

Free Kindergarten Fees Policy

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

PURPOSE

This policy is to provide clear guidelines to parents/guardians of Merri-bek Early Years Management services for:

- Free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- The setting, payment and collection of Late Collection charge
- The application of surplus funding with Merri-bek Early Years Management ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Merri-bek Early Years Management is committed to:

- Supporting the Victorian Government's Free Kindergarten initiative
- Increasing access to quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children
- Ensuring there are no financial barriers for families wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children
- Maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians.

SCOPE

This policy applies to Merri-bek Early Years staff and families with an enrolled child at a Merri-bek

Early Years service.

| RESPONSIBILITIES | Approved provider and persons with management or control | Service Coordinator and persons in day-to-day charge | Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff | Parents/guardians | Contractors, volunteers and students |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted | | | | | |
| Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the Nominated Supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kindergarten initiative (<i>refer to Definitions</i>) | R | √ | √ | √ | |
| Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted) | R | √ | | | |
| Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>) | R | √ | | | |
| Ensuring that any surplus funding is used for directly supporting the quality of the teaching and learning in the kindergarten program and/or attendance at the service, including vulnerable children and families not yet enrolled and/or towards the change management required for preparing for three-year-old expansion | R | √ | | | |
| Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted | R | √ | | | |
| Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system | R | √ | √ | | |
| Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system | R | √ | √ | | |

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| Ensuring that the Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>) | R | √ | | | |
| Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) | R | √ | | | |
| Reading the Merri-bek Early Years Management Free Kindergarten information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>) | | | | √ | |
| Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to the Merri-bek Early Years Management | | | | √ | |
| Complying with the service's <i>Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> regarding financial and other information received | R | √ | √ | √ | |
| Implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the approved provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE's Free Kindergarten initiative (<i>refer to Sources</i>) | R | √ | √ | √ | |
| Informing the approved provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service | | √ | √ | | |
| Referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the approved provider. | | √ | √ | | |

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

The Best Start, Best Life reform will help all Victorian children's dream even bigger through increased access to quality early childhood education. A critical part of the reform is Free Kindergarten, which will support access to two years of high-quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children. All families with a child enrolled in a funded kindergarten program are eligible for Free Kindergarten, this includes both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs.

Free Kindergarten supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by:

- providing a free 15-hour program to four-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- providing a free 5-to-15-hour program to three-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service (subject to the length of funded program offered)

Free kindergarten supports every Victorian child to get the best start in life no matter where they live. Research shows that play-based learning is a powerful way to support children's learning and development. Two years of early learning is a crucial part of their educational journey, these benefits last into the school years and beyond.

Regulation 168(2) (n) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that funded services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. Any voluntary parent donations and/or fundraising must comply with the Free Kindergarten subsidy guidelines and be responsive to the local community.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- Equal opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- National Quality Standard

DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy:

Early Start Kindergarten: A state government subsidy that provides a child free access to a 15 hour per week kindergarten program. To be eligible the child must:

- turn 3 years of age by the 30th April in the year of enrolment
- identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- the family has had contact with child protection services
- is from a refugee or asylum background

Free Kindergarten: A Victorian Government initiative providing free kindergarten programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in funded services.

Voluntary parent/guardian payment/donation: A voluntary payment/donation for items not directly related to the provision of the children's program. Explicit and written agreement from a parent is required for any voluntary payments. Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.

Late Collection charge: A charge that is imposed by Merri-bek Early Years Management when families are late to collect their child/children from the program

Merri-bek Early Years Management: Merri-bek Early Years Management is an organisation that manages and supports the Early Years Services.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- Best Start Best Life: <https://www.vic.gov.au/give-your-child-the-best-start-in-life>
- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au>

- Merri-bek Early Years Management's Constitution

RELATED POLICIES

- Complaints and Grievances
- Delivery and Collection of Children
- Enrolment and Orientation
- Excursions and Service Events
- Governance and Management
- Inclusion and Equity
- Privacy and Confidentiality

LATE COLLECTION CHARGE

Merri-bek Early Years Management in conjunction with the early years services reserves the right to implement a late collection of a child/ren charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child/ren. In these situations, the following procedure will apply:

- The qualified staff member will inform the parents/guardians that if it continues, Merri-bek Early Years Management will be notified and the parent will be charged a late fee.
- If after the reminder, the parent is between **10** and **20** minutes late, a fee of **\$5.00** for every **5** minutes, from the conclusion of the session will be invoiced by Merri-bek Early Years Management.

If the parent is over **20 minutes** late in collecting their child, the fee will be **\$10.00 for every 5 minutes**, from the conclusion of the session and will be invoiced by Merri-bek Early Years Management.

REPLACEMENT SECURITY PASS CHARGE

For services requiring a security pass to enter the building, all families with a current enrolled child/ren are required to have a security pass at all times.

To ensure the safety and security of our children, when a family loses/misplaces a security pass, the family is required to notify the service and then request a replacement security pass. The following procedure will apply:

- The Service Coordinator will inform the Finance Officer of the family requesting a new security pass and an invoice will be issued. Once payment is received, a new security pass will be issued to the family.
- The charge will be \$15.00 per replacement pass to cover the costs of ordering a new security pass from the supplier.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Free Kindergarten information for families

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Merri-bek Early Years Management on [Date]

REVIEW DATE: [DAY][MONTH][YEAR]

Attachment 1: Free Kindergarten Information for families

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

This investment will save families up to \$2,500 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program.

DE also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

2. What free kindergarten means at our service

Merri-bek Early Years Management has opted in to the Free Kindergarten initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (up to 15 hours per week) – **no parent fee**
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - **no parent fee**

Merri-bek Early Years Management has the following charges:

These include:

- **Late collection charge:** MEYM reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by MEYM.
- **Replacement security pass charge:** MEYM reserves the right to implement a replacement security pass charge when parents/guardians lose/misplace their security pass. This charge will be set at a level determined by MEYM.

3. Fundraising and voluntary parent payment/donations

While participation in fundraising/donation is voluntary, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.