

LIVING CREATURES AND PETS

QUALITY AREA 2 – CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY



PURPOSE

This policy provides guidance for Sparkways services for the incorporation of living creatures and pets into the educational program, including:

- animals that exist within the natural environment of the service
 - animals housed on the service premises
 - animal brought into the service
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POLICY STATEMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Sparkways recognises that living creatures and pets provide children with valuable learning experiences, including:

- The opportunity to observe and learn about animals and their behaviour
- Some understanding of what it means to care for animals, always providing water, food and a clean cage
- Aesthetic and physical pleasure and amusement
- Opportunities to share their own knowledge and theories about animals, insects, birds and nature
- The opportunity to work through emotional and spiritual feelings when a creature is born, thrives, is sick or dies.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others attending the programs and activities of Sparkways, including during offsite excursions and activities.



RISK MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

The following potential risks and associated management processes have been identified in relation to living creatures and pets:

Potential Risks

- Children bitten
- Child knocked over
- Child scared/frightened
- Animal disease/hygiene
- Allergies to animals

Note:

Possible outside animals include: rabbits, guinea pigs, chickens, cats, dogs, birds, ducks, reptiles.

Possible inside animals include: rabbits, guinea pigs, small chickens, kittens, puppies, birds, small ducks, reptiles.

Risk Evaluation

Likely frequency/severity of incident:

- Child bitten – unlikely with fish, possible with other animals and therefore risk treatment procedures need to be specified for each animal group. This has potentially the highest severity should it occur.
- Child knocked over – unlikely with rabbits, fish, guinea pigs, birds, small ducks and reptiles, possible with cats and dogs depending on the size and freedom of movement of the animal
- Child scared/frightened – with a carefully supervised and monitored introduction of the child to the pet program fears should be significantly reduced. Furthermore, control of the animal will ensure that the child will not be put into a situation where they feel threatened.
- Animal disease/hygiene – provided procedures are followed minimal risk because:
 - All animals, birds or livestock kept on or about the premises are maintained in a clean and healthy condition
 - All housing used to keep the animals is maintained in a safe, clean and hygienic condition and in good repair at all times
 - All animals, birds or livestock present at the service are in good state of health and have had required vaccinations and health checks if appropriate
 - Children are encouraged to wash hands after handling
- Allergies to animals- allergies to animals or specific animals will be identified on application and selection of the animal will be determined taking into account this information. The safety and well-being of the child will always be our first priority.

Procedures to Address Risks

- Parents/Guardians to be advised about the use of living creatures and pets in the educational program prior to admission
- The Educational Program to be available at the centre, including where living creatures and pets are incorporated
- Prior to the introduction of the new animals the nominated supervisor will evaluate any specific risks and, if considered necessary, consults with their Area Manager to address any concerns prior to the introduction of the animal/s. If considered appropriate, expert advice can be obtained. Signed parental permission may also be considered.
- A formal complaint management process is available to deal with any issues or concerns with the pet program.
- All animals, birds or livestock kept on or about the premises are maintained in a clean and healthy condition

- All housing used to keep the animals will be maintained in a safe, clean and hygienic manner and in good repair at all times
- All animals, birds or livestock present in the kindergarten are in good state of health and have had required vaccinations and health checks
- Staff awareness of personal and child hygiene such as hand washing
- Restricted controlled access to animals
- Education of children by staff about pet handling
- Pet handling only occurs under strict adult supervision
- A provision for dealing with complaints
- Regular monitoring program
- Staff clean up after the animal in an appropriate and hygienic manner
- Caging/containment of the animals when not directly supervised

The risk of a child being bitten or knocked over poses the greatest concern to the service therefore the following safeguards will apply:

- All animals handled under the supervision of an adult
- One parent on duty at animal incursions
- Only children enrolled at the service are permitted to attend incursions and excursions (see Excursions and Special Event Policy)
- Larger animals are to be restrained at all times either by an adult or lead or the animal confined in a pen/cage
- Children taught basic animal handling skills prior to contact e.g. how to hold, staying calm, not to tease. If necessary, a qualified animal trainer may visit the service.
- Frequency of the animal at the kindergarten is controlled if necessary – if supervision is not available
- If there are any concerns about the temperament suitability of the animal, the animal is removed from the kindergarten until an independent assessment can be made.
- The animal is confined by cage or pen when in the centre and not directly involved in the program.



EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- seek feedback from people affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk (*Regulation 172 (2)*).



AUTHORISATION

This policy was confirmed by Sparkways on 08/12/2023.

REVIEW DUE: December 2024