



Parent Information Handbook 2012

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SECTION 1: MERUKA OVERVIEW

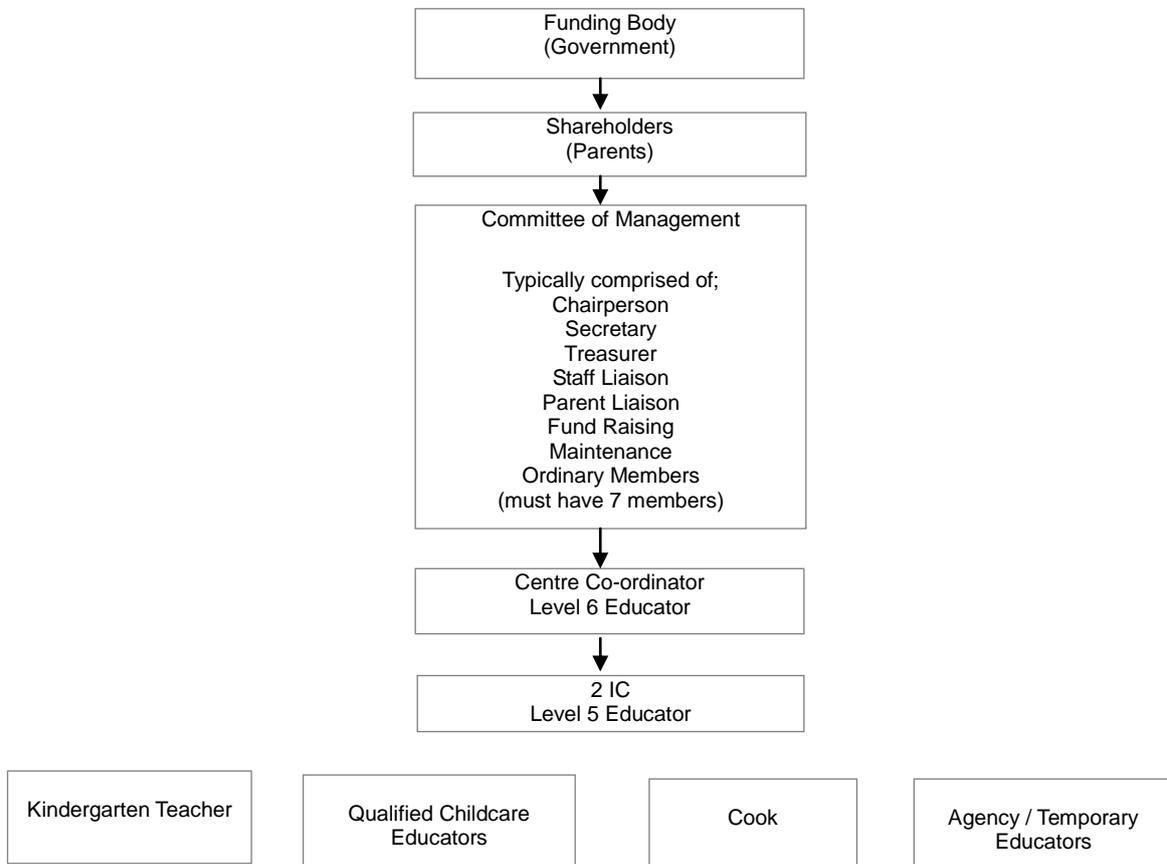
History of Meruka:

The Meruka Child Care Centre and its surrounding parklands are situated within an area of local historic significance having once been part of a 900 acre property that was purchased in 1840 from the Crown. (Source: Victorian Heritage Database, Nillumbik Heritage Study 2001.)

In 1911 the original property was sub divided into a number of smaller lots, one of these lots being the current location of the Centre and its parkland. The Centre's position at the top of the hill was once the location of the homestead and the long driveway lined with Monterey Cyprus Tree's is regarded as significant for the region for both its design and planting. After a number of different private owners, the property was purchased, and is now maintained, by the Shire of Nillumbik.

The Meruka Child Care Co-operative was established in the current building in April 1994 with the assistance of Council members and dedicated parents from the community.

Meruka Structure:



Management Committee

Shareholders in the centre are responsible for deciding on the overall policies of the centre. However, since the users as a whole cannot be involved in all the decisions which need to be addressed, shareholders elect a small group of members to take responsibility for running the centre on their behalf. These members form the Management Committee, and normally meet on a monthly basis.

The Management Committee is made up of;

- Chairperson,
- Secretary,
- Treasurer,
- Staff Liaison,
- Safety & Maintenance,
- Parent Liaison / Public Relations,
- Fundraising Representative,
- Staff Representative,
- Centre Co-ordinator, and
- Ordinary members (x2)

The Co-ordinator has descriptions of the above positions available upon request.

Notices of management committee meetings will be displayed in the Centre one week prior to the meeting, to encourage all interested stakeholders to come along to these meetings. However, only elected members can vote at Management Committee meetings. A quorum of four shareholders is required for all Committee of Management meetings.

Meetings are convened in accordance with the Rules for Meruka Child Care Co-operative Ltd, as prescribed by the co-operation Act 1981, part D, rules 18 through 26.

The annual general meeting (AGM) is held in April every year.

If you are interested in being part of the committee please see the co-ordinator.

Availability of the Centre Co-ordinator

The Co-ordinator has a combined hands-on and administrative role at Meruka, being responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre including enrolments, staffing and administrative responsibilities.

The Co-ordinator will undertake to spend as much time with the children as possible, to ensure their individual needs are being met and as such it is advisable to make an appointment with the co-ordinator if you would like to discuss any particular issues.

The Spirit of a Co-operative:

A co-operative is made up of families with common, child care needs and goals. Through the service provided within the centre and mutual parent support and co-operation these goals can be achieved. Involvement is the key to a successful co-operative. This means that in a sense parents are co-owners, and therefore they have a real say in what happens in the centre. The structure symbolises the collective commitment of the families using the centre.

In becoming a member of the co-operative, the centre families become part of a caring community. They are committing their own interests, energy and resources to the co-operative on the understanding that the group is also undertaking to help and support them.

This centre was established with the assistance of Council members and dedicated parents in this community. It is important that the spirit of the co-operative be retained and strengthened. This centre is a place that enables parents to share in the caring and responsibility of their children.

Philosophy:

At Meruka we believe that all children are individuals with their own thoughts, feelings and past experiences, and as educators we strive to respect and nurture each child's individuality, growth and development. We believe children first need to discover who they are, so they are able to relate to others and become accepting of diversity.

We believe families play the most important role in a child's life, and we welcome and encourage family involvement and input. We respect and support the diversity that each child and their family bring to Meruka. Through building a rapport with each child and their family, we can build trusting relationships, learn more about the child, their home life, routines, likes, dislikes, fears and interests. This helps to make the child's transition from home life to child care more positive and less daunting and assists educators to create a complete sense of belonging at Meruka and provides educators with the tools to better scaffold children's growth, learning and development.

At Meruka we will strive to provide a safe, nurturing and inclusive child care environment, where all children are encouraged to grow, learn and develop at their own pace. We believe in a play based program, which allows children to help make their own choices in their learning and development that is built on the Early Years Learning Framework.

Purpose:

The purpose of the Meruka Child Care Co operative is to provide quality care and development for children under the age of six, in the Nillumbik Community and surrounding shires.

The Centre aims to provide an environment where children can further their development through an educational program, which is developed and evaluated by qualified staff in accordance with child developmental records.

We believe that parent and community involvement is important to the centre to provide new ideas in the running of Meruka, and the structure of the programs and daily routines. Meruka creates a balance that enables staff and parents to work together, to have input into the daily running of the centre through management, suggestions and information.

The staff work in a collaborative way sharing their knowledge and expertise with the parents and other staff. They work with the children to discover ideas, provide opportunities for learning and engage in active research alongside the children.

The staff recognise the importance of communication, teamwork and collaboration between families and the centre's staff and strive to form positive relationships with all. The staff acknowledge that learning is lifelong and they are committed to professional development.

The staff believe in providing a program that fosters all children's developmental areas and they recognise and promote the value of play. The staff at Meruka aim to create a positive indoor and outdoor environment that is inviting, inclusive and rich in possibilities, one that reflects the local community and the families that use the service. The staff set up experiences that allow the children to make choices, promote peer relationships and provoke thoughts and imagination. Through analysis of observations and from listening to the children, the staff continually aim to improve the experiences of the children

Goals:

For Children: To provide an informal, safe and caring environment for all children to learn and develop through;

- Fostering in children a sense of autonomy, initiative, independence, consideration, responsibility, self esteem and self control,
- Catering for individual and differing needs,
- Enhancing development in Identity, Community, Wellbeing, Learning and Communication
- Opportunities for children to explore and experiment,
- Meeting nutrition, health and safety requirements.

For Parents: To provide an environment which encourages active participation in the functioning of the centre and to provide a supportive environment that welcomes and informs parents of their child's day through:

- Acknowledging the central role of parents and their families in children's development,
- Encouraging parent involvement in the service as a whole,
- Maximising parent participation in management,
- Ensuring that the centre acknowledges and supports the cultural backgrounds of families,
- Providing information, advice and support to families on all aspects of the centre.

For Staff: To provide a supportive working environment and opportunities for professional development by:

- Providing opportunities for professional development through in-service training and staff development days,
- Providing information, advice and support so that staff can carry out their duties,
- Ensuring the environment fosters teamwork,
- Treating all staff with respect and as individuals.

For the community: To foster the development of a sense of community and belonging within the shire and where possible, encourage and support other local community development initiatives whose objectives are consistent with those of the Co-operative. This is done by:

- Providing opportunities for social contact between families using the centre and the community,
- Participating in activities within the community and the encouragement of links with other services in the community.

National Quality Framework

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a new framework for Early Childhood Education and Child Care. This agreement has led to the development of the new National Quality Framework which is being introduced in stages over a number of years, with formal implementation commencing from 1 January 2012. A new national body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, will have the responsibility for ensuring the consistent and effective implementation of the new system.

Given that this is a new system we have included a brief overview of the key components for you.

The National Quality Framework has three parts:

- a *National Quality Standard*, that gives families clear information about the quality of early childhood education and school age care services they can expect their children to receive;
- a *National Quality Rating System* with five levels, and including a quality rating for seven key areas of childhood development; and
- the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* that guides educators and carers in developing play based learning and development activities for children in early childhood education and school age care settings.

National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard includes seven quality areas which have been identified as being important in providing quality early childhood education and school age care services.

These are:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children's health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements, including improved staff-to-child ratios and qualifications
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management.

National Quality Rating System

The National Quality Standard will be complemented by a national rating system. The rating system will provide clear and accurate information for families and services. The rating system combines the seven quality areas with a five level rating system.

The rating system has the following five levels:

- Unsatisfactory
- Operating level
- National Quality Standard
- High quality
- Excellent.

Each child care service will receive an overall rating following an assessment by a qualified assessor and services will be required to display their approval and rating information. Given that this is a new system, all existing services, including our own, will be initially allocated an 'Operating Level' Rating.

Victorian Early Years Learning Framework

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, is a document developed by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in partnership with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. It advances all children's learning and development from birth to eight years. It does this by supporting all early childhood professionals to work together and with families to achieve common outcomes for all children.

The framework has been developed to encourage play, fun and enjoyment of learning. Early childhood professionals recognise that learning is an active process that must involve children's engagement and interactions with adults and peers to support children's learning and development. Play is essential to stimulate and integrate a wide range of children's intellectual, physical, social and creative abilities.

The framework identifies eight practice principals for Learning and Development and they are broken down into 3 categories;

Collaborative

1. Family centered practice
2. Partnership with professionals
3. high expectations for every child

Effective

4. Equity and diversity
5. Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
6. integrated teaching and learning approaches
7. assessment for learning and development

Reflective

8. Reflective practices

From these principals the framework has developed five learning outcomes that we must relate our planning and children's development to. The five outcomes are;

- 1. Children have a strong sense of identity**
In order to form a strong sense of self, children need to build secure relationships first within the family and then with caring attentive adults in other settings
- 2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world**
Over time and with opportunity and support, the ways in which children connect and participate with others increase. Participating in their communities strengthens children's sense of identity and well being.
- 3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing**
During early childhood, the foundation of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing are laid.
- 4. Children are confident and involved learners**
When babies and young children are relaxed and involved they express wonder and interest in their environments. When they are encouraged and supported to curious and enthusiastic participants in learning, they begin to develop positive dispositions for lifelong learning.
- 5. Children are effective communicators**
Children communicate with others from birth.
Maintenance of first language is important for children's identity, wellbeing, communication and

learning.

Framework - Implementation & Documentation

Educators within each room take regular group and individual observations on the children over the course of each year. A variety of documentation will be used to gather information about the children's learning, development and interests, including information provided by families.

Background Sheets

Background sheets are sent out to families to gather information on each child to assist Educators in helping provide a sense of belonging in the service and plan for them better.

Family Voice Sheets

Parents are encouraged upon arrival at the centre to communicate information about their child's interests, needs, routine, learning and experiences. Family voice sheets are provided next to the sign in book in each room for parents who choose to communicate in writing with staff about their child and the program.

Staff will endeavour to document important verbal information provided by families.

Individual Portfolio's

When starting at Meruka, each child will have their own Individual Portfolio Folder prepared where all their observations and documentation will be collated. This includes;

- **Individual Observations:**

Educators will document regular meaningful observations on the children over the course of the year. The number of individual observations depends on the amount of time spent in the service, (i.e. children that attend the service 5 days will have more observations than children that attend the service one day a week.)

Ideally educators aim to achieve the following number of individual observations per term;

- 1 Day / Week = 1 Individual Observation
- 2-3 Days / Week = 2 Individual Observations
- 4-5 Days / Week = 3 Individual Observations

Educators endeavour to document an individual observation on new children at the centre within their first 3 weeks of care at the centre, however we do note that our priority is to ensure that children form meaningful relationships with Educators, settle into the environment and develop a sense of belonging.

- **Artwork**

Selected artwork may be included, particularly those that relate directly to an individual observation.

- **Photographs**

Photographs provide a wonderful insight into your child's activities while at Meruka. Photographs will typically be included within Individual Observations Reports however where possible we will include photographs of your child's involvement in daily activities or even birthday celebrations and scheduled incursions.

Children's portfolios are kept in their room, and are available for parents to view and contribute information towards. Parents are encouraged to take their child's portfolio home, and are notified in writing when a new observation is placed in their child's portfolio. A family voice section will be placed with each observation taken on the children for parents to provide feedback on.

Children's portfolios are handed to parents to take home upon their child's completion of the service.

Program Plans & Reflective Journals

The program plan for each room is placed in a reflective journal next to the sign in bench in each room. Educators aim to create a child focused program, reflecting the child's needs and interests based on observations, and documentation provided by families. Educators modify the plan as the children's needs and interest in the experiences change.

Educators use the reflective journal as a tool to document group observations; provide information to share with families, weekly journals, and program evaluations. Educators will use group and individual observations, as well as information provided by families to modify the program, and

document these modifications as required.

Parent / Educator Interviews & Written Reports

Parent – Educator interviews are conducted once a year (usually midyear) to allow families time to sit down and discuss any concerns or information on their child in a relaxed environment. Educators also prepare a Written Report to provide an overview of your child’s learning and experiences while at Meruka.

Policies & Procedures:

Meruka's Policies have been developed by the Committee of Management in consultation with staff, parents and other stakeholders.

Previously, all policies were made available to Parents and Staff in the Centre’s Information and Policy Handbook however this year, Policies and Procedures have been extracted from the Handbook and made available to staff and parents via the Meruka Website. Copies are also available on CD upon request to the Centre Co-ordinator.

All parents are to ensure that they read the policies on a regular basis to ensure that they are familiar with the contents. Any queries should be directed to either the Centre Co-ordinator or to the Committee’s Parent Liaison Representative.

Policies have been allocated to four categories which are in line with the new National Quality Standards (NQS) as follows;

<p>Health Safety & Hygiene (NQS 2 & 3):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OHS Policy • Supervision of Children Policy • Clothing & Comfort Policy • Sun Smart Policy • Oral Health Policy • Health Policy • Child Abuse / Child Protection Policy • Hygiene & Food Safety Policy • Healthy Food Policy • Nut Aware Environment Policy • Head Lice Policy • Safe Sleeping Policy • Anaphylaxis Policy • Asthma Policy • Playground Improvement & Safety Policy 	<p>Staff, Leadership & Service Management (NQS 4 & 7)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrolment of Children Policy • Fee's & Levies Policy • Cash Free Policy • Privacy Policy • Grievance & Complaints Policy • Internal Grievance Policy • Equal Employment & Opportunity Policy • Harassment Policy • Professional Development & Training Policy • Additional Centre Activities Policy • Students & Volunteers Policy
<p>Respect & Collaboration (NQS 5 & 6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Orientation Policy • Diversity & Equity Policy • Babysitting Policy • Positive Guidance Policy • Links with Community Service Policy 	<p>Educational Programming & Practice (NQS 1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programming Policy • Movement between Rooms Policy

All policies are reviewed annually by the Committee and any parent who wishes to participate in this process should contact the Centre Co-ordinator.

SECTION 2: DAILY OPERATIONS

Operating Hours:

Operating hours are between 7.00am and 6.30pm.
Parents must arrive no earlier than 7.00am and collect children no later than 6.30 pm.
We are not legally responsible for children outside the hours of operation.

What to bring:

- ❖ Carry Bag
- ❖ Breast Milk/Formula (if applicable)
- ❖ Change or 2 of clothing (including shoes)
- ❖ Gumboots, Parka, Beanies and Scarf for winter. (Extras for children under 2 years)
- ❖ Dummy (if applicable)
- ❖ Bottle (if applicable)
- ❖ A refillable water bottle to drink from throughout the day.
- ❖ A favourite soft cuddly toy for rest time.
- ❖ A cassette tape/CD, especially stories or music for rest time.
- ❖ Nature items from the garden. Please ensure that house insects are in unbreakable containers.

Additional mandatory requirements during specified times;

- ❖ Sun Hat (September – April)
- ❖ Bushfire Protective Clothing (High Fire Danger Days);
 - Covered shoes

PLEASE ENSURE YOUR CHILD'S NAME IS CLEARLY LABELLED ON ALL ITEMS.

What NOT to bring:

- ❖ Food
- ❖ Money
- ❖ Thongs – they are not safe for group/outdoor play

Nappies:

Parents with children still in nappies need to supply a home nappy for their child to go home in at the end of the day. The centre provides disposable nappies throughout the day for children requiring nappies.

Each child will be changed 15-20 minutes prior to the time that has been signed in on that day unless staff receive a phone message that the expected time of departure has changed. If, on arrival, a parent feels a nappy change is required, this can be requested directly to a staff member on duty.

Toys:

Age appropriate toys are provided by the centre for daily use in accordance with the program plans developed by the educators. Toys that may encourage aggressive play will not be made available at the centre. Parents are requested to ensure that guns, swords or similar toys are not brought into the centre. The only toys that should be brought into the centre without prior permission from the educators are the Comfort Toys for rest time. It is advised that these be clearly labelled with the child's name.

Daily Routines:

The following table provides an overview of the centre's daily activities. Please note that the following timetable is flexible and may alter in consideration of the children's needs or planned incursions.

Activity	Time (approx)	Notes
Centre Opens	7.00 am	Upon arrival Babies go to their room, Toddlers & Kinder children stay together in Kinder Room (Family Grouping)
Breakfast	8.00-8.30am	Toast or Cereal with milk or water
	8.45am	Toddlers leave Kinder room and go into own room to begin morning programs
Morning Tea	9.30am	Seasonal Fruit and milk or water
	10.00am	Outdoor play (weather permitting)
	11.00am	Group time indoors
Lunch	11.00am 11.15am 11.30am	Babies Room Lunch Toddlers Room Lunch Kinder Room Lunch Healthy cooked meals and water. Apple after lunch
Rest Time		Rest periods begin in each room except Kinder room they have quite activities and go down to rest around 12.30 - 1pm
	2.00pm	Afternoon Program begins
Afternoon Tea	3.00pm	Homemade snacks (cookies, pancakes)
	3.30pm	Outdoor Play (weather permitting)
	4.30pm	Indoor Quiet Play
	5.00pm	Family grouping in both kinder and toddler's rooms. Note: Younger toddlers will go down to babies room.
Late Snack	5.45pm	Light Snack (fruit etc.)
	6.00pm	Quite time puzzle, books
Centre Closed	6.30pm	

Helping adjust your child to childcare:

As some children may find it difficult when first attending the centre, it is important that you gradually introduce him/her to day care. Settling in could take an hour, a couple of days or even a couple of weeks. Remember all children are different.

Try to stay with your child at the centre for half a day initially, or if this is not practicable, consider taking them with you when you go. Easing your child in gradually will cause less distress, and eventually they will be happy to stay at the centre all day. For many reasons some children may take a long time to adjust to a new environment, and you should not blame yourself or your child if they take a while to settle in.

A gradual adjustment period is ideal. However, if this is not possible, staff are happy to discuss with you ways, which might assist your child to settle in. Your child will feel happier towards you and the staff at the centre if they are not under any pressure.

When ready to leave, always say good-bye and reassure your child that you will return. Say good-bye quickly so that your child can settle into enjoying the day. Many children stop crying within minutes of parents leaving.

Ring as often as you like to enquire after your child, staff are happy to talk with parents throughout the day and provide updates on how your child is settling in.

Arrivals / Departures:

Access to the Centre

The door entering the childcare centre is fitted with a digital lock. The code will be given to parents upon acceptance at the centre. This code is to be kept completely confidential to maintain the security of your child. Anyone else authorised to collect your child must use the intercom system. All other visitors must first make an appointment and show photo identification.

Please DO NOT OPEN THE DOOR or hold the door open for other parents or visitors. It may seem a bit rude but this ensures that only authorised individuals have access to the centre. We also ask your assistance in ensuring that older children adhere to this rule too.

ONLY STAFF may open the door to visitors.

Arrival

- Parent/guardians must bring children into the appropriate room placing the child's belongings in the allocated 'locker'.
- Parents must sign their child into the Attendance Register each day giving details of;
 - arrival time
 - expected departure time,
 - an emergency contact, and
 - the person collecting the child

Collection

- Parents must sign their child out of the Attendance Register each day.
- Parents can review details of their child's day including;
 - Food consumed
 - Sleep (if applicable)
 - Nappy Changes (if applicable)
- Check the Child / Parent Pockets (located in or near each room) for updates / notices / general correspondence.

Who is authorised to collect children

No child attending the centre will be given into the care of any other person than a parent/guardian of the child except where prior authorisation has been given. Any parent who claims to have Sole Custody of a child will be requested to provide a copy of relevant Court Orders. Access by others will only be granted in accordance with authorisations given at the time of accepting a place at the centre.

Late Pick Up

If a child has not been collected from the Centre by 6.30 pm, staff will;

- Try to contact the parents.
- If unsuccessful, an emergency contact person will be called and asked to pick up the child.
- If the child is picked up by an emergency contact, a note to the parents will be left on the front gate indicating where the child is.
- If neither of the above can be contacted by 7.30 pm, the staff will contact the Eltham Police Station. Two people will always remain with the child.

A late collection fee of \$5 per minute will be charged for children remaining at the centre after 6.30 pm. Repeated late collections may incur additional fees or be referred to the Committee of Management for further action in line with the centre's Grievance and Complaints Management Policy and may ultimately lead to the loss of a place at Meruka.

Holidays

The centre will be closed on public holidays and for a period of approximately 10 working days during the Christmas, New Year period with no fees being payable during this time.

If families are going on holidays at other times, the full fee is payable during the child's absence unless another child using the centre takes their place and the centre is full. In cases of long periods of holidays, it is up to the parents to decide whether they forfeit their child's place or pay the total amount of fees payable in advance to hold the position.

Infectious Diseases & Medications

Meruka has a public health responsibility to protect all children in its care from outbreaks of infectious illness. The three most important methods of limiting the spread of infection in childcare centres are;

- Immunization.
- Hand washing,
- Exclusion of sick children and staff.

Immunization

It is a legal requirement to provide the childcare centre with evidence of your child's immunisation status. This information will help to protect children if there is an outbreak of a contagious disease at the childcare service, for which children can be vaccinated. Children who have not been vaccinated may be excluded from the centre in the event of an outbreak.

Exclusion Periods – Infectious Diseases

The centre will minimise the spread of infectious diseases between children, centre staff and families by conforming to National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) requirements for exclusion of children with infectious diseases as well as other legislative requirements. Exclusion minimizes the risk of transmission of the disease to others and also assists in the recovery of the sick child or staff member.

Each child and staff member must be well enough to attend and participate FULLY in activities. Children requiring additional one-to-one comfort and attention for long periods due to feeling unwell need to be cared for at home.

The centre has a 24 hour exclusion policy for general illness. Exclusion for 24 hours gives the temperature, vomiting or other illness time to subside and for normal activity and diet to be reintroduced. In some circumstances an exclusion period of greater than 24 hours may be required. In the event of an outbreak of a specific condition (as defined by the Department of Human Services), an exclusion period of 48 hours will apply.

General Exclusion Advice:

Fever: A child with a temperature of 38° C or more must be kept home (or will be sent home). It is advised that the child stay home after recovery from the fever for at least 24 Hours. The child's activity level and appetite should be back to normal as well. Although high temperatures may also be related to non infectious conditions such as teething or inflammation, for the wellbeing of the child, they will still be excluded from the care for 24hrs until the child's temperature has returned to normal levels (30- 37 degrees C) without the need for Panadol or other similar medications.

Prescribed Antibiotics: A child who is unwell and has been prescribed antibiotics or antifungals needs to be kept home for at least 24hrs after commencing treatment and until the child is well enough to return to childcare. This gives time for the medication to begin to take effect, and for the child to start recovering from the illness

Diarrhoea: Diarrhoea is the passage of excessively liquid or excessively frequent stools. A child who has watery stools should not return to the centre until they have not had a loose bowel motion for at least 24 hrs. A child who has 3 or more loose bowel actions in a day at childcare will be excluded from childcare for 24hrs to give the child time to recover.

Vomiting: A child who is vomiting should be kept home until the vomiting has stopped for at least 24hrs and after the reintroduction and tolerance of a full diet e.g. full strength milk or formula for babies, fruit, vegetables, bread, meat ect for toddlers and preschools. If a child vomits whilst at childcare, parents will be contacted to take the child home. Exclusion from care for 24hrs will then apply to give the child time to recover.

Conjunctivitis: A child who has conjunctivitis will be excluded until the discharge for the eyes has stopped unless a doctor has diagnosed non-infectious conjunctivitis.

For further information regarding Infectious Diseases and Exclusion periods please refer to the Meruka Health Policy.

Notification of Infectious Diseases

Parents must contact the centre immediately if a child contracts an infectious disease.

The centre will routinely inform all families when there is an outbreak of infectious disease at the centre by;

- placing a notice on the front door, and
- placing notes beside the attendance books, and
- sending email alerts.

Fact sheets on the illness may also be made available to all families, as appropriate. Parents must regularly check their child for symptoms.

Medication

If a child requires any medication during the day, parent/guardian's are to ensure that;

- Medication is to be placed in a sealed plastic container, clearly and correctly labelled with the child's name.
- Record the details in the medicine book and to sign it again at the end of the day. This will include details of;
 - parents' authorization, (for prescription, over the counter & homeopathic medications)
 - name of medication,
 - dosage required,
 - specific time when it should be administered,
 - who administered and the last previous dosage given.

If medication is required due to the onset of certain symptoms, these must be explicitly described (e.g. coughing or wheezing).

- Once the medication book has been filled out, please hand and show it to a staff member. These guidelines also apply to over-the-counter medications such as paracetamol.
- Parents are then to hand medication to a staff member who will then place medication in or on top of the fridge in the kitchen.

Parents should note:

- Prescription Medication will only be administered to the child named on the label.
- Prescription Medication will only be administered in the dosages specified on the label.
- If the name or dosage has been altered on the Medication's Label, the staff are NOT permitted to administer the medication.
- Medications must be in its original packaging and within its use by date. (Note: Medications supplied in dosage syringes will NOT be administered as staff are unable to confirm medication details.)

Accidents

If an accident or injury occurs to any child while in Meruka's care, an accident report will be completed and signed by staff and the child's parent/guardian. This report will be kept on record at the centre.

Emergency Management

An Emergency Management Plan has been developed for the Centre considering likely emergencies which may occur. The plan outlines roles and responsibilities, preparation / maintenance activities as well as recommended initial response activities for the following potential events;

- Bushfires
- Internal fires and smoke
- Medical incidents including;
 - Anaphylaxis
 - Asthma
 - Pandemics / Communicable Diseases
 - Snake / Spider Bites
- Storms and Flooding
- Gas leak
- Chemical Spills
- Bomb threats
- Personal Threat (i.e. Intruder / Siege / Hostage / Abusive Person)

Paper copies of the Emergency Management Plan are available in each childcare room and the Office and electronic copies are available for review on the Meruka website.

All staff undertakes a combination of external and in-house training to ensure that they can implement the plan in the event of an emergency occurring.

Bushfire Season

The lovely bush surrounds of the centre does unfortunately mean that Meruka is regarded as being situated within an area of higher bush fire danger. In response to this, a Bush Fire Policy and Procedures have been developed to ensure that the safest possible responses will be followed to in the event of a bushfire in the vicinity of Meruka.

Both the Policy and Procedures are available on the Meruka Website however a couple of key reminders for parents are as follows;

High Alert Fire Days

Meruka will be on high alert for bush fire danger in the following circumstances:



- when advised by external agencies such as Nillumbik Council, Department of Human Services or other government agency, police or fire services.
- in the event of a total fire ban
- advertised days of extreme fire danger,
- temperatures being forecast for over 40°C,
- there is the smell of smoke in the air or strong winds.
- at the discretion of the co-ordinator,

Parents will be alerted the previous day, if possible, that it is a Meruka High Alert Day via email or SMS. Parents should seriously consider keeping their children home on these days or asking their employers if they can work from home.

On the day of the High Alert, a High Alert Notice will be placed on the front door and the sign in books.

Bushfire Protective Clothing

In previous years parents were required to provide a full set of protective clothing on High Alert Fire Days. Our system has now changed so that there will be long sleeved pants & tops provided for each room.

Parents will still be required to ensure that the following items are provided;

- Covered shoes
- Cotton Hats
- Cotton or Woolen Sock
- Water Bottle

Children will **NOT** be accepted by the centre on High Alert Fire Days unless they have appropriate protective clothing.

Centre Closure – CODE RED Days

Meruka has been included on the Victorian Department of Early Education and Childhood Development's (DEECD) 'Bushfire at Risk Register' and as such the centre will **CLOSE** on days when a **Code Red Warning** has been issued. There will, in most cases, be 3 days notice provided to services of pre-emptive closure with confirmation no later than 12pm (midday) the day before.



Once the decision to close is made, this will not change – regardless of changes to weather forecast. (Note: All warnings of potential or actual closure of facilities will be posted to the DEECD website. www.education.vic.gov.au/bushfires)

Meruka will cover the cost of care for children booked on a day when the Centre is forced to close due to adverse weather conditions for ONE day of closure per year. We do note that the size and nature of the centre means that standard charges would apply in the event of additional closures. We are aware that some of these procedures will mean parents are inconvenienced from time to time, but the safety of the children and staff is of the highest priority. If you feel unable to comply with the requirements of the policy then it is suggested you look elsewhere for childcare.

Healthy Food

The centre is responsible for providing;

- Breakfast,
- Morning Tea,
- Lunch,
- Afternoon Tea and
- late snack for the children.



The lunch and afternoon tea menu is displayed in the foyer near the kitchen area each week

In relation to the preparation of foods the following shall apply;

- Meals will be prepared with an emphasis on fresh and unprocessed foods.
- Sugar, salt, fat, preservatives and food colourings will be kept to a minimum.
- Children's eating habits will be monitored with special attention given to babies under 18 months. Introduction of new foods will be carried out with care after consultation with parents.
- Cows and Soymilk will be provided for all children during the course of the day. The family must supply formula.
- Water is encouraged throughout the day.

Birthday Celebrations

- For children's birthdays the centre will provide cakes made on the premises.



Food Safety

Parents are **NOT** permitted to bring in food and snacks for their children whilst at Meruka, unless first discussed with the co-ordinator.

If children do not eat the centre's meals, for individual or religious reasons, permission from the centre co-ordinator to bring in food for your child is required. This food should be handed directly to a staff member who will store the food in an appropriate place until your child requires it

Under **NO** circumstances should foods known to contain nuts be brought into Meruka.

Examples include:

- *Peanut butter sandwiches, dips or crackers*
- *Nutella sandwiches or dips*
- *Biscuits and cakes with nuts in them*
- *Muesli bars with nuts*
- *Chocolate containing nuts e.g. Snickers*
- *Dried fruit & nut mixes*



For further details please refer Nut Aware Environment Policy

Anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis is a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction. Up to two per cent of the general population and up to five per cent of children are at risk. The most common causes in young children are eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, cow milk, bee or other insect stings, and some medications.

Young children may not be able to express the symptoms of anaphylaxis.

A reaction can develop within minutes of exposure to the allergen, but with planning and training, a reaction can be treated effectively by using an adrenaline auto-injector called an EpiPen®.

Parents/guardians of a child at risk of anaphylaxis are required to:

- inform staff, either on enrolment or on diagnosis, of their child's allergies.
- develop an anaphylaxis risk minimisation plan with service staff.
- provide staff with an anaphylaxis medical management action plan signed by the registered medical practitioner giving written consent to use the EpiPen® in line with this action plan.
- provide staff with a complete EpiPen® kit.
- regularly check the EpiPen® expiry date.
- should ensure that they send their child/ren at risk of anaphylaxis because of an insect sting/bite with appropriate clothing for indoor/outdoor play.
- assist staff by offering information and answering any questions regarding their child's allergies.
- notify the staff of any changes to their child's allergy status and provide a new anaphylaxis action plan in accordance with these changes.
- communicate all relevant information and concerns to staff, for example, any matter relating to the health of the child.
- comply with the service's policy that no child who has been prescribed an EpiPen® is permitted to attend the service or its programs without that EpiPen®.

See the Meruka Anaphylaxis Policy for further information.

Asthma Management

Asthma is a chronic health condition affecting approximately 15% of children. It is one of the most common reasons for childhood admission to hospital. While an average of two people die in Victoria each week from asthma, many of these deaths are thought to be preventable.

It is generally accepted that children under the age of six do not have the skills and ability to recognise and manage their own asthma effectively. With this in mind, Meruka recognises the need to educate its staff and parents about asthma and to promote responsible asthma management strategies.

Meruka's Asthma Policy aims to:

- Raise the awareness of asthma amongst those involved with Meruka
- Provide the necessary strategies to ensure the health and safety of all persons with asthma involved with Meruka
- Provide an environment in which children with asthma can participate in all activities to the full extent of their capabilities
- Provide a clear set of guidelines and expectations to be followed with regard to the management of asthma.

Parents/guardians are required to:

- Inform staff, either upon enrolment or on initial diagnosis, that their child has a history of asthma.
- Provide all relevant information regarding the child's asthma via the Asthma Action Plan.
- Notify the staff, in writing, of any changes to the Asthma Action Plan during the year.
- Ensure that their child has an adequate supply of appropriate asthma medication (including reliever) at all times.
- Ensure that their child has their own spacer device.
- Ensure that they comply with all requirements and procedures in relation to the Medications Book.
- Communicate all relevant information and concerns to staff as the need arises e.g. if asthma symptoms were present last night.
- Ensure, in consultation with the staff, the health and safety of their child through supervised management of the child's asthma.

See the Meruka Asthma Policy for further information

Sun Safety

Meruka recognizes that a healthy balance of the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation exposure is important for health and our Sun Smart Policy has been developed with the aim of achieving a healthy UV exposure balance for children and staff.

Too much UV can cause sunburn, skin and eye damage and skin cancer.

Too little UV from the sun can lead to low vitamin D levels. Maintaining adequate Vitamin D levels throughout winter through skin exposure of the hands arms and face to UV radiation is recognized as being important for the development and maintenance of healthy bones and muscles, and for general health.



In light of the above the following applies;

- Children and staff are required to wear hats, which protect the face, neck and ears whenever they are outside. (Broad Brimmed or Legionnaire - NO BASEBALL CAPS).
- Children should also wear protective clothing and will be encouraged to play in the shade if their clothing does not provide adequate sun protection.
- From May until August, the children may be taken outside at any time and no hats are required to be worn. From September until April, staff will keep the children inside between 10 am and 2 pm (11am and 3 pm daylight savings time)
- Meruka supplies sunscreen 30+ for use by children and staff. It is applied to each child at least 20 minutes before the children go outside and this is recorded in a book. If parents would like to supply their own child's sunscreen, they are requested to clearly label the bottle and inform the staff caring for the child that personal sunscreen has been supplied.
- Staff will encourage the children drink plenty of water to eliminate any risks of dehydration. Parents are asked that they supply a small refillable drink bottle/pop top with their child's name clearly on the bottle

For further details please refer to the Meruka Sun Smart Policy

SECTION 3: CENTER MANAGEMENT

Privacy

Meruka is committed to meeting the requirements of relevant Acts and Legislation in relation to the collection of Personal Information (including photographs and videos) and Health Records. The means by which Meruka shall manage these records is fully outlined in the Meruka Privacy Policy.

Please refer to the Meruka Privacy Policy for further details

Accounting

An inventory is kept of all equipment at the centre. A copy is also kept at the Secretary's home. The budget period will be from January 1st to December 31st. The centre's Administration books/records will be audited annually by a Certified Accountant.

Fee's & Levies

Meruka is a child care co-operative, run by a parent elected committee of management. Meruka receives minimal government grants to assist with its operating budget. All centre costs (including staff wages, superannuation, leave entitlements, running costs, consumables, equipment etc.) must be covered through the fees and levies charged at the centre.

Full details of the Centres Fee's & Levy's are outlined in the Meruka Fee's & Levies Policy however as a general overview the following apply;

1. The Committee of Management is responsible for setting the centre fees and any additional levies.
2. Changes to fees and levies can only be made at the AGM in April each year, or at any Special General Meeting. Parents will be given 14 days notice of these meetings along with the meeting Agenda.
3. It is the responsibility of the Committee of Management to be financially responsible and keep the centre viable

From January 2012 Meruka will be operating a payment system via direct debit only. This system has been introduced due to large outstanding payments and the difficulties that this causes in cash flow for a not for profit centre.

Meruka will be using the EzyDebit System

- **Friends of Meruka Levy**

Meruka has a Friends of Meruka Levy to ensure the continued development of resources at the centre through the purchase of new toys and equipment.

This is an annual payment charged to family accounts in March each year. The payment is based on the number of permanent days booked per family over a week. The fee has been set at \$20.00 per day (i.e. 1 Day = \$20.00, 2 days = \$40.00 etc.)

- **Maintenance Levy**

As a co-operative the centre depends upon families' support and participation. Maintenance of the centre is one aspect for which a shared responsibility is required.

An annual Maintenance Levy of \$150.00 is charged to all families, payable at the start of the year. However, parents can have their maintenance levy returned to them if they choose to participate in other designated centre activities.

Additional Centre Activities

All additional Centre activities where an additional cost is incurred will be automatically added to parents' accounts

For further information please refer Policy on Additional Centre Activities.

Late Collection Fee's

A late collection fee of \$5.00 per minute will be charged after 6.30 pm to cover staffing costs.

If a parent/guardian is late to collect their child/ren on more than 3 occasions in 1 year, the late collection fee will increase to \$10 for each minute after 6.30pm that they are late.

If they are late another 2 times, in that same year, (totalling 5 late pickups), grievance processes will be undertaken which may ultimately result in the loss of a place at Meruka.

Refer Fee's & Levies Policy

Absences from the Centre

The regular fee is charged for non-attendance at the centre, regardless of the reason. If a child is away from the centre for a long period or notice of the absence is made in sufficient time, days can be displayed on the board for other families to use. If your child's place is filled, no fee will be charged for that particular day but only if the centre has full occupancy on that day.

Child Care Benefit is paid for a child's first 42 absences each financial year. There are no restrictions on the reasons for these initial absences and there is no requirement for supporting documentation.

If a child uses all 42 initial absence days, they can have access to more absence days only if they are taken for certain reasons. For some of these reasons you need supporting documentation, such as doctor's certificates in the case of illness.

For more information visit the Family Assistance Website – www.familyassistance.gov.au

Enrolment of Children

The Enrolment of Children Policy outlines the Centre's processes in relation to;

- New enrolments / requests for care
- Priority of Access
- Placement Offers
- Changes in Care Arrangements
 - Change of Placement
 - Holidays / Vacant Days
 - Termination
- Re-enrolment of Children
- Non return or Incomplete Enrolment Forms

Please refer to the Policy for full details however some key points are as follows;

Changes in Care Arrangements

- Change of Placement requests - ten (10) working days notice must provided in writing.
- Termination of Placement - ten (10) working days notice must be given in writing
(NOTE: If families do not use their allocated days during the ten working days notice, they will not be eligible to claim CCB and will be liable to pay Meruka full fees.)

Re-enrolment

In September/October of each year, letters will be sent out to all parents whose children currently use the centre to advise them that if they require ongoing childcare for the following year, they must re-enrol their children at the centre. They will be asked to complete and return a re-enrolment form, and pay a non-refundable holding fee (equivalent to the first two weeks of fees for the following year) in early November.

If re-enrolment forms are not completed and returned, and the holding fee **not** paid by the nominated date, the Co-ordinator may not be able to ensure a place for the child when the centre re-opens the following year. Also if a family has not fully paid their account as of the 23rd of December of that year, their place for the following year cannot be ensured either. Given that Meruka has only a small number of childcare places and to avoid disappointment, prompt return of forms is required, as this will determine the place on the enrolment list.

Please note that places CANNOT be guaranteed for particular days in subsequent years.

We do often encounter problems with demand for places which can unfortunately results in people missing out on some of the days that they request, or missing out on a place entirely.

The Meruka Committee does acknowledge that the re-enrolment process is less than ideal, however the current process has been put into place by the Committee, in conjunction with the Centre Co-ordinator (both past and present), to ensure that a fair, unbiased re-enrolment process takes place.

To carry out this process in a fair and unbiased manner the Committee has entrusted the responsibility for this process to the Centre Co-ordinator with the assistance of the 2 I/C. Educators in the rooms do not play a part in the allocation of places and we do remind parents that queries or concerns should only be directed to the Centre Co-ordinator or the Committee's Parent Liaison Representative.

The re-enrolment process is something that the committee discusses at length each year, in the hope that we may find a better way. To date, no fairer way has been found. We do invite people to make suggestions or forward any ideas that they may have to make this process smoother and more equitable to everyone involved.

Moving Children between Rooms

Where possible, children are moved to the appropriate section according to age.

This is governed by;

- the availability of care, and;
- the developmental needs of the child.

Throughout the year staff will assess a child's readiness to move up and will discuss this with the parents. Every effort will be made to accommodate the child's needs and parent's wishes as to moving up or staying in a group. However the overall Centre occupancy rate and needs of children across all the groups must also be taken into consideration when moving children between groups.

Participation of Parents and/or Guardians

Parents are encouraged to offer their services in a variety of ways to enhance the running of the centre. This includes participation in Working Bees, Gardening Rosters, sewing tasks, repairing toys and attending meetings, and where possible to share their skills and knowledge of language interests, arts and crafts, etc.

Making a Parent / Guardian Complaint

Parents / Guardians who wish to lodge a complaint should refer to the Centre's Grievance and Complaints Policy.

The Grievance and Complaints Policy provides the strategies and practices that guide Meruka in dealing with complaints and grievances, ensuring that procedural fairness and natural justice underpin all its actions.

This policy is applicable to all complaints and grievances by all users of the centre except in relation to a disciplinary matter with regards to a staff member when the Internal Grievance Policy shall apply.

Disclaimer:

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and currency of this document however in the event that a discrepancy occurs between the Parent Handbook and a Policy, the Policy shall be regarded as the primary and overriding document.