DEVELOPING A NATURE EDUCATION OPERATIONS MANUAL:

YOUR 'HOW TO' GUIDE

A STEP BY STEP GUIDE SHOWING YOU WHERE TO START AND HOW TO DEVELOP THE SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES FOR SETTING UP A NATURE PROGRAMME IN NZ. PERFECT FOR ECE AND PRIMARY.

Little Kiwis Nature Play

CONTENTS

Kia ora kaiako

My name is Celia Hogan, from Little Kiwis Nature Play. I have a background in Outdoor Education and teaching and, over the past 3 years, I have been running nature programmes for pre-schoolers and providing Professional Development for kaiako on how to set up and run nature excursions or develop nature schools.

Through my work I have met some wonderful people who are out there introducing our tamariki to papatuanuku and our ngahere. New Zealand educators are innovative people with many skills and as a culture we have a strong connection to the land.

Many of these people have figured out the path themselves, but have found there has been no guiding light. This has put other people off setting up nature programmes as they just don't know where to start or they don't know if what they are currently doing is what they should be doing.

I want you as educators to feel confidence in what you are doing. To do that you need to plan but to plan you need to know where to start. This is where this Operations Manual comes in. The purpose of this manual is to be a detailed 'How To' guide on what information, systems and processes to have in place when setting up a nature excursion, nature kindergarten or nature school programme.

I want to enable centres, schools and kaiako to be able to develop and grow their nature discovery programmes and this is the starting point of that journey.

Having a 'How to' guide that all teachers have access to, which covers everything about the programme, is not only confidence building but it is also great when new teachers come into your team so that information doesn't leave with a teacher who has been running the programme. It is also a place to refer to if any questions arise. It can be added to, updated or adapted at any time.

WHY NOT JUST START?

For sure – you can head out the door with your tamariki and start running a programme, but you will find your programme will flow much easier having put in some effort to the planning stage.

There is also the saying 'You don't know what you don't know'. From an outdoor education perspective, if people are taking children into nature without a foundation understanding of how to keep them safe in that environment, how to manage the group in an outdoor un-fenced environment, how to safely use any tools or equipment or quite simply, how to be in nature with children, then some form of training or upskilling is required.

Educators need to have a solid understanding of the systems and processes as well as some upskilling to support that. More on that later.

WHAT DO I MEAN BY PLANNING STAGE?

When I talk about planning I am talking mainly about the written planning e.g., purpose, philosophy, benefits, location details and risk benefit assessment, travel details, roles and responsibilities, clothing, group equipment, ratios, checklists, whānau information, kaiako

training, up skilling/requirements, relevant policies, permission form, whānau letter example, safety operations and emergency planning…the list goes on!

Some people will be saying – wow that is so much work to do. Well, you have to do most of it anyway, so my suggestion is that you are better to do it all first and then start the programme rather than start the programme and have problems figuring it out along the way, or have some kind of incident occur. It is also not that much paperwork when you have a system to follow – like this awesome Operations Manual!

Proper Prior Planning Prevents Piss Poor Performance. I learnt this little saying back when I studied Outdoor Education over 20 years ago and I have to say it still has its place. Perhaps it is not a politically correct statement, but the meaning behind it stands strong.

We wouldn't run our weekly sessions at an ECE centre or school without having some kind of plan, so the same goes for a nature education programme.

An outdoor non-fenced environment is different to a fenced environment and it is helpful to spend time thinking about what could happen, how we would deal with it and what the best systems and processes are that will help it run smoothly.

In short: **This manual is about helping you to think about all the possibilities and eventualities so that there are no surprises** (or only small ones!). Thinking through things thoroughly helps with any fears that you might have or that others around you might have.

The great thing about this manual is that your centre or school will probably have things like excursion policies and risk management documents already. It then becomes a case of pulling everything into one place as a reference and confidence-building document.

HOW IT WORKS:

This manual will be split into 3 different sections.

1. Operations Manual – Descriptions and Details
2. What to cover in a parent information evening
3. Parents' Guidebook (some cross over from the operations manual)

You can use any of the information in this document in your own Operations Manual if you choose to, via copy and paste.

You may choose to read the whole document first and then work through setting up your own Operations Manual, or you might choose to read one section at a time and set them up as you go. Whatever works for you – go for it! Last request. I have put many hours of time into developing this document. If someone expresses interest in this document outside of your immediate team, I would really appreciate you sharing with them my website to get their own copy. I appreciate your support with this.

www.littlekiwisnatureplay.com

1. Operations Manual

There are a number of sections that you can put into an Operations Manual. Please note that ***you know your programme best*** and you might decide that a section is not needed. You might also decide to add a completely different section. We will cover what will help build confidence and provide clarity, especially if you are starting out, for the majority of people.

If you currently have a Safety Operation Procedure (SOP) document, you will notice part way down that I encourage putting the SOP in as part of the manual. Different organisations have different information on their SOP's. The SOP section will cover many of them and you might see some cross over into the risk management / emergency procedures section.

2. Where to Start

When it comes to starting a nature programme, for some people it will be easy and for others it will be challenging. For those who find it easier it might be because they have the support of their team, centre or school or even their whānau, perhaps they have spent a lot of time outdoors and feel comfortable with the environment, perhaps they have recently done some professional development (PD) on risk assessment or managing groups outdoors and they are feeling confident.

On the other side you might be the only person who wants to do it, there might be resistance from other team members, managers, the school or whānau, you might not yet have the confidence to take groups out as there are some 'what if' questions popping up in your head or you can't see how exactly it is all going to work.

The very first place to start for both sides of the coin is with the research and the benefits. This helps us build up a picture in our head of all the good stuff that happens, or it reaffirms WHY we want to do it in the first place.

It also gives you a starting point for discussions with your team, centre, school or whānau. Exposing people to this information or even YouTube clips of centres or schools that are doing it helps to plant the seed that it is possible.

Below are some research snippets and links to start you on your way. Follow my Little Kiwis Nature Play Facebook page and you will find research links or you could join the Nature Educators NZ private Facebook group for further information and support on setting up and running nature programmes in NZ or overseas.

3. Benefits and Research

'Time in nature is not leisure time; it's an essential investment in our children's health (and also, by the way, in our own)'

Richard Louv

Nature can not only heal our children it can build confidence, resilience and is beneficial for their overall mana atua (Wellbeing). There are so many benefits that nature play can offer, including:

Physical activity

- When children have regular time in the outdoors, including forests, parks, and playgrounds, they have opportunities to release stress, play vigorously, and directly explore nature, which in turn provides physical and psychological benefits (Frost, 2010; Jacobi-Vessels, 2013; Louv, 2005).

- For children, greenspaces are an important environmental influence on physical activity and emotional wellbeing (Ward, Duncan, Jarden, Stewart, 2016).

- Outdoor natural environments may provide some of the best all-round health benefits by increasing physical activity levels with lower levels of perceived exertion, altering physiological functioning including stress reduction, restoring mental fatigue, and improving mood and self-esteem and perceived health. (Gladwell, Brown, Wood, Sandercock, Barton 2013)



Mental health and overall wellbeing

- Reduced stress. Green plants and vistas reduce stress among highly stressed children. Locations with a greater number of plants, greener views, and access to natural play areas show more significant results (Wells and Evans, 2003).

- Spending time in nature improves wellbeing. It's not just something that's nice to do, it's good for your mental and physical health. (2015, Mental Health Foundation NZ)

- Frequent, positive early childhood experiences with nature have a major impact on the healthy growth of a child's mind, body and spirit. (Wilson 2011).

- Nature Supports multiple development domains. Nature is important to children's development in every major way—intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically (Kellert, 2005).

- The natural environment is fundamentally important to both our physical and psychological wellbeing, so actions that promote and protect our natural environment help to increase our ability to flourish in life. In turn, people and communities that are flourishing, i.e. have high levels of wellbeing, tend to be environmentally responsible in their behaviour and can, therefore, contribute to environmental sustainability. (Auckland: Mental Health Foundation Publication, 2011)

- Maggie Barry (Conservation Minister, 2015) says, "The links with improved physical and mental health are proven and well established. People feel less stressed, more relaxed and refreshed when they venture into the outdoors, whether they are exercising or helping to contribute to a worthwhile conservation project." (Article 2, 2015)

- Evidence suggests that not only are people dependent on the natural environment for material needs such as food and water, but also that the natural environment is equally essential for fulfilling psychological, spiritual and emotional needs (Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown & St Leger, 2006). Therefore, it seems crucial that mental health promotion should acknowledge the importance of ensuring access to natural environments and protecting these areas for our wellbeing (Article 2, 2015.)

- There is a great advantage of germs for your child's developing immune system. Microbial exposure and increased microbial burden is beneficial for wellness. (Gilbert, J. Knight, R. 2017)

- Exposure to germs in childhood is thought to help strengthen the immune system and protect children from developing allergies and asthma. The study supports the 'hygiene hypothesis', which contends that such auto-immune diseases are more common in the developed world where the prevalence of antibiotics and antibacterials reduce children's exposure to microbes. Eating dirt and playing in the mud are thought to confer protection from allergies and asthma. (Olszak, T. et al. 2012)

- You can only catch a cold virus from another person and that's much more likely to happen indoors where viruses find it easier to jump around. Most scientists think the main reason we catch colds more often in winter is because we all spend a lot more time cosied up together. (Next Magazine. 2011).



Social emotional skills

- Play, particularly free, unstructured and outdoors is essential for healthy brain and socio-emotional development and in the early years of life is far more important than direct instruction (Frost, 1998; Szalavitz and Perry, 2010).

- Improves social relations. Children will be smarter, better able to get along with others, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the outdoors (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005).

- Having regular contact with natural outdoor environments plays a pivotal role in promoting children's health and wellbeing. (Armitage, 2009; Jacobi-Vessels, 2013; Kernan & Devine, 2010; Louv, 2005; Robinson & Wadsworth, 2010)



Creativity and problem solving

- Play actually changes the structure of the developing brain in important ways, strengthening the connections of the neurons (nerve cells) in the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain considered to be the executive control centre responsible for solving problems and making plans and regulating emotions. (Pellis, Pellis and Himmler 2014)

- Nature supports creativity and problem solving. Studies of children in schoolyards found that children engage in more creative forms of play in the green areas. They also play more cooperatively in the natural environment (Bell and Dyment, 2006). Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem solving and intellectual development (Kellert, 2005)



Environment and culture

- Creating a play experience outside on a regular basis will not only educate our children about where their curiosity may take them, it also feeds a deeper connection to our natural

environment. Instilling these connections in this new generation is of most importance to our kaitiakitanga and environmental sustainability (Ministry of Education, 2017).

- Wilson (2012) outlines how the early childhood years are fundamental in developing "environmental attitudes and a commitment to caring for the Earth" (p. 87). The natural world can give children instant responses to their curiosity through all their senses as they touch, taste, smell, see and hear what is going on around them. Such connections tend to foster an ethic of care for the natural environment and the life systems within it (Phenice and Griffore, 2003). Positive experiences in nature can support children to develop the understanding that humans are interconnected with the earth and its life supporting systems, and that all humans have a responsibility to ensure its survival for future generations (Chawla, 2007).

- Time in nature is not leisure time; it's an essential investment in our children's health. Today, kids are aware of the global threats to the environment, but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading (Louv, 2005).

- Research has shown that empathy with and love of nature grows out of children's regular contact with the natural world. Hands-on, informal, self-initiated exploration and discovery in local, familiar environments are often described as the best ways to engage and inspire children and cultivate a sense of wonder. These frequent, unstructured experiences in nature are the most common influence on the development of lifelong conservation values. (DOC, 2011)



Improved academic performance including oral language, decision making and negotiation skills

- Greenspace can have a significant positive effect on improved concentration duration, behaviour in the classroom, and educational and social development for school-aged children. (Beere & Kingham 2017)

- Access to play improves classroom behaviour and academic performance (Pellegrini and Smith, 1998) and enhances children's readiness to learn, their learning behaviours and their ability to problem solve (Ginsburg, 2007).

- Studies in the US show that schools that use outdoor classrooms and other forms of nature-based experiential education support significant student gains in social studies, science, language arts, and math. Students in outdoor science programs improved their science testing scores by 27% (American Institutes for Research, 2005).



Risk management skills

- Nature provides children with age appropriate risky play opportunities which allows them to understand their own limitations, develop their problem-solving skills, and it teaches them to overcome fears and anxieties.

- risky play in the outdoor environment is important for children's developmental growth. (Jensen, A. 2016)

- The opportunity for risk taking improves children's competencies in risk management and risk perception. In addition, social skills may be enhanced through opportunities for collaboration with older peers, as children collectively decide and learn how to manage risk. (Bundy et al., 2009)

- Risky play helps children to learn to manage their own safety and move around comfortably (Knight, 2009).



For the future of our tamariki

- In other parts of the world, full-time nature education programmes are well established in ECE. These countries include Sweden, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, England, Scotland, Wales, America and Australia. They are often called forest kindergartens. The benefits are not just immediate but long term and with the early years being a critical time for brain development, supported nature-based play is a must for New Zealand ECE and primary.



4. Purpose / Outcomes

"The reason for which something is done"

Once you are at the stage of having some support, or at least acceptance of starting a nature programme, it's time to get clear on the WHY or the purpose of the programme. Knowing the reasons why you are doing what you are wanting to do gives you some clearer direction with your programme. This might change as the programme goes on and that is ok, but it is good to start somewhere and then adapt from there. Here is an analogy: Think of a boat choosing a course and following the compass to get to where they want to go versus a boat just floating on the sea letting the winds take it wherever it takes it – they will get somewhere but it might not be where they wanted to go.

Below are a few examples of what a purpose might look like. Yours could be similar or completely different:

- To improve mental health and overall well being of children while connecting with nature during social interactions
- To provide children with the opportunity to engage in nature play and learning in the early years
- To provide the opportunity for parents to engage in nature play and learning with their young children in a supported environment
- To provide the opportunity for parents/carers and young children to increase their social engagement
- To provide the opportunity for increased understanding of the natural environment
- To provide the opportunity for increased physical exercise through unstructured play in the natural environment
- To develop a deeper connection with their local environment
- To build confident and capable communicators with strong social skills
- To build resilience in our tamariki through exploration in nature

5. Philosophy

'A theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principal for behaviour'

Philosophy is about what we think, and spending time talking about our beliefs is a way to start establishing what our philosophies are as a team, and personally too. This is not a one off discussion. It is likely that you have already worked through a team philosophy. The purpose of looking at it again is because it is not only good to reflect again and see if it still fits but also because a nature discovery programme needs to be considered in your philosophy too.

You might have already considered this but if not, I offer some suggestions of things to discuss and consider when looking at your team's philosophy.

Areas to look at and discuss your thinking with your team could include:

- Risky play – What is it? What is it not? Discuss risk adverse vs risk taker: the benefits and risks of each and the impact each can have on a child's development
- Safety – When do we step in? When do we observe?
- What is the role of observation in a nature programme and how do we step into that role if we are used to a more hands on approach?
- Independence and Leadership – What does this look like in nature-based education?
- What is child-led play and when does it stop being child-led?
- Are children capable? If we see a child as capable, what does that do to levels of trust?
- How do we as teachers trust our children if we feel nervous in a natural environment?
- What is your understanding of nature play?
- What is the role of place-based education in your nature programme?
- What is the role of the child in nature play?
- What is the role of the adult / teacher in nature play?
- Getting wet – Is it ok to get wet?
- Getting dirty - DISCUSS: 'I have never met a child who has got so dirty that they can't get clean again'
- How do we manage challenging behaviours in an outdoor environment with no fences? What tools or strategies can we apply that build on trust and open communication?
- Te Whariki strands/ principals or the NZ curriculum are great to discuss! What does it look like in an outdoor environment? How do we apply that to nature education? How do we recognise nature learning in the curriculum?
- Use of tools – Is it ok to use tools? What are the non-negotiable rules?
- Religion – Is nature inclusive?
- How can a nature programme be inclusive?

- What does looking after a child's wellbeing look like in a nature-based programme?
- Relationships – How can relationships be strengthened in nature?
- How do you value nature and the environment? What do you do in your centre or school that connects back to what you do in nature?
- How do we role model and support emotional needs?
- Success vs failure – Is there such a thing? Growth mindset

What is the difference between a philosophy and culture?

A philosophy is a way of thinking and culture is how behaviours are displayed. A reflection on our actions can often show us if our culture and philosophy match. If they don't then there is some further reflection to be done.

Your team culture also needs to filter down to your whānau.

If a culture or philosophy isn't strong it can be swayed by external factors. Communicating your culture/philosophy to your whānau is an important part of this step. Knowing why you do what you do and how you share that with your families is important.

The clearer you are with your philosophy and the more you communicate that to your families, the more you will attract families who either are already in line with that or who want to learn and understand it more.

For ECE I often say to educators that when new families come to visit or even existing families, if they don't like something which is a strong part of your philosophy/culture, it is ok to say (kindly) this is why we do this, this is the research – if this is a problem for you then this might not be the centre for you.

This is not always so straight forward in school but through education and open discussions headway can be made in a majority of situations.

6. Safety Operations Procedures (SOP's)

If your organisation has their own SOP's, there might be different/similar sections compared to the ones below. Use your organisation's one and, if you don't have one, then this is a good guide. Below are descriptions and points to think about. **You will find the example SOP at the end of this section.**

PRIOR TO LEAVING

Before you leave (preferably on a sperate day) there are things that you want to cover with your tamariki. Here is a list of things that could be included but not limited to:

- How to stay safe - listening ears, looking where walking, buddy system
- Dogs in public areas – how to respond, behave
- What to wear and bring
- What to do if they get lost
- How to cross roads
- What to do if drop something on road while crossing
- What to do if get upset and need your own space (sit within sight of an adult and use thumbs up to communicate)
- Food and water
- Toileting (if no public toilet)
- Leave no trace code (Environmental care code – e.g. take rubbish back out)

It is good practice to do this often, especially in an ECE as children come and go, so it's important to remember that new children will need to be made aware of these things too. At school, it's great to do it regularly and you can even get your children running the safety talk for the group.

ON THE DAY CHECKS

On the day there will be a lot going on so it's important to have a system in place. This could be a simple section in the SOP section that outlines what you need to check, and could be supported with more detailed checklists if you feel that would be useful.

Here are some suggested checks to carry out:

- Check tamariki's clothing and footwear are appropriate for the season and weather
- Food and water
- Weather forecast
- Role check (leave copy at centre or school)
- Group equipment including first aid (this could be stored in a box/bag so it's ready to go)
- Travel logistics

- Cell phones charged
- Ratios and parent help
- Safety hui with tamariki before departure (you can ask them to remind you of all the things to be aware of to stay safe)

SITE CHECK / MAJOR HAZARDS TO MONITOR

As part of an SOP the major hazards are often identified. It is best practice to do a site assessment when you arrive for your session. This could be done by one teacher when the group arrives and are setting up their base camp.

> ***Before you take a group out for a regular nature excursion, I recommend you visit the site to complete a thorough site assessment. This will not only help to identify any major hazards, but it will help build your confidence of the area and ensure you are familiar with the high-risk areas and have thought about how you will control these areas.***

Here are some examples of major hazards you might want to include in this section:

- Rivers and streams – drowning or hyperthermia
- Weather (high winds / trees) – crushing
- Temperature – sunburn or hypothermia
- Roads and cars – severe body injury
- Medical emergencies – asthma, allergies

SEASONAL CONSTRAINTS

Here we are thinking about our programme and if things need to change depending on the season. Here is an example for your reference:

- Activities will run all year round. In the cooler months clothing information will be provided to ensure enjoyment of all participants. During the warming months sunscreen needs to be applied before the start of the session. Sun hats need to be provided.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

This section is about the things that we always do – the things that are always standard. Here are some examples:

- Obtain weather forecast
- Lead teacher role assigned / roles discussed and agreed
- Ratios met
- Monitor weather
- Monitor tamariki well-being including warmth, water and food intake
- Sunscreen (in warmer months)

- Stop at known hazards
- Follow Leave No Trace code

GROUP / SAFETY EQUIPMENT

Group gear is part of the centre or school's responsibility. Here is a list of what could be included in this section:

- First Aid Kit
- Tarps
- Sting or rope
- Pocket knife
- Spare warm clothes
- Whistle (use to call children back to base camp or for an emergency)
- Thermos
- Blanket in winter
- Cell phone
- Operations Guide or at minimum emergency procedures
- Toileting equipment if there are no public toilets (check with land owner)
- Map (if going somewhere with lots of trails or somewhere new)
- Some groups use high vis vests (optional)

Depending on your programme you might also want to include some other items for the group:

- Bug catchers
- Magnifying glasses
- Insect, bird and tree identification books (Andrew Crowe does some wonderful ones)
- Karakia
- Story book
- Pulleys
- Rope and swing

CLOTHING

Having the right clothing makes for an enjoyable nature programme. This is not just for the children but the teachers and parents too. Below is a list for winter with summer information slotted in. I have also included a bit about the 'why' here and this can be useful in the Parents Handbook if parents are responsible for providing the equipment.

- Rain jackets are awesome for long periods of enjoyment in wet conditions. Hoods are useful for stopping rain from going down the back of your neck and can also act as a heater for your head. The main purpose though is to stop us getting cold. When we get wet we are more likely to get cold so rain jackets are a priority. They also need to accompany the children in summer too.

- I also recommend over trousers for winter or on rainy days. What tends to happen when only wearing a rain jacket is the rain runs down the rain jacket and then at the bottom it has nowhere to go so it runs onto your trousers! I like www.mudmates.co.nz for some cool New Zealand made over trousers and wet weather clothing. You can also get along to places like Farmers (especially their half price sales), www.thermoutdoor.co.nz is also great New Zealand made gear or a local opportunity shop. They also need to accompany the children in summer.
- Woollen hats are great in winter or on a particularly cool day. We can loose 80% of heat through our head so a hat will help reduce heat loss and keep us warmer for longer. In summer, sun hats preferably with a wide brim will be required and sunblock should be applied beforehand.
- Gloves are great in winter too. They can make it a little harder to do things but it can turn into a problem-solving activity for children. Woollen gloves are generally enough in New Zealand city winter conditions. For those in rural or inland locations where the temperature can be a lot colder I would suggest thick water proof / water resistant gloves. You can sometimes find woollen gloves in opportunity shops or crafts markets. For waterproof gloves the best places are often ski shops – or a second-hand ski shop!
- Warm layers become essential with cooler temperatures. Wool, merino and thermals are best for warm layers as they keep you warm even when they get wet. Cotton is not good when it gets wet as it can make you cold so be aware of what children are wearing against their skin. Farmers half price sales are great value for woollen, merino and thermal clothing purchases. Op shops and Kathmandu or Macpac also sell these layers so watch out for sales.
- Warm thick socks for winter are essential for keeping warm. Gumboots are not as warm as running shoes and children's feet tend to get colder faster. Having thicker socks will keep them warm enough to last a whole session. If children's feet start getting too cold, then it will impact on the session.
- Gumboots are ideal in the winter months or on wet days. Even though they are harder to run in they will keep them much drier and hence warmer.
- Covered shoes or secure sandals are good during summer but they must be practical for the walk and for the kinds of activities the children will undertake.
- Covered shoulders are essential too especially for longer periods outdoors in summer.
- Spare set of clothes should accompany children for each session.

For some families it will be too costly to provide some of the above clothing. There are a number of grants that can be applied for or some fundraising can be done to purchase a set of rain jackets and over trousers and, depending on the group, socks and thermals might become part of that too.

If you purchase the wet weather gear consider how it gets stored and looked after. Perhaps when children get back from their session they need to wash them in a tub and hang them up to dry for the next session. Perhaps a wipe down is enough.

TRAVEL

How do you get to the site? Do you walk with the children? Take a bus? Use parents cars? Are there any policies that relate to these methods of travel? Perhaps the children get dropped off at the site and picked up from there?

Whatever way you get there, it is worth thinking about it and considering if there needs to be a new procedure or system developed around it. This doesn't have to be a big procedure, just something that can ensure everyone (teachers and families) know what is expected e.g., how we walk with a group of children on busy roads or perhaps where to drop them off, sign them in and ensure there is a proper handover (especially if they are getting dropped off directly to the site).

LOCATION

Putting details of the location is helpful as it also outlines all the possible entry points that can be used in an emergency. It is also helpful for giving instructions and sharing what facilities are there e.g. carparking, public transport, toilets, picnic tables, the type of landscape / bush, how far away from your centre or school, the flora and fauna in the area, boundaries. A map of the site is a great way to do this. This is especially helpful to any teachers who won't be involved in taking children on the excursion.

EXAMPLE Safety Operations Procedures (SOP's)

Prior to Leaving

- Talk with children about how to stay safe - Listening ears, Looking where walking
- Talk about and role play how to respond to dogs in public areas
- What to wear and bring
- What to do if they get lost
- How to cross roads as a group
- What to do if drop something on road while crossing
- Food and water
- Toileting (if no public toilet)
- Leave no trace code (Environmental care code – e.g., take rubbish back out)

On the Day Checks

- Check children's clothing and footwear are appropriate for the season and weather
- Food and water
- Weather forecast
- Role check (leave copy at centre or school and take one)
- Group/safety equipment including first aid
- Travel logistics – how we are getting there
- Cell phones charged
- Ratios and parent help
- Safety hui with tamariki before departure

Site Check / Major Hazards to Monitor

- Streams – drowning or hypothermia
- Weather (high winds / trees) – crushing
- Temperature – sunburn or hypothermia
- Roads and cars – severe body injury
- Medical emergencies – asthma, allergies
- Rock Fall – head injury

Anything new from the on the day site check?

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Seasonal Constraints

Activities will run all year round. In the cooler months clothing information will be provided to ensure enjoyment of all participants. During the warmer months sunscreen needs to be applied before the start of the session.

Standard Operating Procedures

- Obtain weather forecast
- Lead teacher role assigned / roles discussed and agreed
- Parent helpers briefed on their role
- Ratios met
- Monitor weather
- Monitor tamariki well-being including warmth, water and food intake
- Sunscreen
- Stop at known hazards
- Follow Leave No Trace code

Group / Safety Equipment

- First Aid Kit
- Tarps
- Sting or Rope
- Pocket knife
- Spare warm clothes
- Whistle (use to call children back to base camp or for an emergency)
- Thermos
- Blanket in winter
- Cell phone
- Operations Guide including minimum emergency procedures
- Toileting equipment

Other optional group equipment:

- Bug catchers
- Magnifying glasses
- Insect, bird and tree identification books
- Story book
- Pulleys / swing

Clothing

Winter:

- Rain jackets
- Over trousers
- Woollen hat and gloves
- Thermal leggings and top
- Warm middle layers x2
- Warm thick socks
- Gumboots
- Spare set of clothes

Summer:

- Sun Hat
- Top that covers shoulders
- Warm outer layer
- Covered shoes or secure sandals
- Spare set of clothes
- Rain jacket and over trousers in case of rain

Travel

Follow Excursion policy.

Other notes: Group walks together to and from Mt Vernon Park. Parent helpers should be present for safety hui before departure and need to read parent help laminated sheet. One adult at front, one at the rear and other adults spread through middle of group. Whole group needs to stop when crossing Centaurus Road. If busy, stopping traffic is an option. Children must hold hands while crossing roads. Group can cross in two groups if it is deemed safer to do so. Front person needs to walk at a pace that whole group can stick to. If getting spread apart, front person needs to stop and wait.

Location

Mt Vernon Park is a 1.6km walk from Kindergarten. There are no public toilets but the land owners have given permission to dig holes for waste. Toilet paper will need to be carried out and a bucket with a lid will be provided for this.

Mt Vernon has some open spaces with native bush surrounding. There are a number of walking tracks leading off from the open spaces.

Mt Vernon Park

7. Environmental Considerations

Part of running a nature programme is about introducing 'caring for the environment' or Kaitiakitanga, into your sessions. Learning about the environment often leads to loving the environment and ultimately caring for and protecting it.

What we do need to appreciate with younger children is that to love their environment they need to engage with it. If they are not allowed to touch it, explore it or climb it then this will impact the connection they have with it.

I am not encouraging destruction of the environment, but I would ask you to put yourself in a child's shoes. If a child is building a hut and they break a branch off a tree – it has a purpose. It is not intentional destruction. They are creating an amazing hut and the branch fits with what they need for their creation.

We can use it as a learning opportunity by talking about it being preferable to use sticks that are found on the ground rather than breaking off new branches. But we mustn't push too hard for this age group – they are still learning.

While it isn't ideal, the tree should recover and if a broken branch is what we have to sacrifice for a child to connect to nature – then that could be seen as an acceptable sacrifice.

As we get older, we learn and know this stuff, but as a young child our priority should be getting them connected to nature.

Here are a couple of concepts you can introduce to your tamariki over time.

- Walking through bush and the impact of footprints on small plants
- Minimising the effects of fire
- Whakaute (Respect) for wildlife and farm life
- Leave what you find – allow others to enjoy it too (sometimes children will collect things. Manage this in a way where they can collect some treasures but also leave enough for others to enjoy)
- Kaitiakitanga – guardianship of the land
- Consideration of others, including locals, land owners and other users
- Dispose of waste properly (take all rubbish out)
- Toileting in nature – how to do it in an environmentally friendly way

8. Day Plan

A day plan just gives an estimate of timings to help everyone know what to expect. Here is an example from a programme I helped set up:

8.30am	Children arrive at kindy/school. Parents help/ensure children dressed appropriately for the weather. Children's bags need to have their spare clothes and lunch boxes. On the Day Checks are carried out
8.40am	Parent helpers gather outside and read Parent Helper Information card (laminated information). Safety hui is led by Lead Teacher or one of the students
8.50am	Children leave to walk to their nature site or local park
9.20am	Arrive at site, set up a base camp and children to have a safety boundary hui. Site Assessment Check carried out while base camp being set up
9.25am	Nature Play time and rolling kai
11.30am	Children gather to walk back to kindy/school
12.00pm	Arrive back at kindy/school

9. Roles and Responsibilities

Ensuring that everyone knows what their role is helps with the smooth running of a programme and, if a situation arises, everyone is clear on what they need to do.

Think about the following people: lead teacher, support teacher, parents, and children. Also consider, in an emergency, what the centre or school's responsibility is (you will find this information in an emergency procedure document).

Things to consider when writing:

- Who does what in the planning stages?
- Who does what the day before?
- Who does what the morning of?
- Who leads the session, who supports and how do they do that?
- Who is responsible for the group and personal equipment?

Think of every stage and what roles people will have – pre, during, after.

Lead Teacher

- Ensures Standard Operating Procedures are followed
- Ensures Prior to Leaving List is completed (parts can be delegated)
- Ensures On the Day Checks are carried out (parts can be delegated)
- Carries out Site Check on arrival
- Monitors hazards, captures new hazards and communicates new hazards to group
- Makes final decision if required
- Acts as 'In Field Leader' in case of an emergency (refer to emergency planning info)
- Responsible for group safety
- Ensures equipment is cleaned and packed ready for next time
- Updates risk management documentation if required
- Fills in any other paperwork that is required

Support Teacher

- Follows standard operating procedures
- Supports Lead Teacher with tasks that are required to be completed on the Prior to Leaving list and On the Day Check List
- Manages group while lead teacher carries out site check
- Monitors hazards and communicates new hazards to lead teacher
- Supports lead teacher throughout the session
- Supports Lead Teacher in case of emergency
- Steps in as Lead Teachers if something happens to Lead Teacher
- Steps in as 'In Field Leader' if lead teacher is not able to
- Responsible for group safety
- Helps ensure that all equipment is cleaned and packed ready for next time
- Supports any paperwork that needs filling in after the session

Parent Help

You can have a more detailed version available for the parent helpers. This is laminated and is given to all parents to read when they arrive for parent help. There is an example available as part of the operations manual.

- Supporting teachers with group management of the children including while walking
- Helping to identify any hazards and communicating these to the lead teacher
- Observing the children and being intentional about your conversations

When to step in:

- When there is a hazard or danger that the children have not seen or are not aware of
- If a child is getting hurt or is about to get hurt

Children

Children have a role too! Often I see the adults taking all the responsibility for the safety of the group but you have a wonderful wee group of willing helpers who would love to have some responsibility! So use them!

- Keep themselves safe and assessing risks
- Look after the other children around them – helping with group safety
- Stay within talking distance to another person at all times
- Communicate to teachers about their plans
- Take turns at leading the group
- Listening to teacher and adult instructions when walking to and from and crossing roads

10. Policies and Procedures

Relevant policies from your centre or school can be copied and added into the guide. These could include but are not limited to:

- Excursion policy
- Emergency response/communication policy
- Water
- Vulnerable children
- Sunscreen
- EOTC guidelines for your school

On reflection, are there any additional procedures/guidelines that need to be created to help ensure a smooth running of your programme?

11. Assessing a site:

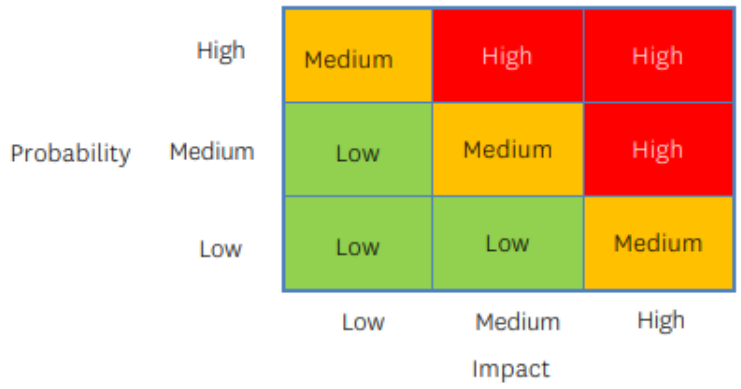
Here is some supporting information on how to assess a site:

Site assessment

1. **Identifying hazards** – finding out what could cause harm
    - What are you looking for when identifying hazards?
        - Environmental hazards (e.g. rivers, trees, landscape)
        - Equipment hazards (e.g. swings, platforms, trolley)
        - People hazards (e.g. behaviours, your group, external people)
    - How do you do a site assessment?
        - Visit the site and spend time walking around it
        - Look around you from ground level, knee height, waist height, shoulder height and up above
        - Get up close to things
        - Record them on your hazard identification and risk management form, what the hazard is and what harm it could cause

2. **Assessing risks** – finding out the severity of the consequences
    - What are you assessing when assessing risks?
        - You are assessing the likelihood and the severity of the consequences when a person is exposed to a hazard
        - Consequence could be: insignificant, minor, moderate, major or critical
        - Likelihood could be: rare, unlikely, possible, likely, almost certain
    - How do you do that?
        - You can use a diagram like this one to help figure out the risk level. This is a basic version and they can have more columns and rows
        - Sometimes the risk level can change so it is important to review and reassess often
        - Probability = Likelihood and Impact = Severity of consequence
        - Low, medium or high can be put in the relevant column on your form

Risk Map:



- You can also consider some of these questions to help you assess the level of risk:
  - What could go wrong in relation to this risk factor?
  - What harm could be caused?
  - Has it happened before, and what did we learn?
  - What is already in place?
  - What could change in relation to each risk factor?
  - What could harm people?
  - What might a natural event or disaster mean?

NOTE: A risk register is not required by the Health and Safety Act, but it is good practice.

3. **Controlling risks** – managing, fixing, changing what you do / how you do something
   - How do you control risks?
     - Depending on the level of risk will depend how you need to control it
     - If it is high risk, you might have to remove the risk or minimise it to an acceptable level
     - If the risk is medium or low, you may have to minimise it or you may leave it as it is
     - Controlling is an ongoing process

4. **How often do we do a site assessment?**
   After our initial detailed site assessment, whenever we arrive at our site we should be doing a rapid site assessment. If there are any new risks, we need to think about how we communicate that to everyone there and when we capture that new risk into our documentation e.g., when we get back to our centre or school.

12. Risk Management and Hazard Documentation

On the next page there is a generic RAMS form that can be used, or information from it can be added to your organisation's risk management documentation.

When starting a regular nature based programme (visiting the same site regularly), it is important to visit the site **BEFORE** your first session and do a thorough risk assessment. If you don't do this, it will likely raise your stress levels on the first session.

While the example on the next pages is free for you to use, ***I don't recommend copying and pasting it***! If you do that, you probably haven't gone to the site and thoroughly looked at it or completed your own risk assessment. By all means compare and analyse but remember each site is different and could have completely different risks or hazard features.

To carry out a risk assessment of your site you will need to take along a blank RAMS form and follow the steps for the risk assessment in section 11 and write them into the relevant columns. You can then take that information back to your computer and tidy it up, pull hazards together and turn it into a readable document.

Harm What could go wrong?	Hazard Why would this happen	Risk Rating How serious?	Existing Controls or Action How can it be prevented? First try to eliminate, then minimise the risk	Controls implemented? by who?
Fatality or serious injury	Fast moving vehicles / roads / car parks	**High**	Hold hands if crossing roads Where possible have sessions away from busy roads Have safe areas for students to wait with another instructor if required at the time Cross at designated crossings Ratio 1:6	
	Rivers / ponds / water	**High**	An instructor should be close to any students who are approaching water and is to make students aware of the risks Instruct students to stand a safe distance from water's edge Instruct students to not lean over or climb railing on bridges	
	Tree fall	**High**	Look up - Check for dead, overhanging and/or large trees and branches Check weather forecast for high winds	
	Earthquake or other extreme weather situations	**High**	Assess site beforehand and be aware of emergency exit strategies Children to be aware of what to do in an earthquake while outdoors	

	Unknown adults interact with children / tricky people	**Medium**	Keep away from built up areas where possible Children to always be in pairs (never alone) Keep children in line of sight where practical Pair up older students with younger students when moving through higher populated areas Monitor other adults entering the group's immediate area Move to another location if concerned for student's safety	
Burns	Fire	**Medium-high**	Set boundaries for lighting a fire Adult supervision required Advise of all safety requirements and manage the site actively throughout	
Hypothermia	Cold weather or falls in water	**High**	Wear warm clothes and all students to have a rain jacket Have spare clothing Have a contingency plan if needed	
Medical event	Medical condition or allergic reaction	**High**	Ensure children's medication is carried and teachers know how to administer Teacher/lead teacher must have first aid training and be aware of signs of anaphylaxis	
Person goes missing	Walks off, gets lost	**High**	Children to always be in pairs Set boundaries of site	

			Teach children beforehand what to do if they get lost (stay still and blow whistle if they have one) Buddy system or regular head counts Know the site thoroughly including all entry and exit points where practical Avoid crowded areas where possible	
Falling over, twist ankle, graze, cut, bruise	Slippery / uneven / steep ground	**Low-medium**	Students to be encouraged to wear sturdy footwear or use hands / feet / adult's hand if required Make children aware of the major risks Manage areas that have a higher risk factor Involve children in the discussions to help create awareness	
Cuts, lacerations	Tools including knives, hammers, saws	**Low - medium**	Set boundaries for using tools Adult supervision required Teach correct techniques and safety requirements	
Children get scared, get bitten, get a fright	Dogs / other animals	**medium**	Children to learn how to safely be around dogs Teach them what to do if a dog approached them Adults to be vigilant and, if appropriate, gather the children together if a dog is running around	

			Ask dog owners to hold dogs or put on lead	
Sunburn, hyperthermia	Weather – sun, over exertion	**Low - medium**	Apply sunblock before session and during Drink plenty of water Wear sunhats and find shade if needed	
Broken bones	Climbing trees or things at a height	**Medium**	Talk to children about them only climbing as high as they can get down guideline Spot children if required No leaning on the balustrades in huts Encourage children to assess the risks, weather and their own capabilities Step in if required	
Pricks and embedded prickles	Chestnut pods or blackberry bushes	**Low - medium**	Teach children how to identify chestnut pods Wear shoes to prevent spikes going into feet – especially in autumn and winter Advise to pick them up gently so they don't get spikes in their fingers Clear blackberry, where practical, from high use areas	
Personal equipment and group equipment left in various places Broken equipment	Misused equipment / lost / stolen	**low**	Keep all students' personal items together and have someone with gear at all times Watch for children taking off items of clothing or sunhats and pick up or put back on student	

			All equipment checked before use and maintained in line with industry standard Instructors to check areas before leaving Any equipment used should be monitored by instructors and used in accordance with instructions	
Environmental damage	Toileting, trees, plants, wildlife, rubbish	**Medium**	Use toilet facilities if available or follow land owner's policy on toileting Respect flora and fauna Take all rubbish out with you	

13. Weather and Forecasting

Being aware of the forecast and local weather conditions helps when planning what to take on a session. In an operations manual, you can give a short description of what is expected and where to find the information. This could also be part of the SOP and the daily check sheet as it is a standard operation procedure.

www.metservice.co.nz is my preferred general forecasting site as it also has detailed forecasting maps.

There are some great local providers popping up around the country that give localised weather forecasts so look out for those in your area.

If weather is not something you know much about, you might find you take more of an interest with your regular sessions. As you become better at reading the weather and your regions own micro climate, you will notice what different cloud patterns mean and how far away storms are from hitting.

Paying attention to extreme weather forecasts for your area is essential. My biggest concern when out in nature is not the cold or the wet but the wind. Falling trees is a significant risk so I am often paying attention to wind speeds. With this information you can adapt your programme and you might visit a section of your site with low trees or more open lands and avoid tall tree areas. PLEASE NOTE this is specific to the environment that I live in and it might not be the biggest concern for you!

14. Emergency / Crisis planning / Communication plan

Most organisations should have an emergency or crisis plan. What you need to check is if it works when you are offsite or if it needs to be amended.

A scenario session is recommended to practice and see if it is smooth sailing or if it becomes confusing. You can do this by having the Lead Teacher and Support Teacher in one room role playing an injury or situation. In another room you can have the office responder/EOTC coordinator/centre manager. In the field they would use cell phones or mountain radios so once the injury (or other chosen scenario) is in a manageable place, they can ring the office and role play the next stage.

It is good practice to have a delegated person (office manager, EOTC coordinator or centre manager) who responds to these kinds of situations.

In the outdoor industry this delegated person would have a folder that they would carry with them whenever a group was offsite. If they received a call, they would then have all the information on emergency procedures right there with them in a step by step format. This would be good practice.

An EOTC coordinator in schools would likely perform the same role or an EOTC emergency cell phone would be provided to a person that is on EOTC duty.

Having a list of other teachers or parent help cell phone numbers and the delegated emergency contact or EOTC coordinators cell phone number is also good practice in case of an incident or emergency. This information should be with your SOP / Crisis management folder and accessible to the rest of the group in case the head teacher is the one who becomes ‘injured’.

Example - Emergency Response Information and Procedures

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of an emergency response process is to preserve life and property and prevent further loss.

If an incident occurs, educators should refer to the Incident/Accident Management form, which is part of this document. This form provides a structure to follow if an Incident, Accident, Emergency or Crisis should occur out in the field. An instructor should refer to and fill in the form when practical. The leader of the session may be required to operate as part of the 'response in field' (please see Emergency Response Procedure section) depending on the nature of the situation. This will need to be assessed and decided at the time.

DEFINITIONS

Incident/Accident

An incident is an undesired event which could, or does, result in harm to people, damage to property and/or loss to process. Accidents are incidents that do result in harm/damage/loss.

Emergency

An emergency is a serious incident (concerning the health, injury, missing person or damage involving staff, clients or property) where outside assistance (professional medical attention, police or rescue services) is required.

- dealt with onsite with support from Head Office.

Crisis

A crisis is a critical emergency situation that involves loss of life or potential loss of life.

- Head Office becomes involved in leadership role.

Media Interest

An incident, emergency or crisis where the media are involved / likely to become involved.

EMERGENCY TRAINING

All new staff receive the LKNP Safety Management and Emergency Operations SOP before commencement of work.

EXAMPLE Emergency Response Procedures

Responsibilities in an Incident / Emergency

	In the Field to do (Teachers)	EOTC Coordinator or Centre Manager to do once phoned
Incident / Accident An incident is an undesired event which could, or does, result in harm to people, damage to property and/or loss to process. Accidents are incidents that do result in harm/damage/loss.	Primary Response in Field: ▪ Control situation ▪ First Aid ▪ Make a Plan ▪ Communicate ▪ Evacuate	Support – if required Then Follow Up ▪ Review & Report ▪ Communicate with Next of Kin if required
Emergency An emergency is a serious incident (concerning the health, injury, missing person or damage involving staff, clients or property) where outside assistance (professional medical attention, police or rescue services) is required.	Primary Response in Field: ▪ Control situation ▪ First Aid ▪ Make a Plan ▪ Communicate ▪ Evacuate	Base / Office Response: ▪ Support ▪ Communicate ▪ Resolve ▪ Follow up ▪ Communicate with Next of Kin if required
Crisis A crisis is a critical emergency situation that involves loss of life or potential loss of life.	Primary Response in Field: ▪ Control ▪ First Aid ▪ Make a Plan ▪ Communicate ▪ Evacuate	Base / Office Response: ▪ Support ▪ Communicate ▪ Resolve ▪ Follow up ▪ Communicate with Next of Kin ▪ Manage External Communications
Media Interest Any Incident, emergency or crisis where the media become involved.	Refer to Leader	Initial response – A comment will be provided once the situation is stable Secondary response to follow once situation stable and provided by the EOTC coordinator or Owner

Incident Management – Teacher in the Field EXAMPLE FORM

Incident Type:

Incident Detail

Control ❑ Assess & Contain ❑ Remove people from hazard
First Aid / First Response ❑ Primary Survey (D, R, A, B, C) ❑ Secondary Survey (SAMPLE) ❑ Vital Signs
Clarify (the Strategy) ❑ Develop a plan ❑ Prioritise Actions ❑ Look after rest of group
Communicate ❑ Notify Emergency services ❑ Notify EOTC Coordinator ❑ Record Info
Evacuate ❑ Establish safe route into site ❑ Safely evacuate all present

EOTC Coordinator Response

Emergency Type

Incident Detail

Initial Response ❑ Receive call or gather info ❑ Remain calm & reassure ❑ Define roles
Communication ❑ Detail & document ❑ Internal comms? ❑ External comms?
Support ❑ Provide & co-ordinate internal assistance ❑ Assist outside agencies
Resolve ❑ Incident resolved ❑ Communicate 'Incident Over' ❑ Next steps
Follow Up ❑ Patient &/or family ❑ Staff ❑ Report (internal & external) ❑ Review

15. Upskilling and Further Training

When running a nature programme for the first time it is normal to feel a little nervous. It is new. The operations manual is part of building your confidence. There are some other areas you might feel you need to upskill on too.

Some things you can do as a team (also outlined in this guide) or through some professional development:

System Development and Planning

- Purpose
- Benefits of a session
- Philosophy and Culture
- Developing systems and procedures
- Linking to the Curriculum

Upskilling and Professional Development

- Assessing and managing risks in the outdoors
- Emergency and crisis management in the outdoors
- Health and Safety and Regulations
- Role of the teacher in the outdoors
- Behaviour management in an outdoor environment
- Practical skills session – knots, fires and cooking, hut building, tools

I have set up some specific Professional Development training designed for Nature Educators in New Zealand. Nature Educator Training Workshops has been developed that will help build confidence and upskill educators to be at a stage where they can take the reins and make it happen.

Workshops are added to our professional development page periodically and can be found at: www.littlekiwisnatureplay.com

16. Whānau Engagement – Information Evening

If you are setting up a new nature discovery programme, or even if you have been running one for a while, it is helpful to hold an information evening to share with the families what it is all about and what the benefits are.

One of the key outcomes for an evening like this is to get support for the programme. The more support there is from whānau, the easier it will be for the teachers.

During an evening you are answering the 'WHY', the 'HOW' and talking to some of the fears or barriers the parents might have.

Things you could cover:

- What the benefits are, some of the research and why the teachers feel this is going to help their children
- Share what it will look like, what they might be doing and how it links to the curriculum
- Talk through safety stuff (risk benefits, learning injuries vs life altering, how risks are managed and the children's involvement in risk assessment. You can link benefits here too)
- What is required of parents who come along – parent help / what their role is
- Clothing – what they need and who provides what
- What they can do in their own time to support the programme
- If any fundraising is required by the centre or school to support the programme
- Address any concerns, worries or barriers whānau might have

One thing I have learnt over the last year or two of running these evenings for centres is that parents aren't that interested if you say, 'come and find out how great nature is for your children'. This puts most people off (I find this very sad that not everyone sees the value). But there are ways to frame it to make it more interesting.

A couple of areas that might spark more interest are around Technology and the impact that is having on a child's development, wellbeing and mental health (and how time outdoors can reverse some of those effects) and behavioural or academic concerns.

17. Permission Forms and Parent Help Roster

People often tell me that they need one permission for each session. There are always ways around this.

If you are good with your planning and you are going on regular excursions to the same place/couple of places, you could get a blanket permission form that covers the year.

You could also do it by term and have all the dates that you have planned on running excursions on the form, the parent/guardian then signs a form each term. This can be good in ECE. Schools tend to have year release forms for local excursions.

This document link here is great for schools.

Refer to document EOTC Guidelines Bringing Curriculum Alive for the requirements for schools page 32.

Childs Name: _____

Dates of sessions: _____

	YES	NO
I give permission for my child to attend Bush Kindy on the dates above		
I have read the parents information and risk assessment pack		
I confirm that my family's emergency contact information held at _____ is correct		
I understand that the children will be walking to and from Mt Vernon farm park on their bush kindy days		
I or someone from my family will be available at times to volunteer. Please let us know you/your family availability for the term and names: Wednesday 17th May: Wednesday 24th May: Wednesday 31st May: Wednesday 7th June: Wednesday 14th June: Wednesday 21st June: Wednesday 28th June:		

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

18. Parent Handbook

A parent handbook is another great way to help inform parents or guardians, and to provide them with information that they might be interested in. It will also help them understand the nature programme purpose and what it actually looks like.

It doesn't need to be big – it is just there to support the information evening and would be given to parents, or emailed, when their children start going on the nature discovery programme. This could be a downloadable link if your centre or school has a parent's portal on their website. Although a printed version tends to get more traction!

On the next page there is a basic example of what one could look like.

19. Example – Parent Guide Book (Basic)

PURPOSE OF A REGULAR NATURE DISCOVERY PROGRAMME

To provide children with the opportunity to engage in nature play and learning in the early years and to develop a deeper connection with their local environment.

BENEFITS OF BUSH KINDY

Heading into nature on a regular basis provides children with a wonderful opportunity to explore their surroundings, develop a connection to their local environment, become environmentally aware, develop confidence, wonder, gross and fine motor development, social skills, literacy and problem-solving skills to name a few. With the changes in society and the advances in technology, having bush kindy days is a wonderful addition that helps support the Te Whāriki curriculum.

Here is some further research from DOC: http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/getting-involved/students-and-teachers/benefits-of-connecting-children-with-nature.pdf

LOCATION

The proposed location of the Nature Discovery sessions is Mt Vernon Park, off Hillsborough Tce. It is a 1.6km walk from Kindy. The trustees have been contacted and they are happy for us to use the park to run our sessions. Here is a map of the park along with emergency exit points and other points of interest:

Mt Vernon Park

TRAVEL FROM KINDY TO BUSH KINDY

Mt Vernon Farm Park is 1.6km from the kindergarten if walking. Initially walking will be the mode of transport and this will be monitored to see if it's the best use of time. Other

options are A) a bus drops them off at 9am and the children walk back to kindy, or B) parents can drop the children off at Mt Vernon Farm Park at 8.30am – this could have some logistical issues though. We will keep you informed on the success of the walking option.

DAY PLAN

A day plan just gives an estimate of timings to help everyone know what to expect.

8.30am Children arrive at kindy. Parents help children to dress appropriately for the weather. Children's bags to have their spare clothes and lunch boxes and to be placed in the box on the picnic table (for morning tea). On the Day Checks are carried out.

8.40am Parent helpers gather outside and read Parent Helper Information. Safety hui is lead by Lead Teacher.

8.50am Children leave kindy and walk to Mt Vernon.

9.20am Arrive at Mt Vernon park, set up a base camp and children to have a safety boundary hui. Site Assessment Check carried out while base camp being set up.

9.25am Nature Play time and rolling kai

10.50am Children gather to walk back to kindy

11.25am Arrive back at kindy

CLOTHING

Having the right clothing makes for an enjoyable nature programme. This is not just for the children but the teachers and parents too. Below is a list for winter and summer clothing with further information about why it is required.

- Rain jackets are awesome for long periods of enjoyment in wet conditions. Hoods are useful for stopping rain from going down the back of your neck and can also act as a heater for your head. The main purpose though is to stop us getting cold. When we get wet we are more likely to get cold so rain jackets are a priority. They also need to accompany the children in summer too.
- I also recommend over trousers for winter or on rainy days. What tends to happen when only wearing a rain jacket is the rain runs down the rain jacket and then at the bottom it has nowhere to go so it runs onto your trousers! I like www.mudmates.co.nz for some cool New Zealand made over trousers and wet weather clothing. You can also go to places like Farmers (especially their half price sales) or a local opportunity shop. They also need to accompany the children in summer.
- Woollen hats are great in the winter or on a particularly cool day. We can loose 80% of heat through our head so a hat will help reduce heat loss and keep us warmer for longer. In summer, sun hats preferably with a wide brim will be required and sunblock should be applied before kindy.

- Gloves are great in winter too. They can make it a little harder to do things but it can turn into a problem-solving activity for children. Woollen gloves are generally enough in New Zealand city winter conditions. For those in rural or inland locations where the temperature can be a lot colder I would suggest thick water proof / water resistant gloves. You can sometimes find woollen gloves in opportunity shops or crafts markets. For waterproof gloves the best places are often ski shops – or a second-hand ski shop!
- Warm layers become essential with cooler temperatures. Wool, merino and thermals are best for warm layers as they keep you warm even when they get wet. Cotton is not good when it gets wet as it can make you cold so be aware of what children are wearing against their skin. Farmers half price sales are great value for woollen, merino and thermal clothing purchases. Op shops and Kathmandu or Macpac also sell these layers so watch out for sales.
- Warm thick socks for winter are essential for keeping warm. Gumboots are not as warm as running shoes and children's feet tend to get colder faster. Having thicker socks will keep them warm enough to last a whole session. If children's feet start getting too cold, then it will impact on the session.
- Gumboots are ideal in the winter months or on wet days. Even though they are harder to run in they will keep them much drier and hence warmer.
- Covered shoes or secure sandals are good during summer but they must be practical for the walk and for the kinds of activities the children will undertake.
- Covered shoulders are essential too especially for longer periods outdoors in summer.
- Spare set of clothes should accompany children for each session.

SAFETY

The teachers will be following the Standard Operating Procedures that has been established for these sessions. It covers:

- Checks to be completed before leaving kindy
- Site Assessment and Hazard Identification checks to be carried out
- Seasonal constraints
- Group and safety equipment to be carried, including first aid kit, whistle and emergency procedures documentation
- Clothing requirements
- Location emergency exits and points of interest

LEARNING INJURIES AND LIFE ALTERING INJURIES

Learning injuries are injuries like scratches, bruises, cuts, grazes and even the odd broken bone. In childhood development, these are acceptable as they are not causing significant harm – they are busy learning.

Life Altering injuries are injuries that have a significant impact on a child. These could be head injuries, back and neck injuries or death.

Through all our hazard assessment and risk management processes we will do everything within our control to prevent life altering injuries. You might see your child/ren come home with some learning injuries – these are all part of their development and will mend in no time!

MAIN HAZARDS

It has been identified that the main hazards to be aware of during travel to and from and while at Mt Vernon Park are:

- Streams – drowning or hypothermia
- Weather (high winds / trees) – crushing
- Temperature – sunburn or hypothermia
- Roads and cars – full body injury
- Medical emergencies – asthma, allergies
- Rock Fall – head injury

Hazard management is a priority on all sessions and will be managed appropriately and dynamically at each session. This means if something changes it will be reassessed at the time and this might mean cancelling the session. Safety is the number one priority.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Prior to leaving the centre a daily risk assessment will be carried out. When arriving at the site, a daily hazard checklist shall be completed. Any new hazards that are identified will be communicated to the group at the time and updated on the risk management form at the end of the session.

Children will be involved in risk assessment discussions which will help to increase their own personal risk assessment abilities.

WEATHER

Weather is changeable and it's important that children are dressed appropriately on their bush kindy day. If adverse weather is forecast for the day, the decision will be made on the morning and will be written on the board and confirmed at mat time. Adverse weather might consist of heavy rain, strong winds or a big storm.

PERMISSION FORMS

Permission forms will need to be completed before a child can go on the programme. Initially these will be per session with the aim of signing one form per term. Teachers will give these out before the sessions and there will be a note on the board as a reminder to bring them back.

IN YOUR OWN TIME

Your children will be really excited about what they do at Mt Vernon Park and they may want to show you! It is a wonderful park with much to explore. We encourage you to take your child/ren back and let them show you around. Take a picnic, go for a walk to the cave or make a hut in the bush.

Reconnecting as a family to this place will help strengthen their feeling of belonging and caring for nature. If you have any questions about the site please ask one of the teachers.

20. Final Thoughts

When you take a group out into nature, or run a regular programme on your site, one of the first priorities is to build a good connection with the tamariki. If they can trust you and you can trust them, your sessions will go much smoother.

This is very much the case if you have some more challenging behaviours in your class or group.

Please also remember sometimes things don't go to plan! I have had many times when things haven't gone how I imagined, or it turned into a bit of a flop! That's very normal when we are trying new things. It is also how we learn.

So do the best you can with what you have and become good at reflecting on what has worked well, what hasn't and look at how you can improve for next time.

There is a great saying 'If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got'. If things aren't working, change it. You can always ask the children to help figure it out as they love to get involved in adult 'work'.

Lastly, once you start running your programme you will need to get good at observation. Observing learnings, observing behaviours, observing interactions and risky play. For some this will come as second nature and for others this might be a challenge.

I recommend getting someone to come in, observe you running a session and provide feedback. Or you can go and observe someone else running a session to get some tips and ideas. This is a great way to help us grow into our role and can be done regularly to help our continual development.

I wish you all the best with your nature programme and if you need any further support, please contact me, or ask a question in the Nature Educators NZ Facebook group as people are very happy to help!

Sending you lots of nature vibes!

Celia Hogan