

A photograph of a young child with blonde hair, wearing a light green sweater and blue jeans, climbing a tree trunk. The child is looking to the right. The background is a blurred green field. The image is framed by a green and yellow geometric design.

Natureplay Guidelines 2023

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Acknowledgement of Country

Frankston City Council acknowledges the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters in and around Frankston City, and value and recognise local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, heritage and connection to land as a proud part of a shared identity for Frankston City.

Council pays respect to Elders past and present and recognises their importance in maintaining knowledge, traditions and culture in our community.

Council also respectfully acknowledges the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation as the Registered Aboriginal Party responsible for managing the Aboriginal cultural heritage of the land and waters where Frankston City Council is situated.



Introduction

*"No one will protect what they don't care about,
and no one will care about what they have never experienced."*

Sir David Attenborough

These guidelines have been developed in response to a growing demand for available nature play spaces where early child educators can safely and responsibly allow children to engage in nature play as part of their formal education.

Throughout the municipality, Frankston City manages a network of parks and open space providing residents with a variety of recreational and educational opportunities.



Natural Reserves – primarily to preserve unique conservation and biodiversity values



Neighbourhood Feature Parks – primarily informal recreational open spaces, sometimes with garden beds and small playground areas



Regional Playgrounds – providing play equipment for children and family picnic facilities



Recreation Reserves & Golf Courses – providing formal facilities for sporting clubs and informal recreation spaces such as skate parks, fitness trails and bicycle paths.



Botanic Gardens and Arboretums - providing thematic displays of plant groups in an attractive setting with opportunities for passive family and educational gatherings.



Community Gardens – provide community members with opportunities to grow their own plants and produce.

In addition, there are three major conservation reserves within the municipality managed by Parks Victoria

- Langwarrin Flora & Fauna Reserve
- The Pines Flora & Fauna Reserve
- Frankston Nature Conservation Reserve

These three reserves are subject to special regulation concerning appropriate uses and Parks Victoria has its own Bush Kinder Handbook. Further enquiries concerning use of these reserves should be directed to Parks Victoria on ph: 13 1963 or through the website www.parks.vic.gov.au.

It can be challenging to balance competing uses of reserves and parks, since some activities may result in unacceptable environmental damage or clash with authorised activities or programmed management works.

These guidelines are intended to address these issues and provide a framework for educators, within which to conduct activities. Permission from Council via an online application and adherence to the guidelines, is required prior to your use of a reserves.

1. What is Nature Play?

Other terms used for this concept are Forest kinder or Bush kinder, where children are encouraged to explore, play and learn in a natural outdoor environment with minimal direction, utilising natural items rather than commercially made toys and objects. The lack of conventional toys and structure requires children to use their creativity and imagination to develop new ways of play and connect with the natural environment in a way that is rapidly being lost in the current zeitgeist.



As our society becomes more urbanised and children tend to spend the majority of their time indoors engaging in more screen time, some educators have recognised that many children suffer from 'nature deficit disorder'. This is a term which provides recognition that disconnection from the natural world can cause alienation from nature, diminished use of senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses.

Researchers identified that increased exposure to nature leads to better health outcomes and overall well-being with improved mental and physical health, reduced anxiety and stress, and increased creativity and curiosity.

By providing developing minds with the opportunity to deeply connect and engage with the natural environment, a lifelong appreciation of the environment is fostered, which is carried on through adolescence into adulthood. This connection and understanding is essential for our future as species on this planet. Our future policy and decision makers must make decisions which are informed by a sense of care for our natural world, of which we are all the stewards.

2. Tread softly principles

Natural reserves, conservation parks and urban parks are protected and valued for their natural features. Protecting and appreciating these areas should form a core part of all nature play activities. Practicing 'tread lightly' principles fosters a sense of stewardship and ensures that natural areas can be enjoyed by everyone, into the future.



Ensure that your group understands the importance of caring for natural areas, not causing damage and leaving things how they were found



All activities are to be respectful to and aligned with the values of enhancing and protecting the natural environment



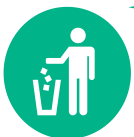
Respect animal's homes by leaving them where you find them such as not moving large fallen logs or rocks or otherwise interfering with them



Return and redistribute materials (taken from open space and pathways only) used to construct cubbies to where they were found



Always observe animals from a distance and avoid approaching them. Close observation can cause some species to exhibit unnatural behaviors.



Take any rubbish you bring with you or place in onsite bins (if provided). Avoid the use of single use plastics within reserves wherever possible.



Never feed animals as this can habituate them to people, which can bring them into conflict and cause serious health issues such as botulism.



Take away only photographs, drawings, memories and leave only foot prints (on paths and in open spaces!).



Adhere to Council guidelines, conditions and other relevant rules

3. Selecting a site

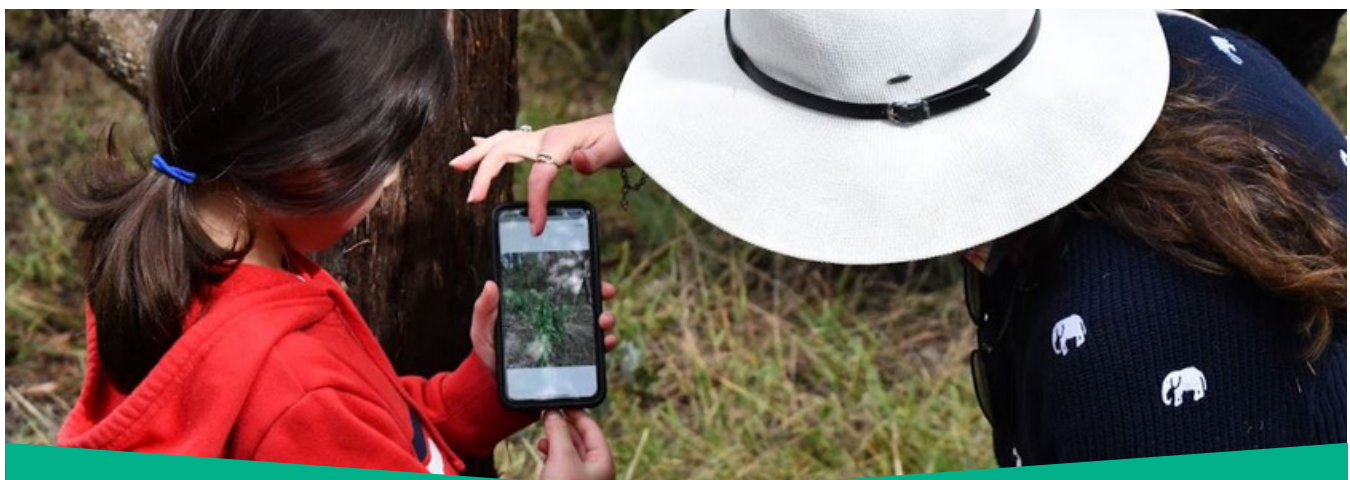
The Frankston City municipality contains 56 Natural Reserves and over 130 open space parks, some of these may be suitable for Nature Play activities, as outlined below. An ideal site might include a mown open space, designated paths through bushland or planted garden beds, access to toilets and shelter and would be easily accessible via walking or public transport.

Many Natural Reserves are not considered suitable for Nature Play activities, due to their high conservation values, ongoing management activities and the sensitive nature of the sites, which precludes intensive visitation. Some Natural Reserves or areas within Natural Reserves may be suitable with restrictions, and each application will be considered on its own merit.









Often open space parks meet the above requirements and can provide range of nature play options with fallen branches, leaves and twigs, grassed areas, changes in topography, native and indigenous plants and animals and access to seating/table areas. Some of these parks even include drinking fountains, toilets and free BBQ facilities.

Other factors to consider when selecting a site include:

- Type of activities/experiences planned
- Natural boundaries
- Risks and hazards, such as water or steep inclines
- Visitor numbers (members of the public)
- Access during different seasons
- Emergency access
- Adequate facilities eg. toilets and parking



List of suitable Natural Reserves for Nature Play:

- ✓ Armstrongs Reserve, Seaford 
- ✓ Austin Reserve, Seaford
- ✓ Banjo Rise Reserve, Carrum Downs 
- ✓ Casuarina Reserve, Frankston South 
- ✓ Frankston Waterfront (not vegetated dunes) and foreshore
- ✓ Illawong Reserve, Langwarrin 
- ✓ Jubilee Park, Frankston
- ✓ Keast Park (not vegetated dunes) and foreshore
- ✓ Overport Park Reserve, Frankston South
- ✓ Raphael Reserve, Frankston 
- ✓ Robinsons & Witternberg Reserve, Frankston
- ✓ Seaford Lifesaving Club (not vegetated dunes) and foreshore
- ✓ Solferino Reserve (2R Crimson Cres), Carrum Downs 
- ✓ Southgateway Reserve, Langwarrin 
- ✓ Wallace Reserve, Frankston 

Please note we cannot always guarantee access to these reserves due to conflicts with scheduled events and/or works. Under special circumstances, Council may approve nature play activities in reserves not listed above, please contact Council to discuss prior to submitting an application. Council officers reserve the right to restrict or stop nature play activities due to environmental degradation, planned works or extreme weather, and applicants will be notified via email.

For more information on location, type, users, activities and features for all our Reserves and Parks head to - www.frankston.vic.gov.au/Things-To-Do/Parks-and-Reserves.

4. Suitable activities

The following activities are generally considered suitable within approved sites

- ✓ Finding (from paths/open spaces*) and sorting natural items by their size, shape color or texture.
- ✓ Creating 'cubbies' using fallen sticks found on paths or open spaces*
- ✓ Observing and identifying plants and animals
- ✓ Creating 'bushcraft' items using items found in paths and open spaces*
- ✓ Collecting and disposing of litter
- ✓ Scrambling on fallen logs and rocks
- ✓ Tumbling and rolling on grassy inclines
- ✓ Investigating leaves for insects and insect damage

*Open space is defined as lawn areas, generally comprising of introduced grass species

The following activities are generally NOT considered suitable within approved sites

- ✗ Removal of any plant or animal material from garden beds or bushland areas
- ✗ Tree climbing (beyond scrambling on fallen timber in open space)
- ✗ Leaving designated paths or open space and trampling vegetation
- ✗ Attaching anything to trees or shrubs via means which may impact on the vegetation
- ✗ Unauthorised planting into reserves
- ✗ Feeding, following, closely observing, harassing or otherwise interfering with wildlife
- ✗ Digging or creating mounds
- ✗ Moving rocks and large logs
- ✗ Erecting signage
- ✗ Use of non-natural items such as glitter, confetti and other craft supplies
- ✗ Any activity not specified and approved through the permitting process

5. Applications for nature play

Permission from Council is required for all schools, childcare and private organisations to conduct Nature Play activities within Frankston City nature reserves. Applicants must fill out the online application form on Councils Booking Manager Portal - www.frankston.vic.gov.au/Things-To-Do/Get-Involved/Event-Applications-and-Information. Please allow 10 business days for review. Commercial/private services providers will be charged an administration fee for each application.

This is to ensure the:


- Suitability of proposed site for activities.
- Conservation value of sites is not impacted— some reserves and areas are managed for their high conservation values and nature play activities may be in conflict with this.
- Avoiding conflicts with planned maintenance works or other events such as herbicide application, machinery operation, pest control activities etc.
- Approved activities are in line with these guidelines and Frankston City’s policies and procedures.

A pre application e-mail when applying for permission to use a park for the first time, would be beneficial in most instances. Council Officers can review your proposed application and make suggestions in regard to sites which are most suitable for your intended activities.

6. Managing hazards and risks


Hazards and risks are always present within uncontrolled ‘natural’ spaces but can generally be managed to an acceptable level. Educators have a duty of care to their charges and should always undertake their own risk assessments and risk mitigation measures.

HAZARD



Hazard is something that has the potential to harm you

RISK



Risk is the likelihood of a hazard causing harm

Some examples of the types of hazards that may be present in FCC reserves are listed below (note that this is not an exhaustive list, other hazards may be present):



Interaction with animals

Poisonous and venomous insects and snakes can be common in natural spaces, and some bird species will defend their young during breeding season. Other animals not known for their hazardous nature may become defensive (justifiably so!) when they feel threatened.



Weather

High wind increases risks of falling branches; wet weather may make areas impassable or increase the risk of slips and falls; and hot weather can increase fire risk, check the CFA Fire Danger Rating. Changes can be rapid and alternate sites/activities may need to be planned.



Water

Some reserves contain unfenced water bodies such as wetlands, water storage impoundments and the Seaford and Frankston foreshores. Steep embankments may lead to water.



Interaction with strangers

Reserves are public spaces accessible to all residents and Frankston City visitors.



Trips and falls

Paths may be uneven with exposed roots and gradient changes and not accessible to those with physical difficulties or are otherwise compromised.

Nature Play checklist

- Find a reserve that is accessible to you
- Assess reserve for suitability (see 'What make a suitable site?' or contact Council)
- Submit application through Council's website
- Receive confirmation Letter, review and understand conditions
- Check site for hazards, risks and weather conditions prior to your visit
- Leave site as you found it and...
- Have fun!

7. Child Safety

Everyone in the community has a responsibility in ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of children.

Frankston City Council's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety.

Council has zero tolerance for child abuse. Council is committed to creating and maintaining a child safe environment where all children are valued and protected from harm and abuse and will promote a whole of community approach to keeping children safe.

All children, who attend services, programs, events and spaces (including online environments) that are delivered, owned or managed by Council, have the right to be heard, to participate and feel safe regardless of their, or their families', age, gender, race, ability, health, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or social background. Council will encourage and support Aboriginal children to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights and commits to creating culturally safe environments.

Council will actively facilitate the voices of children in Council planning, the design and delivery of services, programs and events and in the management of facilities. Council's priority is to involve children in opportunities to influence matters that affect them as active citizens in their community. Council will treat all reports of child safety concerns seriously and will actively encourage children to raise such issues.

Bush Kinder and Playgroups are expected to:

1. Commit to proactively keeping children and young people safe
2. Comply with all relevant child safety legislation which may include, but is not limited to, The Victorian Child Safe Standards (2022) and The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005)
3. Report (according to guide in Appendix 1) all concerns of abuse or harm to children

If you are unsure about your responsibilities in relation the Victorian Child Safe Standards visit <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/>

If you would like further information about Council's approach to child safety please email childsafefrankston@frankston.vic.gov.au

Support and further information



Contact Council Officer for pre-application advice, or any other related queries.
1300 322 322 Mon - Fri 8:30AM - 5:00PM

Frankston City Council

30 Davey Street
Frankston VIC 3199
PO Box 490
Frankston VIC 3199
P: 1300 322 322
E: info@frankston.vic.gov.au
W: frankston.vic.gov.au

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Snap Send Solve is an easy and efficient way to notify local councils, utilities or other authorities of issues that need addressing in your community.

Visit: www.frankston.vic.gov.au/Council/Report-an-issue



The Victorian Government provides grant support through the Bush Kinders program. For more information visit: www.vic.gov.au/bush-kinders

Translation and accessibility



Council can arrange a telephone interpreter for you, call us on 1300 322 322



If you are a non-English speaker, call the Interpreter Service on 131 450



Contact the National Relay Service on 133 677 or 1300 555 727

Appendix 1. Child Safe Reporting

<h2>Who can report?</h2>	<p>Anyone can report – child, young person, parent, carer, Councillor, employee, volunteer, contractor or others in the community.</p>		<p>IF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER CALL THE POLICE ON 000 (TRIPLE ZERO)</p>
<h2>What to report?</h2>	<p>Child safety concerns related to Frankston City Council</p> <p>Any disclosure or allegation of abuse, harm or neglect of a child or young person by a Council workforce member including an employee, volunteer, contractor or Councillor.</p> <p>Any disclosure or allegation of abuse, harm or neglect related to a child or young person's attendance at a Council service, program or event.</p>	<p>Complaints</p> <p>A complaint about a Council service, program or event.</p> <p>A complaint about the way a prior concern was handled.</p> <p>The conduct of a child or young person at a Frankston City Council service, program or event.</p> <p>General concerns about the safety of a group of children or young people at a Council service, program or event.</p>	<p>Other child safety concerns</p> <p>Other concerns about the health, safety or wellbeing of a child in the community.</p>
<h2>Who to report to and how?</h2>	<p>Contact Council's Reportable Conduct Team childsafefrankston.vic.gov.au 1300 322 322</p> <p>Report directly to the Commission for Children and Young People contactccyp.vic.gov.au 1300 782 978</p>	<p>To make a complaint, call Council on 1300 322 322.</p> <p>Frankston City Council's Complaints Handling Policy will be followed and can be found at frankston.vic.gov.au</p>	<p>For all other concerns contact Frankston Police non-emergency line 03 9784 5555 and/or Child Protection South Division 1300 655 795 or 13 12 78 (after hours)</p>
<h2>What Happens Next?</h2>	<p>The Reportable Conduct Team will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer support to the person who has made the report. 2. Ensure the immediate safety of all children and young people including the alleged victim. 3. Initiate investigation and determine what, if any, actions need to be taken in relation to the subject of the allegation while the investigation is underway. 4. If required, report the concern to Police, Child Protection and/or the Commission for Children and Young People as soon as possible. 		
<h2>Outcome</h2>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigation completed. 2. Relevant parties notified of outcome of investigation. 3. Policies, procedures and practices reviewed and where necessary, updated to improve responses to child safety. 		

For more information about Council's approach to child safety contact childsafefrankston.vic.gov.au or call 1300 322 322
 Council's Reportable Conduct Team will manage all reports in accordance with legal requirements and Duty of Care



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