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Sustainability in Family Day Care

What is sustainability?

When you think about “sustainability” in Family Day Care, what is it you think about? Is it about recycling? Is it about worm farms?

Or is it about ‘environmental responsibility’ and children developing ‘respect for the environment’ which are key aspects of the National Quality Standard and the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* and *My Time, Our Place*?

All of these things have a role in Family Day Care. As educators we know that we need to help children learn about sustainability and we need to ensure our Family Day Care service is sustainable – but what exactly is sustainability?

- ▶ **Sustainability** means meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- ▶ **Sustainability** requires making changes to how we live and use available physical, natural and social resources so that we allow the living systems in which humans are embedded to thrive forever.

- ▶ **Sustainability** is also about using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased.

In Family Day Care, sustainability is an ongoing process that requires educators and co-ordinators to:

- ▶ Ensure our Family Day Care service uses as few of the earth's resources such as energy, and water as possible
- ▶ Actively engender a love of nature in all children we educate and care for
- ▶ Help children understand the importance of sustainability
- ▶ Promote children's understanding about their responsibility to care for the environment
- ▶ Help families recognise the importance of sustainability and learn about ways they can introduce sustainable practices into their homes

- ▶ Model respect, care and appreciation for the natural environment
- ▶ Appreciate the culture and knowledge of the original custodians of the land on which we care for and educate children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Our learning frameworks – *the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* and *Framework for School Aged Care* tell us that:

“Environments and resources can also highlight our responsibilities for a sustainable future and promote children’s understanding about their responsibility to care for the environment. They can foster hope, wonder and knowledge about the natural world.”



Why is it important to think about sustainability in Family Day Care?

There are many reasons to think about sustainability in Family Day Care and for all of us to act to ensure how we live is as sustainable as possible.

Some of these include:

- ▶ **The country we live in is facing increasing impacts of climate change.** The CSIRO warns us that “Australia has already experienced increases in average temperatures over the past 60 years, with more frequent hot weather, fewer cold days, shifting rainfall patterns and rising sea levels. More of the same is expected in the future.”
- ▶ **The country we live in is fragile.** We are an arid country without huge supplies of water. The Barrier Reef is under threat from global warming. We are witnessing more and more extensive bushfires and floods.
- ▶ **Family Day Care can be run without draining earth’s resources.** It does not require huge changes in how we operate to run our Family Day Care services sustainably.
- ▶ **We need to demonstrate it when we are assessed and rated.** Element 3.2.3 of the National Quality Standard requires that “The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible”.
- ▶ **It underpins our learning frameworks.** Both of our Learning Frameworks outline sustainability as a key practice and as part of Outcome 2 (Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment).



- ▶ **As educators we need to teach a love of the natural world.** When children are taught to love the natural world from an early age they grow up to want to protect that world. Education and care settings are places where children learn about self, others and the world, including environmental responsibility. Services play a role in helping children develop an understanding and respect for the natural environment.
- ▶ **Children need to have a world to grow up in.** Caring for children now is pointless if the earth they live in will not be able to sustain them in the future.
- ▶ **It will help us bring up children who look after the world.** By helping children to become aware of the need for sustainability and their role in living sustainably, Family Day Care educators can become part of building a more sustainable world.

What sustainability looks like in Family Day Care

Three of the major ways Family Day Care services can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability is by:

- ▶ helping children to develop a love of nature and the physical world around them
- ▶ helping children to understand the need for them to act in ways that are environmentally responsible
- ▶ operating sustainably – reducing the amount of the earth’s resources we use in providing our Family Day Care service.

Sustainability in Family Day Care is more than being aware of what we are doing with our rubbish. It is about consuming less, it is about helping children learn about biodiversity, it is about helping children develop a level of curiosity and wonder about the world they live in.

A Family Day Care operates in a way that is sustainable when:

- ▶ It uses as little of the earth’s natural resources to operate as possible
- ▶ Its energy consumption is controlled
- ▶ It promotes water as a precious natural resource
- ▶ It helps sustain and extend children’s delight in the natural environment
- ▶ It helps children of all age groups learn about environmental issues
- ▶ Items and materials are appropriately chosen and reused or recycled in an environmentally sustainable way
- ▶ General waste and hazardous materials are disposed of in an environmentally sustainable way
- ▶ The environmental footprint of the production and transport of certain products is assessed against sustainable development principles

- ▶ The protection and conservation of biodiversity is promoted
- ▶ Children's learning about sustainability is embedded in all learning.

A Family Day Care service looking to improve their sustainable practices would be embedding sustainability in all learning, operations, policies and procedures in every part of what it does.

Helping children learn about sustainability by being role models for them will help ensure that children will have a world to grow up into.



The Learning Frameworks and Sustainability

Sustainability is a key concept in the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the *Framework for School Aged Learning*.

Sustainability exists in the Practices of the Learning Frameworks.

The fifth **Practice** is about LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.

We are told to use outdoor learning spaces because “They foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education”.

We are also told that “Environments and resources can also highlight our responsibilities for a sustainable future and promote children’s understanding about their responsibility to care for the environment. They can foster hope, wonder and knowledge about the natural world.”

Sustainability and the Outcomes of the Learning Frameworks

The **Outcomes** of the learning frameworks also include sustainability. For example, for Outcome 2 – Children are connected with and contribute to their world, we are told about the importance of children becoming socially responsible and showing respect for the environment and that this is evident when children:

- ▶ “Demonstrate an increasing knowledge of, and respect for natural and constructed environments
- ▶ Explore, infer, predict and hypothesise in order to develop an increased understanding of the interdependence between land, people, plants and animals
- ▶ Show growing appreciation and care for natural and constructed environments
- ▶ Explore relationships with other living and non-living things and observe, notice and respond to change

- ▶ Develop an awareness of the impact of human activity on environments and the interdependence of living things”.

Educators are told they promote this learning when they:

- ▶ “Provide children with access to a range of natural materials in their environment
- ▶ Model respect, care and appreciation for the natural environment
- ▶ Find ways of enabling children to care for and learn from the land
- ▶ Consider the nature of children’s connectedness to the land and demonstrate respect for community protocols
- ▶ Share information and provide children with access to resources about the environment and the impact of human activities on environments

- ▶ Embed sustainability in daily routines and practices
- ▶ Look for examples of interdependence in the environment and discuss the ways the life and health of living things are interconnected”.

“When educators create environments in which children experience mutually enjoyable, caring and respectful relationships with people and the environment, children respond accordingly.”

Early Years Learning Framework

Encouraging children to love and appreciate the earth

Children are generally born with a close connection to nature. They ask questions about clouds, they observe insects, they appreciate flowers, they love animals.

The world is in the hands of our children, and it is a world that is not in as good a condition as the world we inherited from our elders. We need children to fall in love with the earth because it is then that they will fight to ensure its health. We

need them to be delighted by our fellow animals, to love plants and flowers and trees, to gasp when they see the ocean or the desert, to wonder about how the world works.

Through most of time, when children played, they played in nature. You probably remember playing in nature yourself as a child. You probably also had the time and space to do this without adult supervision. But now this is not the case. Many children get almost no access to nature. The ones that do often have that access closely monitored by adults ensuring that it is safe. They may connect more with nature through screens than through playing in it.

Features that enable children to explore the natural environment

“A natural environment in an education and care service is an environment which includes natural elements. These may include:

Children have a lot of wonder about the natural environment. As educators it is our role to support and foster that curiosity and children’s love of nature.

- ▶ Gardens where children can grow their own plants
- ▶ Sandpits for sensory, symbolic and physical play
- ▶ Digging patches where children can use garden equipment
- ▶ A range of planting to encourage a variety of modes of play such as playing with gum nuts, small branches, flowers, stones and bark
- ▶ Small pits of pebbles, gravel, coarse sand and smooth river rocks for fine motor and imaginative play
- ▶ Plants for picking and eating



- ▶ Plants that encourage birds, butterflies and other insects
- ▶ Trees which provide shade
- ▶ Worm farms and compost areas for environmental education
- ▶ Water play areas for sensory play.”¹

How can you teach children to love the natural world?

1. Become a great role model

If you want the children you care for to love and appreciate nature, you have to model your love of nature to them.

2. Plan to spend a large part of your day outside

Outside play spaces are special. We are lucky in many parts of Australia to be able to play outdoors much of the year.

3. Encourage children to notice nature and discuss it with them

Encourage children to plant vegetables and flowers, love trees, notice insects, listen to birds singing, notice the passing of the seasons.

1. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/naturalenvironments.aspx>



4. Create gardens with children

Grow herbs if you have no space for vegetables, grow flowers, indoor plants, propagate plants, sprout seeds, grow carrot tops. Children love to see things growing.

5. Explore your local community

Every community has beautiful spots. Introduce your children to the best parts of your community, parks, bush, lovely gardens, vacant lots where nature has pushed through, beautiful views. Do you have community gardens in your area? Do you have farms?

6. Help children to learn about biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of all living things; the different plants, animals and micro organisms, the genetic information they contain and the ecosystems they form. Children need to learn about biodiversity and the importance of ensuring that we do not lose any of our biodiversity on the planet.

7. Include natural environments indoors

Natural environments do not have to be limited to outdoors. There are many ways in which the natural environment can enhance the children's indoor program. Pot plants and small tubs in which to grow plants work well.

8. Help children to learn about the original owners of the land on which they live.

For generations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been calling for stronger measures to recognise, protect, and maintain all aspects of the land, waters, and sacred sites from exploitation, desecration, and destruction. The land on which children learn in Family Day Care always has been, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

**We need to help
children learn
to love the earth
before we ask
them to save it.**

Teaching children that we currently use more of the earth's resources than we can sustain

Being environmentally friendly is not something we are born with. It is something that needs to be developed and learnt. Understanding about why we need to practice sustainability and how we need to do it can be learnt by very young children.

Sustainability education is about the future. It focuses on the need to protect our environment and create a more ecologically sustainable world through informed action.

Education about sustainability involves integrating key sustainable development issues into everything we do. This may include, for example, helping children learn about climate change, biodiversity, recycling and sustainable consumption.

Education for sustainability helps children develop the knowledge, skills, values and views necessary to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable patterns of living. It enables children to reflect on ways of understanding and engaging with the world.

If you are not exactly sure about the key components of sustainability you can either learn at the same time as your children learn or you can use some of the many resources that exist.

Try:

- ▶ [The Australian Museum](#)
- ▶ [Sustainable Schools NSW](#)
- ▶ Read the further reading material that is part of this topic in [PD in Your Pocket](#).

Four key topics that children need to learn about in connection with sustainability are:

- ▶ Climate change
- ▶ Water conservation
- ▶ Energy use and the cost of using non-renewable forms of energy creation
- ▶ Consumption and the impact on the environment of excessive consumption and the issues it creates with waste disposal.





You can involve children in specific acts of sustainability

Children can often easily get on board an environmental cause be it recycling or a campaign to save a particular animal or insect's environment – especially if it is one happening in their local area. Talking to children about things that are happening in the world helps them to think more critically and helps them understand that we can make our world a better place. Look at websites such as [Australian Conservation Foundation](#), [World Wild Fund for Nature](#), [Greenpeace](#), [Friends of the Earth](#).

You can discuss the sustainability of your Family Day Care service

Talk to children about the actions you can all take to make your Family Day Care sustainable such as turning off lights, consuming less, drawing on both sides of the paper, recycling rubbish. Can some of the older children be given jobs as energy savers or recycling monitors?

You can read books about sustainability

Reading storybooks with your child is both an opportunity to bond with them, and an excellent way to introduce difficult topics such as climate change in a child-friendly way. ABC Kids recommends some well-known classics such as *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Charlotte's Web* to start the conversation about the importance of living sustainably.

You can explore food production with children

Growing food, even something as simple as herbs or sprouts, with children helps them understand where it comes from and how we grow it. Food that grows quickly can help children remember why we are doing the planting and watering. The ABC suggests snow peas, corn, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers and the herb, chocolate mint. Go to the ABC Everyday article, '[Five easy plants kids can grow and eat](#)' for further details.

You can talk about the loss of species on earth

Children readily identify with other animals. Talking to them about the animals that are already extinct and the ones who

soon may be, allows you to talk about why animals face extinction and what we must do to help them survive. Explore the Bee 'n' Bee Highway and maybe you can plant some plants in your garden that could provide food for hungry pollinators such as bees, birds, butterflies and bats. Go to the [ABC's Gardening Australia website](#) for further details.

You can celebrate special days:

- ▶ Clean Up Australia Day
- ▶ National Tree Day
- ▶ World Environment Day
- ▶ World Water Day
- ▶ Earth Hour
- ▶ National Recycling Week
- ▶ National Threatened Species Day.

Find out more about these days at the [NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment website](#).

Making your Family Day Care more sustainable

Making sure our Family Day Care services are sustainable is important because children learn as much from what we do as what we say. It is also important because we need to ensure that in caring for children we aren't depleting the earth's resources.

Making your Family Day Care sustainable basically means following the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle path.

Reduce:

- ▶ Only purchase new resources when you can't find them second hand or can't repair what you have. When you do buy new equipment or resources try and buy ones of wood rather than plastic.
- ▶ Your use of water (turn off taps, only use a certain amount of water in water play)
- ▶ Your use of energy (turn off lights and air conditioners)
- ▶ Your use of chemicals in cleaning (use greener products)
- ▶ Avoid single use disposable materials

- ▶ Can you collect natural materials for play (never taking too many) such as pine cones, stones, sticks, leaves?

Reuse:

- ▶ Make reuse common in your service. Can you use cardboard boxes for art, junk mail for collage?
- ▶ Can you set up a compost bin or a worm farm so that your food waste becomes re-used to help your garden grow?

Recycle:

- ▶ Get the children to help you recycle your clothes at the local op-shop
- ▶ Create a clothes swap for families at your service where outgrown clothes can be given to other families
- ▶ Purchase as much as you can second hand
- ▶ Make recycling an everyday act at your service.

Remember to involve your families in what you are doing to make your Family Day Care sustainable!

Great resources to use with and for children

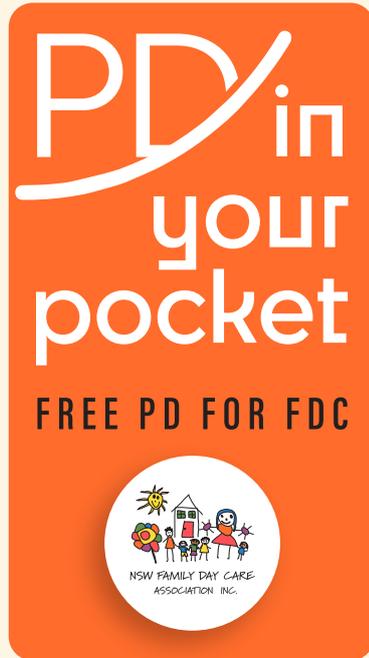
There are lots of good resources available to help children learn about the natural environment and sustainability.

Check these out:

- ▶ [Wildlife photographer of the year gallery](#)
- ▶ [Learn more about sustainability](#)
- ▶ [Picture books](#)
- ▶ Learn more about [what happens to what we recycle](#)
- ▶ Learn more about [how you can talk to children about the environment](#).



This booklet is part of the PD In Your Pocket professional development program.



This program is being conducted over nine months during 2021.

This topic – **Sustainability in Family Day Care** – has an accompanying webinar and video, both of which can be viewed as videos or listened to as podcasts, as well as a further reading list.

There is also a Facebook Group where you can discuss the learning frameworks' practices with other Family Day Care educators in NSW.

For more information about PD In Your Pocket, go to:

www.nswfdc.org.au/pdinyourpocket



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“Surely we all have a responsibility to care for our blue planet. The future of humanity and indeed, all life on earth, now depends on us.”

Sir David Attenborough

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