternative payment methods, please speak to your Centre Manager.

If you are planning holidays, a Holiday Discount form is available from the centre's office. This form must be submitted at least two weeks prior to the holiday absence to receive 35% off your fees for up to two weeks (pro-rata to the number of days your child attends) each financial year.

All children's booked days, including public holidays and absent days must be paid to retain your child's place. Late fees are charged if children remain in the centre after closing times.

Two weeks' notice is required if you wish to cancel a booking. Failure to do so will require parents to pay full fees. All accounts must be finalised within seven days and any outstanding accounts will be forwarded to debt collection agencies.

Please refer to the fee policy for all conditions of fee discounts including holiday bookings and cancellation of bookings.

Signing in and out of the centre

Each child must be signed in and out of the centre every day they attend. This is a legal requirement and is in the interest of your child's safety.

These records are used in case of emergencies and for the calculation of the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). If a child is away, ill or on holidays the corresponding days must be logged using the Xplor app.

On arrival at the centre, you are asked to:

- Sign your child into the centre using the Xplor parent app or in the centre Xplor Hub.
- Present your child to the educator in charge.

When you collect your child, we ask that you:

- Come into the room and greet your child.
- Collect your child's belongings.
- With your child, say goodbye to the educator in charge of the group.
- Sign your child out of the centre using the Xplor parent app or the Xplor hub.

To ensure the safety of all children, no child will be released into the care of any persons not registered as authorised by the parent/guardian in the Xplor web portal.

If team members do not know the person collecting your child by appearance, the person must be able to produce some form of photo identification to prove that they are authorised to collect the child as per the Xplor authorised information.

If a child has not been collected 15 minutes after closing time, then the parents/guardians will be contacted on the emergency telephone numbers provided.

If the child has still not been collected 30 minutes after closing time, then staff will follow the Department of Communities Abandoned Child Procedures including contacting the Child Protection and Crisis Centre 24-hour service.

Early Year Learning Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework is a National Early Learning Framework for children from birth to five years. As the early years are a vital time for children to learn and develop, the framework has been developed to ensure your child receives a quality educational program.

Educators will use the framework in partnership with families to develop learning programs responsive to children's ideas, interests, strengths, and abilities and recognise that children learn through play.

The Early Years Learning Framework describes childhood as a time of belonging, being and becoming.

Belonging is the basis for living a fulfilling life. Children feel they belong because of the relationship they have with their family, community, culture, and place.

Being is about living here and now. Childhood is a special time in life and children need time to just 'be' – time to play, try new things and have fun.

Becoming is about the learning and development that young children experience. Children start to form their sense of identity from an early age, which shapes the type of adult they will become.

Through the Framework's five learning goals, educators will assist your child to develop:

- A strong sense of their identity.
- Connections with their world.
- A strong sense of wellbeing.
- Confidence and involvement in their learning.
- Effective communication skills.

Our centre also offers an extensive Kindergarten and School Readiness program based on the Framework. The Framework has a strong emphasis on play-based learning as play is the best vehicle for young children's learning providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development. We aim to guide your child in becoming an effective learner through creating an environment that is challenging and stimulating. The overall aim of our programs is to help your child in developing all areas necessary for success now and in later years.

Watching your child's progress

Using the Early Years Learning Framework educators will observe your child's learning so they can build on it and plan the next steps. They will do this by listening, watching, and talking to your child. Each child will have their own digital portfolio or collection of learning. This may contain photos and children's work to show what your child is learning. This learning journey is available for you to view at any time.

To ensure you are connected to your child's early education, parents have access to an app and receive notifications to their smartphone or email with details of their children's day, including photos and the learning outcomes they're achieving. Ask our Centre Manager for more details.

Your child's room will also show ongoing learning through daily journals/books, photographs, project work, learning stories and a program documenting the day's progress.

Family walls

All rooms have a 'family wall' which features photographs of the children with their families. This is a strong and valuable tool which encourages children to connect and feel they and their family are a valued part of the service. If you would like to bring in a photo, or a couple of photos that represent your family, we would love to add it to our wall.

Parent interviews

As well as attending an interview with your child's teacher at the start of the year, at any time during the year you can arrange an appointment if you wish to discuss your child progress. It is a great opportunity to work in partnership to establish goals for your child.

All staff are very approachable and are committed to working in partnership with you to develop an individual learning plan for your child that will support your child in their learning journey. Our highly experienced teachers will also talk with you about your aspirations and expectations for your child's year.

National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework is a government initiative which sets a National Quality Standard creating greater consistency for early childhood education and care services across Australia.

This initiative aims to improve educator-to-child ratios in services, increased skills and qualifications, national regulations and a quality ratings system which will help you to make informed choices about the education and care you choose for your child.

Our centre's aim is to exceed the National Quality Standard across all areas of our service and each centre has a quality improvement plan in place to show what is happening in our centre to achieve this. This will look at areas such as educational programs and practice, children's health and safety, physical environment, staffing arrangements, relationships with children and collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

For more information about the National Quality Framework, please speak to your Centre Manager or visit www.acecqa.gov.au

Environments and routines

Our routines provide for individual play and learning as well as small and large group play and learning activities. Children's language and literacy skills are further developed during these times as children are involved in storytelling, drama, and games. Music also plays a large part during these sessions as children can experiment with dancing, singing, and exercising their bodies.

Spaces are made available for children to engage in rest and quiet experiences. Educators provide a range of active and restful experiences and support children to make appropriate decisions regarding participation.

Each of our centre's rooms are individual and unique and are tailored to suit the age and development stage of your child, the diversity of the educators, children, families, and the wider community and are filled with laughter, fun and educational resources.

All aspects of children's learning and development are catered for including physical, social, emotional, creative, cognitive and communication. Children's learning is dynamic and complex, and the centre's environment is designed for this.

As your child grows and develops so will their needs, interests, and abilities. To cater for this, your child will gradually transition to the next room, where their skills and development can be extended.

Our transitioning procedure includes communication with families and involves a careful assessment of your child's records to ensure they are ready for the next step. This process also includes short visits to the new room to build familiarity and ensure a smooth transition.

Supervision

Supervision of children is the function of actively observing and guiding a child or group of children. This includes awareness of and responsibility for the activity of each child and being physically present and near enough to intervene if needed. Supervision means faculty members have knowledge of children's needs, accountability for their care, and knowledge of which children they are responsible for at all times. All our staff have been trained in 'active supervision'.

Policies and procedures

Our centre has several policies and procedures pertaining to the care of your child. Our policies are displayed in the centre foyer and are available to review at any time. For more information on our centre policies please speak with your Centre Manager.

Accidents and incidents

Our Educators take a proactive approach to safety and conduct thorough risk assessments of all play areas so that each child can feel safe and free to explore their environment.

A senior first aid qualified staff member is always present as well as nominated asthma and anaphylaxis supervisors. Should an accident or sudden illness occur, Educators will immediately commence first aid and you will be contacted to collect your child. In emergency situations you will be advised of the plan of action regarding further medical treatment.

During an emergency, if you or your authorised nominee cannot be contacted, the nominated supervisor will provide the ambulance officers with information regarding your child and a team member known to the child will accompany them to the hospital and stay until you arrive. Full documentation of the incident will be made available.

Health and hygiene

Children and Educators are actively encouraged to practice good personal hygiene to minimise the instances of illness. We also believe that if your child is ill, the best place for them is to be at home where they can recover faster.

If your child presents at the centre with signs of illness, the nominated supervisor may advise that they are not well enough to participate in the day's activities. You will be asked to make alternative arrangements until they are well, or the exclusion period has ended (you may be asked to provide a medical clearance letter before your child can return). Although this can be inconvenient for parents, it is in the interests of all children and families at the centre to minimize the risk of infection.

Should your child become ill during the day, documentation and first aid will commence, and you may be contacted to collect your child from the centre and seek further medical advice. It is important that you read the Centre's medication policy carefully to know when educators can administer medications.

A list of common infectious illnesses, their exclusion periods and policies and procedures related to illness and minimising the spread of infectious diseases are available in the office if required. This information can be provided to you if you wish.

Emergency evacuation

Emergency evacuations as well as lockdown procedures are actively practiced, and the centre has individual plans for local emergencies including cyclone, flood, and bushfire. Fire extinguishers are strategically located throughout the centre. As part of our fire safety measures all children in attendance are noted from the electronic sign in device in the event of a drill or evacuation – another important reason to ensure that you sign your child 'IN' and 'OUT' of the centre each day.

Immunisation

As part of your enrolment process you will be asked to provide details of your child's immunisation status from the Medicare website.

Medication

If your child requires medication while in care, a medication record must be filled in and signed by a parent. The medication must be in original packaging and accompanied by a prescription label/doctor's letter which states who the medication is for and the dosage. Medication must be handed to a staff member and will be stored in an Allergy Buddy or the Medication Fridge. Under no circumstances is any type of medication to be left in children's bags. Please refer to the Medication Policy for further information.

Allergies and medical conditions

Please advise us if your child has allergies or medical conditions. If your child is at risk, asthma, allergy, and anaphylaxis action plans must be provided by your GP. We will work with you to develop plans to ensure your child's safety and wellbeing while they are with us.

Nutrition

We understand the important role we play in supporting the nutritional needs of children while in care.

We also have a commitment to assist families who provide their children's meals to develop healthy food attitudes and habits. Guidelines around healthy eating can be found in the foyer or by asking a friendly team member.

Water bottle

Your child will need to bring a filled water bottle with them for every session. We ask that you clearly label it with your child's name. We encourage healthy eating, so water is the best option for your child.

Confidentiality of centre records

We value and uphold your privacy and have several systems and procedures in place to ensure the protection of your data. For more information on our Confidentiality of Centre Records policy, please ask the Centre Manager for more information.

Sun protection

Our centers take care to protect children and team members from direct exposure to the sun by all state regulations and the childcare building code regarding the amount of manufactured and natural shade available in the playgrounds.

We recommend that parents pack clothing for children that will protect them from the sun, including a hat, longer sleeved t-shirts and loose clothing which covers all their body (i.e., no midriffs, singlets or bare backs).

Sunscreen will be applied to those children with prior written permission in accordance with the blanket permission form guidelines relating to the use of foreign substances. Sunscreen will be applied to these children 20 minutes before going outside and is then regularly reapplied.

Literature on sun care is available at the centre. For more information on the centre's Sun Protection policy, please ask the Centre Manager.

Clothing

Please dress your child in play clothes that wash easily. In choosing what your child should wear to the centre, please consider the following:

Your child will be working with messy materials such as paint, glue, water, and sand so clothing must be able to stand a little wear and tear.

Clothing must provide some protection and be comfortable for both indoor and outdoor experiences.

Children will be climbing, running, jumping, and swinging so they will need clothes that neither restrict their activity nor reduce their safety (e.g., slippery shoes, long skirts).

Children will need clothes which allow for growing independence i.e., pants that can come off easily for toileting.

Please label all clothing and footwear with your child's name.

Priority of access

The Australian Government funds childcare to support working Australian families and ensure all children have access to quality early childhood education and care. However, the demand for childcare sometimes exceeds supply in some areas. When this occurs, it is important for services to allocate places to those families with the greatest need for childcare support.

To ensure that the centre adheres to the guidelines issued by the Australian Government, priority of access to childcare will be given according to children falling in to the following categories:

- Priority 1: A child at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Priority 2: A child of a single parent or of parents who both satisfy the work/training/study test under section 14 of the New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999.
- Priority 3: Any other child.

In relation to priority three, there are some circumstances in which a child who is already in a child care service may be requested to give up their place or change days at the service in order for the service to provide a place for a higher priority child, but only if the parent is notified of this policy upon enrolment AND the service gives parents 14 days' notice of the requirement for their child to give up their place or change days.

Within the main categories, priority is also given to children in:

- Families with low incomes.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- Parents or children with disabilities.
- Families from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- Single parent families.
- Socially isolated families.

Safety and child abuse prevention

Child Protection Children First supports each child's right to live and learn in a safe and secure environment. As mandatory reporters, employees are required to report and act in accordance with the procedures for recognising, responding to, and reporting child abuse and neglect to the Victorian Department of Family and Community Services.

Concerns/Complaints

We hope that families within our Early Learning Centres are happy with the service we provide. Staff are available to discuss any concerns parents may have. In the first instance, it is preferable for families to address any concerns with the Room Educators and Leaders particularly those relating to your child or the program.

Should you still not be satisfied or wish to discuss any other issues, please feel free to contact the Centre Manager or Operations Manager.

This Handbook is updated from time to time. For the most recent version please contact your Centre Manager.

Cultural diversity

We recognise that our centre is culturally and linguistically diverse and we want to ensure all families experience a sense of belonging. To achieve this, we provide opportunities for all children to develop an understanding of different cultures and help foster in each child an awareness and acceptance of these cultures by integrating multiculturalism into our programs.

We aim to help foster in each child an awareness and acceptance of other cultures through integrating multiculturalism into our programs. This can be achieved through providing and offering a range of books, music, cooking, activities, singing, clothing, play equipment and more.

Celebrations

We are an inclusive community and encourage you to share your traditional and cultural events in the kindergarten program. This may include things like birthdays, Eid, Diwali, Easter, Passover just to name a few.

We celebrate these festivals and events as part of the program and would always encourage you to participate and share your knowledge about these things.

We really look forward to having your family become part of our Early Learning Hub.



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