



Mansfield Kindergarten Earth Kinder Program Parent Handbook 2023



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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Mansfield Kindergarten promotes a holistic approach to children's learning and development. In order to offer a unique educational experience within our program, the children will attend Earth Kinder for three hours each week. We believe Earth Kinder encourages children to develop responsibility for themselves and others, promotes children using their imagination and develops their physical and motor skills.

"Outdoor spaces with plants, trees, rocks, mud and water invite open ended interactions, spontaneity, risk taking and a connection with nature (NQS, 2010, Element 3, Physical Environment)"

Earth Kinder will be special part of your child's total kindergarten experience. They will have the opportunity to play in the rain, get muddy, be involved in changing types of play, talk, listen, find insects, explore, participate in natural art and observe nature first-hand. Their affinity with their local, natural environment will be developed and sustainability practises will be enhanced into the future.

At times, specialists may assist the children's learning. We have strong affiliations with Vic Parks, Landcare and our Aboriginal elders and we will have visits from these groups to share knowledge and understandings of our local area. Through play, your children will connect with and learn to respect this unique space. They will grow connections with their land in a way that cannot be done under a roof or within the kindergarten walls.

LOCATION

The Earth Kinder site is located near just off the Stock Route, near The Wetlands and Rail Trail in the heart of Mansfield. It is directly opposite Mt. Buller Sports. The environment provides an ideal site with bush, grass, bird life and natural habitats for frogs and other natural species. The site has been chosen as it gives a flat, comfortable area for the children to play and explore with clear lines of sight for our teachers. This area also offers opportunities to venture further afield (under supervision) to explore the Wetlands and surrounding areas.

PARKING

Parking is at the Mansfield Information Centre, followed by a short walk down the rail-trail. **Please do not drive down the Stock Route (off the Maroondah Highway) to the rail -trail or approach the Earth Kinder site by car – it is too dangerous for our children!** Bike riding is also a popular way to get to Earth Kinder!



PARTICIPATION

In order for your child to participate in this program, Parents/Carers must complete and return to kinder prior to the first session, a **Routine Excursion Form**.

Parents/Carers should also provide details on their child's Enrolment Form of authorised people able to collect your child. We cannot allow another adult to collect your child unless in writing on the Enrolment Form.

COMMUNICATION

We ask Parents/Carers to have your mobile phone with you, and turned on, throughout the duration of your child's Earth Kinder sessions. This way, we can easily contact you if necessary.

SESSION OVERVIEW

Prior to the commencement of each session, teachers will scan the site for safety and new areas of potential interest. Each Earth Kinder session will commence with a group meeting, or 'gathering' with the teachers and children. The children will then be free to engage in play within the boundaries of the Earth Kinder site. Children will be able to access their food and drinks throughout the session.

STAFF

Staff in attendance all have a passion for our Earth Kinder program. Three staff will be in attendance at all times. Staff ratios have been set at 1:9 for each session. All staff are First-Aid trained. Parent helpers are welcomed and a roster will be drawn up for this purpose.

ATTENDANCE

- **When shouldn't my child attend?** We ask that Parents/Carers are diligent, and exercise their own judgement in assessing whether it is appropriate for their children to attend Earth Kinder. Children should not attend if they are ill, excessively tired or if Parents/Carers are concerned about their well-being due to forecast weather conditions.
- **Others in attendance** – To ensure that your children are given freedom to play and engage with nature, we ask adults to respect their space and time. Parents are welcome to stay and be involved in sessions, and are asked to indicate their intention at the commencement of the session or via the Roster.
- **Siblings** – to ensure full supervision of the Earth Kinder children, and the smooth running and integrity of the program, we ask that siblings **DO NOT** attend on your rostered day.

SESSIONS

Earth Kinder will run on the following days for each group

Red Group Monday 8.30am – 11.30am

Blue Group Wednesday 9.00am – 12 noon

Sessions may be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions or staff absences. If this occurs, an SMS will be sent out by 6.00pm the night before the session or prior to 8.00am in the morning. If you do not have mobile coverage where you live, please advise us and we will make alternative arrangements.

NOTE: If on arrival, Earth Kinder is not set up on site, this means that the session has been cancelled. Please return to “Home Kinder”.

WEATHER

Earth Kinder may be cancelled in circumstances where the weather is deemed too extreme. Eg. Temperatures in excess of 38, high winds, or **extreme** cold. Please note that Earth Kinder **WILL** be held if it is raining.

CLOTHING

Parents/Carers are required to determine appropriate clothing based on the weather forecast, appropriate to their child’s Earth Kinder session time.

CHILDREN WILL BE UNABLE TO ATTEND AN EARTH KINDER SESSION IF THEY HAVE ARRIVED WITH INAPPROPRIATE CLOTHING AND/OR WITHOUT A SUITABLE CHANGE OF CLOTHING.

It is important that Earth Kinder children wear appropriate and protective clothing and footwear which:

- Allow children to move freely
- Keep children warm and dry in cold/wet weather
- Protect children from UV rays in hot weather
- Prevent sunburn, bites, scratches and stings
- Where possible is made from natural fabrics which allow the body to breathe
- In the case of footwear, keeps feet and toes covered and has a flexible sole to allow children to climb and balance on uneven surfaces.

	Warm weather	Cold weather/Rain
Recommended clothing and footwear	Light loose fitting long sleeved tops and long pants, broad brimmed hat, closed toe shoes (preferably boots)	Waterproof jacket and over pants (supplied by Mansfield Kindergarten and purchased with the assistance of Mansfield and District Community Bank), long pants, long sleeved, woollen top, beanie, waterproof gloves, thermals in cold weather
Not recommended	Short sleeved tops, long skirts or dresses, shorts	Skirts, dresses (incompatible with waterproof jackets and pants)
Unacceptable clothing	Open toe shoes, sandals, thongs, crocs, singlet tops.	Non-waterproof outer clothing (Our waterproof jackets and over pants on top of non-waterproof clothing is recommended)

CHANGE OF CLOTHES

All children participating in Earth Kinder are required to bring a change of clothes and footwear, as these may become wet and muddy.

SUNSCREEN

On high UV days, please ensure that you apply sunscreen prior to the session commencing. Sunscreen will be available for re-application during sessions.

CLOTHING PROVIDED BY MANSFIELD KINDERGARTEN

Over pants and jackets purchased with the assistance of Mansfield and District Community Bank, designed to keep children dry and clean will be provided for all children. Please note that these suits ARE NOT for warmth, and children will require very warm clothing underneath these items in winter.

WHAT ELSE TO BRING

WATER

Parents/carers are required to provide a water bottle of fresh water at all sessions. There will be access to drinking water to supplement this when required on site. ALL children onsite at Earth Kinder are required to have a water bottle.

FOOD

Parents/carers are required to provide a snack/lunch in a sealed container for each session for their child to eat. We ask that you consider the environment by **NOT INCLUDING ANY PACKAGING**. We also ask you to observe allergy precautions when selecting items to include.

SUSTAINABILITY

Please always take home what you brought in. Parents/carers and children are asked not to bring toys to Earth Kinder to better enable children to engage in the natural surround.

TOILETS

Parents/carers are requested to encourage children to use the toilet at home prior to their session. Children will have the use of a portable toilet housed in a pop-up tent at Earth Kinder, if needed.

MEDICATIONS

Parents and carers of children with anaphylaxis or asthma must ensure they discuss their emergency plans with staff prior to commencing the first session. All emergency plans and medication will be available at Earth Kinder in a pop-up tent.

TRAINING AND AWARENESS SESSIONS

For our first session of Earth Kinder, **parents will be required to attend the first hour with their children.** During this time staff will “walk the boundaries” of our Earth Kinder site. Both parents and children will therefore be familiar with our set boundaries. Additionally, sessions will be run as part of Earth Kinder orientation, for staff, children and parents/carers covering dog and snake awareness. Where a need is identified, further training will be carried out. All Mansfield Kindergarten staff are Level 2 First Aid trained and Certified.

RISK MANAGMENT AND ASSESSMENT

Extensive risk assessment has been carried out by Mansfield Kindergarten. Risk assessment is an ongoing and continual part of our program and we ask all participants of the Earth Kinder program to be actively involved in providing feedback.

FURTHER POLICIES

Earth Kinder is conducted as part of the Mansfield Kindergarten program and is governed by the regulations of the Kindergarten. Full policy documents are available in the Committee Office of Mansfield Kindergarten. Should you have further queries, please contact us on

mansfield.committee@kindergarten.vic.gov.au

EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Should the need arise to evacuate to a safer location the attached maps indicate evacuation points. Reasons for evacuation may include, but are not limited to:

Fire, missing child, aggressive dog off lead, other animal intruders, uninvited person/stranger, natural events such as extreme weather, floods, severe winds or thunderstorm, medical emergency or accident.

