



PARENT HANDBOOK

www.headstartelc.com.au

OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

There's more to early learning than simply care - the early years are fundamental to a child's emotional, cognitive and social development. Research suggests that a quality early childhood education sets a child up for success throughout their school years and even later in life. That is why we are focused on providing our families with quality programs to support children's learning and development from birth right through to school age.

Our children and our families are at the heart of our service. Our commitment to you and your child is that we take the time to invest in our centres and our people, so that they can best support your child, nurture them, empower them and help them to grow. We know that doing this goes a long way to ensuring that the children in our care can flourish.

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Helping children and families to feel welcome and settle into the centre environment is one of our top priorities.



SETTLING IN TO CARE

Ensuring your child feels safe and secure is our top priority. Starting at a new early learning centre can be full of emotions for both families and children. To support you in this transition we can arrange some 'stay and play' days prior to your child beginning care, to support them to form attachments and bonds with their educators.

Building strong relationships with you, your child and your family is very important to us and makes a real difference to the early learning outcomes for your child. We especially like to know as much as we can about 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 in care, educators will make immediate connections with your child to make the transition process run more 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. You are encouraged to call at any point of the day to discuss your child's learning and activities with their primary educator. Communication is fundamental in helping all parties adjust.

The settling in process is a unique journey for each individual child and although we'd like to say the process only takes two weeks, in reality, it could be shorter than this - or longer. We'll reach that destination when your child arrives into the care environment feeling confident and ready to learn. That's when we'll know we've made strong, lasting connections.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LEARNING

Our services are guided by the National Quality Standards, the Early Years Learning Framework, and for school aged services, My Time Our Place. These frameworks guide and shape the curriculum for all education and care services for children under the age of 12, across Australia.

Children's neurological pathways multiply and develop faster in the first five years than at any other time in their life. The architecture of a child's brain is shaped by high quality interactions with trusted adults and peers. The foundation of a strong relationship with educators is fundamental for future success.

Our educators understand the impact relationships have on a child's learning journey and are committed to ongoing professional development to stay current in their knowledge of how to best program and plan for every child's developing mind.

For a child, play and learning are interrelated and our team of educational professionals embrace this. Each day, our teams provide interactive learning experiences for children to engage and explore concepts of literacy and numeracy, consistently using their interests as a vehicle to learning.

A holistic approach to your child's development is prioritised through our focus on social and emotional well-being. Concepts such as confidence, resilience, getting along and self-care are embedded throughout the day and explored in small and large groups, as well as during spontaneous conversations with educators.

Information about the daily program, observations and stories about your child and their involvement in learning projects will all be available to you in real time via our smart phone app. This helps to keep you connected to your child's learning journey and share in their wonder and joy as they explore and discover.

We invite parents and family members to schedule meeting times with their child's educators to discuss specific details about their child's development.

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Children learn more quickly during their early years than at any other time in their life. They need love and nurturing to develop a sense of trust and security that turns into confidence as they grow.



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Working together is the best way to ensure a high quality education for our children, helping to build the foundations for their success not only in the centre and the early years, but also in life.



HELPING YOUR CHILD ON THEIR JOURNEY

As the old adage goes, it takes a village to raise a child. That is why it is so important for us to work together right from the start.

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.

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 child care 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:

1. A family's combined income will determine the percentage of subsidy they are eligible to receive.
2. An activity test will determine how many hours of subsidised care families can access, up to a maximum of 100 per fortnight.
3. The type of child care 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 child care 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 on \$66,958 or less a year 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.

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

You can read more about the Child Care Subsidy and Activity Test, and can complete an online estimator at www.education.gov.au/ChildCarePackage

It is the responsibility of the parent to register for Child Care Subsidy. This can be done by contacting Centrelink either in person, by phone on 136 150 or by accessing their My Gov account at my.gov.au



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.

Our families will:

- Not be limited by start and finish times like models from other early education providers.
- Be able to confirm their enrolment in one of our flexible options.

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.

NEED HELP?

Call the Child Care Subsidy Support Line on 1800 319 434.

If you are experiencing any problems with your transition to the new Child Care Subsidy please phone Centrelink on 136 150.

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Strong relationships between educators, children and families provide children with a secure base from which they can thrive.



PAYMENT OF FEES

Following a once off enrolment fee, it is our policy that family's weekly fees must be one week in advance and paid by Thursday (this includes the current week plus one). The parent must then continue to pay the weekly fee in advance in order to maintain a credit balance equivalent to one week of fees.

All payments must be made via EZIDebit and all families must complete an EZIDebit application form upon enrolment. In consultation with management, CENTREPAY and BPAY may be available however, requests are carefully assessed and not guaranteed to be approved. Our service has a no cash policy.

If you are planning holidays, a Holiday Application form is available from the office. This form must be filled out two weeks prior to the holiday absence to receive 35 per cent off your fees for up to four weeks 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 two weeks 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.

In the event that 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.

OPEN DOOR POLICY

You're welcome to drop in and see your child or speak with an educator. You don't need to call and tell us you are coming, you are welcome at any time.

We'd love for you to come in and join in our programs - your participation is valued.



EARLY YEARS 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 outcome's they're achieving. Ask our Centre Manager for more details.

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

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Play activities planned by our educators allow children to naturally develop and have the opportunity to guide their own learning.



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

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Our centre has a number of policies and procedures pertaining to the care of your child to ensure they are in the very best of hands.



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 are able to 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 is 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 full of laughter, fun and educational resources.

All aspects of children's learning and development is 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.

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Our educators and children work together to learn about and promote the sustainable use of resources and to ensure we continue to develop and implement sustainable practices. Our centre has an environmental strategy including recycling, use of recycled resources, energy efficiency, water conservation and more. Find out how you can be involved by asking your Centre Manager or your child's educators.



CHILD CARE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Our centre has a number of policies and procedures pertaining to the care of your child. Our policies are located 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 present at all times 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 minimise 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 (please note that paracetamol is not regarded as a first response and can only be administered in emergency situations and with prior written parental consent). 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 foyer.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Emergency evacuations as well as lockdown procedures are regularly 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. This is why it is important 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. In the event of an outbreak of an infectious disease it may be necessary to exclude any children who are not immunised for their health and wellbeing. State specific immunisation requirements are available on request.

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 a locked cupboard. Under no circumstances is any type of medication to be left in children's bags. Please refer to the Medication Policy for further information.

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We have a commitment to assist families who provide their children's meals to develop healthy food attitudes and habits.



NUTRITION

We understand the important role we play in supporting the nutritional needs of children while in care. In the instance where meals are provided, children who attend a full day of long day care will be offered at least 50 per cent of their recommended daily dietary intake 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.

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.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF CENTRE RECORDS

We value your privacy and have a number of initiatives in place to ensure the protection of your data. For more information on our Confidentiality of Centre Records policy, please head to our centre website or ask the Centre Manager for more information.

SUN PROTECTION

Our centres take care to protect children and team members from direct exposure to the sun by all state regulations and the child care building code in regards to 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 of 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 name all clothing and footwear.

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Our centres take care to protect children and team members from direct exposure to the sun.



PRIORITY OF ACCESS

The Australian Government funds child care to support working Australian families and ensure all children have access to quality early childhood education and care. However, the demand for child care 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 child care support.

To ensure that the centre adheres to the guidelines issued by the Australian Government, priority of access to child care will be given according to children falling in 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.

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