

The Buzz



from Mitchelton Pre-Schooling Centre

Term 3 2020

News from the Committee

Wow, what a year it has been so far. It was so lovely to see kindy return this term, with some more normalcy. In a recent committee meeting, as I was listening to the teachers talk about what each group had been up to over the last couple of weeks, I couldn't help but smile. BUSH PARK PLAYS and walks to the train station were back!!! Amongst a year of uncertainty, it was so lovely to hear about such familiar events loved by children from previous years.

The kids have loved being back, building upon old experiences and experiencing new ones, as a large majority of them prepare themselves to start Prep next year. Some groups celebrated International PJ day by wearing their PJ's to kindy. All children enjoyed a reptile experience earlier this term, where they were able to touch different reptiles. This was loved by all and parents enjoyed seeing these photos communicated in various ways.

This year has been particularly challenging to make connections with other parents/families at MPC. To help MPC families to connect, Clair Perkins (WHS Officer on the MPC Management Committee) has organised another **park play**.



Challenges in the Secret Hide-Out.



Taking time to stop, look and listen.



All families from MPC are welcome to join Clair after drop-off for a chat or to bring younger siblings for a play, **10am Tuesday 1st September at Teralba Park**. Look for the MPC flag!!

Thank you to Lucy Harrison (Working Bee Coordinator) and all those who will be attending the upcoming working bee on Saturday 22nd August. Please let Chris know in the office if you would also like to attend this working bee. Many hands make light work.

Thank you for a fantastic start to Term 3, I hope everyone stays safe and continues to have a great term ahead.

Emma-Kate Clyburn (MPC Committee President)

News from the Director (Leanne Hunter)

"How are you going" continues to be a frequent conversation starter with everybody at the moment, with genuine interest in the response. We have been incredibly impressed with both children and parents with making adjustments. Flexibility and adaptability is the name of the game! Thank you parents for keeping your children at home when unwell and for keeping physically distant as you collect your child in the afternoons. There have been occasions when your child has been keen to show you something of particular interest, which is fine, however on most afternoons the collection of bags, a good-bye and walking out the gate has been quick and efficient.

This has prompted some thinking about the times when children are reluctant to leave particularly if they are having a great time. All parents are greeted from time to time with a negative response from their child when they would rather stay and play when told *it's time to go*. How we respond, both our words and body language, influence the child's next action. Being clear about whether the child has a choice in this instance or not, helps to clarify the way we give the message.

Parents have a choice: to say, *"okay you can stay or "yes, I know you'd like to stay but it's time to go."* Acknowledging that they're having a great time and want to keep playing is not in conflict with also saying that it is time to go. *"I can see you're happy and want to keep playing. It's great you're having such fun and now it is time to go home."*

'Messaging' and the importance of clarity with messages are now very familiar concepts to all of us. Children also benefit from clear, concise and consistent messaging with words and body language. It's worthwhile trying to put yourself in your child's shoes to think what message they've received with the words and body language we think we're projecting. The message we think we're giving isn't necessarily the message they're receiving. This is where clarity, not ambiguity, has significant impact.

As adults we all decide which battles we're going to take on at any particular time. Knowing your child and how they're likely to respond when something doesn't go their way can also influence your decision. If we use the example of leaving kindly when a parent arrives, avoiding the potential tantrum by saying you can stay longer may create a quieter, later exit, however the question is: Does this help with the long term learning that sometimes you don't have a choice. Coping with disappointment takes practise and is an essential component of building resilience.

Teachers and educators are on hand to reinforce your words. Some children may need time, practise and consistent messaging to adjust their behaviour. If it's a noisy exit, parents, at least know that they are working on the bigger picture of helping their child with learning that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Practicing seems to be a recurring theme in many of the articles in this newsletter. You will find information about:

- Executive Function Skills: what are they? Why are they important? How can they be developed?
 - Bush Park: the learning before stepping outside the gate and when we are there.
 - A parent and grandparent's perspective about Bush Park.
 - Noisy Miner: beginnings, endings and learning in between.
 - Dealing with disappointment: postponing and disappointment are a part of life and a great learning opportunity.
 - Building independence
 - Building strong foundations for learning.
 - Thinking about Prep.
- ...And much more!

The long awaited playground re-design is planned to begin (yet again) in the September holidays!

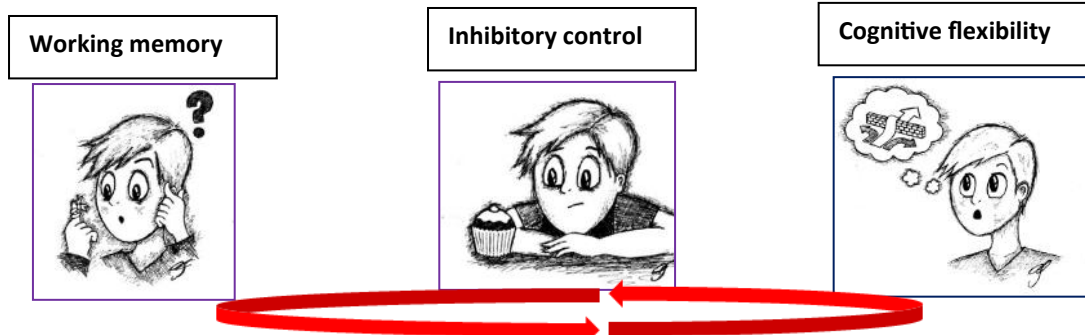


Executive Functioning

What is Executive Functioning?

An umbrella term used to refer to a variety of interdependent skills that are necessary for purposeful, goal-directed activity from learning to hold a crayon to engaging in more complex social play. (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p.116)

Elements of Executive Functioning



Working memory – the capacity to hold and manipulate information in our heads over short periods of time.

Inhibitory Control – the skill we use to master and filter our thoughts and impulses so we can resist temptations, distractions, and habits and to pause and think before we act – close links to self regulation.

Cognitive or mental flexibility – the capacity to nimbly switch gears and adjust to changed demands, priorities or perspectives. It enables us to apply different rules in different settings. (Cognitive flexibility includes problem solving, reasoning, planning, shifting)

How do Executive Function skills help children?

As adults, we prepare dinner while simultaneously helping children with homework and making notes about appointments we need to schedule for the week. We **focus** on our jobs when we need to and our families when they need us. We **remember** the phone number that our neighbour just gave us so we can write it down as soon as we find a pen.

We **take a deep breath**, rather than honk, if the car in front of us fails to move immediately when the light turns green. As adults, our **capacities to multitask**, to **display self-control**, to follow multiple-step directions even when interrupted, and to **stay focused** on what we are doing despite ever-present distractions are what undergird the deliberate, intentional, goal-directed behaviour that is required for daily life and success at work. (Shonkoff 2011)



MPC teachers and educators have been involved in a number of research projects over recent years and we have built our knowledge, skills and commitment to incorporate many possibilities for children to practise their executive function skills.

When children build their capacity to **think flexibly, remember, focus, self-regulate and make plans**, they will increase their ability to solve problems, make decisions, persist at tasks, recognise and correct mistakes, control impulsive behaviour as well as set goals and work towards them. **These skills will help them meet the challenges they will face at school and throughout their life.**

Children aren't born with these skills—they are born with the potential to develop them.

Our goal is to create self-regulated learners who:

- Use memory to recall goals, tasks, processes and recall prior knowledge;
- Use inhibitory control to stay focussed on tasks and to collaborate successfully with others;
- Use flexible thinking to be creative, to generate new ideas, to problem solve and to respond to new situations in positive ways.

Opportunities abound in the dramatic play games children develop to practise executive function skills including:

- ⇒ remembering the ideas in the game from one day to the next
- ⇒ planning what they need and what to collect/make/build first
- ⇒ listening to others, sometimes shifting their thinking to follow someone else's idea enabling the play to continue.

Possibilities also abound in musical experiences, transitions, routines and everyday play such as:

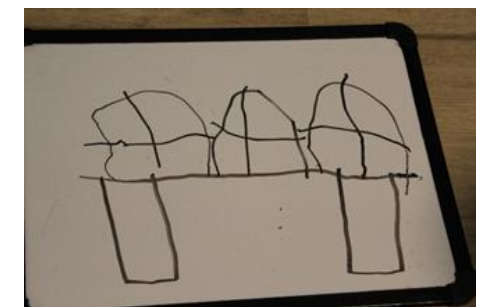
- Guessing what the museum item, hiding under the material, could be. Waiting for all other children to have a guess too and accepting that their guess could be wrong. (inhibitory control/cognitive flexibility)
- Recalling what happened in stories. (memory)
- Playing movement songs which involve a pause such as *Statue Game*, *Around and Stop*, *My Pigeon House*. (inhibitory control/self-regulation)
- Singing *Open Shut them* the opposite way with actions different to words. (cognitive flexibility)
- Acting out stories (e.g. *Goldilock and the 3 Bears*)— remembering what happened, changing the story to a different ending or from a different perspective such as if the pig was big and mean. (memory, cognitive flexibility).
- “*Baa baa white sheep*” – singing in your head when the sheep hides away. (inhibitory control)
- Using different musical instruments to denote different animals and moving as that animal as the sounds change. (memory, inhibitory control)
- Planning and saying which shape they will land on before jumping. (cognitive flexibility)
- Drawing plans before building/making/construction. (cognitive flexibility)
- Remembering a ‘code’ (3 numbers) before entering through the ‘boom gate’ doorway created by a child who is also the code decider. (memory)
- Regulating their bodies by sitting still while waiting for a child to call their name to transition to outside play. (inhibitory control)

The possibilities are endless!

Useful links for further information:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-executive-function-skills-for-life-and-learning/>

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/video-building-core-capabilities-life/>



In recent weeks many of the groups have been journeying out the front gate and into the community. In the lead up to these excursions the children have discussed and practiced walking with a partner, staying together, listening to teacher instructions and staying safe when navigating footpaths, roads, station stairs and level crossings. Most importantly we are learning to help each other to remember what to do. We have practiced and then practiced some more!

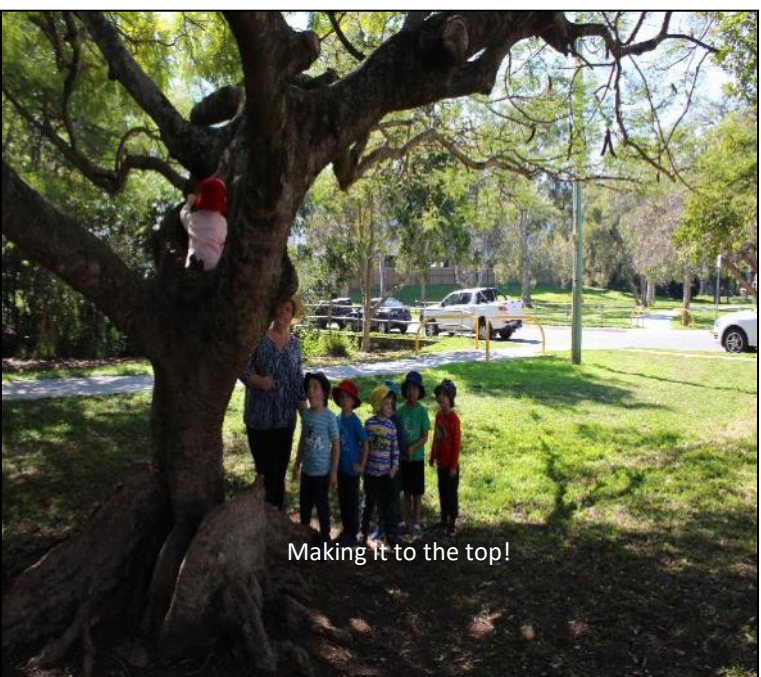
In Unit 1 the ultimate destination to walk to has been the Bush Park- a green zone between McConaghy Street, Blackwood Street and the creek. Here the group has felt the freedom of just running! The space is not large, yet offers opportunities for exploration, observation, wondering, imaginative play and physical challenge. There are spaces for children to sit quietly and ponder, to watch birds, insects and lizards go about their day, or to watch the sunlight hit the water in the creek, in the hope of seeing fish, turtles or eels swim by. The creek has given us opportunities to think about rubbish management, discuss the quality of the water and the health and safety of the animals living there. The trees provide wonderful shade and climbing opportunities. Children are learning to assess their own risk and challenge themselves, whether tree climbing, balancing on the windy tree roots, or walking along the bouncy branches of the 'Secret Hide-out Tree'. We have made collections while there, categorizing leaves, seed pods, sticks and barks by size, shape, and colour, and are learning a little about the trees themselves. We have built houses, campfires and running race finish lines with the abundance of sticks found on the ground thanks to those trees. We have noticed animal homes in tree hollows, between tree branches, on leaves and dug in the ground in hidden spots, and imagined who could live there. We have researched and learnt the names of 5 different species of birds spotted near the creek. We have played hard but most importantly we have planned our return!



This is our Base Camp



Watching for wildlife.



Making it to the top!

Bush Park: what a parent and grandmother have to say!

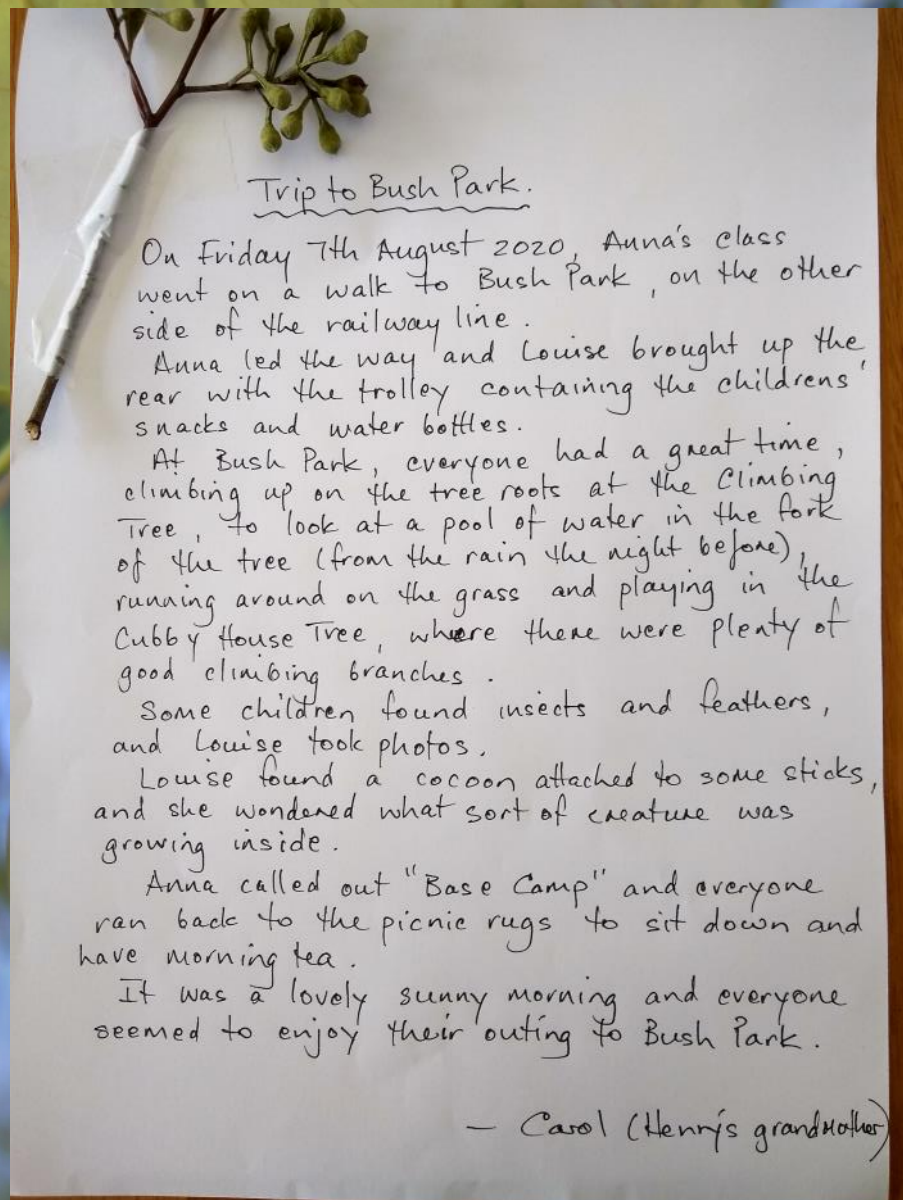
I have been privileged to spend a few mornings this term with an awesome group of children (and their dedicated teachers and educators) when I volunteered to assist with a walk and a play in the affectionately named "Bush Park".

The trip was a few hundred metres on paper - a kilometre at best. And yet, to our children, it was so much more. So very much more.

We shared the excitement of the intended route in the kindy room via discussion of the intended path on Google Maps (a particular interest for my GPS-mad son). We made choices during the walk around personal safety and boundaries (so important for our budding explorers). We experienced together some new and unanticipated aspects of the journey (The boom gates! A curlew!). No detail of the experience was too small or insignificant to warrant attention.

The rush to be the first to spot the "needle" water bug camouflaged against the twigs reminded me that little things (bugs and minds) matter. The zeal with which the children approached their important job of helping the BCC educators "clean up" the creek gave me (as a parent) so much pride in seeing the care our kids have for their community and ultimately, their world. And the beaming grin shining out of my little boy's face when he proudly introduced me to his class will stay with me forever. Sometimes, it takes a global pandemic to remind you of exactly what is important in life.

Belinda (Ben's mum)



If you could pile all the disappointments you have personally encountered in your lives so far, the pile would be high! If you put them into piles of small disappointments and big disappointments, I would be thinking the piles would look different. Hopefully the small disappointment pile was larger than the other large one. Recovering from small disappointments is a fairly quick thing and we have to remember a big disappointment can take a very long time and need greater support. Children have to learn early in life too, about disappointment, and as adults, we are there to guide them about the size of a disappointment. *Is this a small disappointment or a large disappointment to overcome?*

When yesterday was a disappointment and today isn't better, remember there's always a tomorrow, so make it something to look forward to and smile.

Disappointment evolves from a problem or a dilemma. How we deal with these problems is how we deal with disappointment. Think how you deal with things, what works, what doesn't? Resilience and how we frame it and learn to rebound is the key. When teaching children about disappointment, firstly, it is very important to acknowledge the problem that needs to be dealt with and overcome. Whilst you may consider it small, every problem with a young child can be enormous because of their limited life experience.

A disappointment that occurred at Kindy last week was not going to Bush Park as planned. At our morning discussion it was definitely a talking point. We acknowledged the change of plans, the fact that morning teas had been packed separately and that plans we had made the day before weren't going to happen, reminder notes that the children had drawn and taken home were now obsolete and holding the hand of the walking buddy **was just not going to happen!**

Our discussion on this morning lead to the word POSTPONE. "Does anyone know what that word could possibly mean?" Moments of silence followed and then words started to flow... "Can't do it", "Can't go", "No" and then the words that cheerfully came out of one child's mouth "We can't do it today, but we can do it another day". **Yes, that is how we looked at this disappointment, our plans are changed today but we can do it another day!** In discussing this disappointment, we acknowledged the problem and together worked out how we could re-frame thinking and feelings about being disappointed.

Throughout our days we often have brief moments of disappointment, sharing, building something and it falls down, sticky tape hasn't stuck the 2 boxes together, the person I like to play with isn't at kindy or wants to play with someone else, waiting too long, forgetting to bring something from home (buzz groups/library bag/a hat) ...the list is endless. It is important for children to practise 'not dwelling' and moving on from small disappointments. Overcoming these issues is a teachable moment! As adults, we can listen and talk briefly, then plan an alternative possibility and model moving on.

To solve these moments, again we acknowledge the problem and feelings of frustration or disappointment and in our discussions we expand the child's thinking to consider not just the individual child's feelings but another's feelings as well. It is important for children to realise that there are often other stakeholders involved in these moments of disappointment.

You as parents are often one of the stakeholders involved in 'disappointment'. Plans change at home, a planned play in the park, being able to buy something at the shops that was on the list before leaving home...the shop didn't have it in stock or your child's size. Good words to use are: *it won't happen today but it may happen another day; they haven't got it now but we will check another day.* Children need to learn that recovering from disappointment is not often a quick fix and that replanning, waiting or considering other options is an important part of the process. A short conversation, with clear solutions to consider and sticking with the decision is the best way to solve a problem. Being firm but fair and showing that you understand their feelings and remind that there is always another time is a great way to support your child's resilience.



What a delight it was to notice a small Noisy Miner chick on the ground in the garden. We spent time observing the bird. Noticing its physical features which were made all the more clearer to us by the bird's position on the ground.

Time was spent watching the habits of the small bird and noticing the parent birds feeding it. Children sat and chatted to each other about what they noticed. Some decided to build a block wall to protect it.

While, we were all so engrossed and interested in the small creature, we had questions and concerns. "Why was the small bird on the ground and not in the nest?" We noticed it had soft downy feathers but no stronger feathers for

flying. Could it fly? After spending the morning observing the bird, the group was keen to check on it again during the afternoon. Although, sadly we found the small bird did not survive. We held a discussion and wondered why the small bird died.

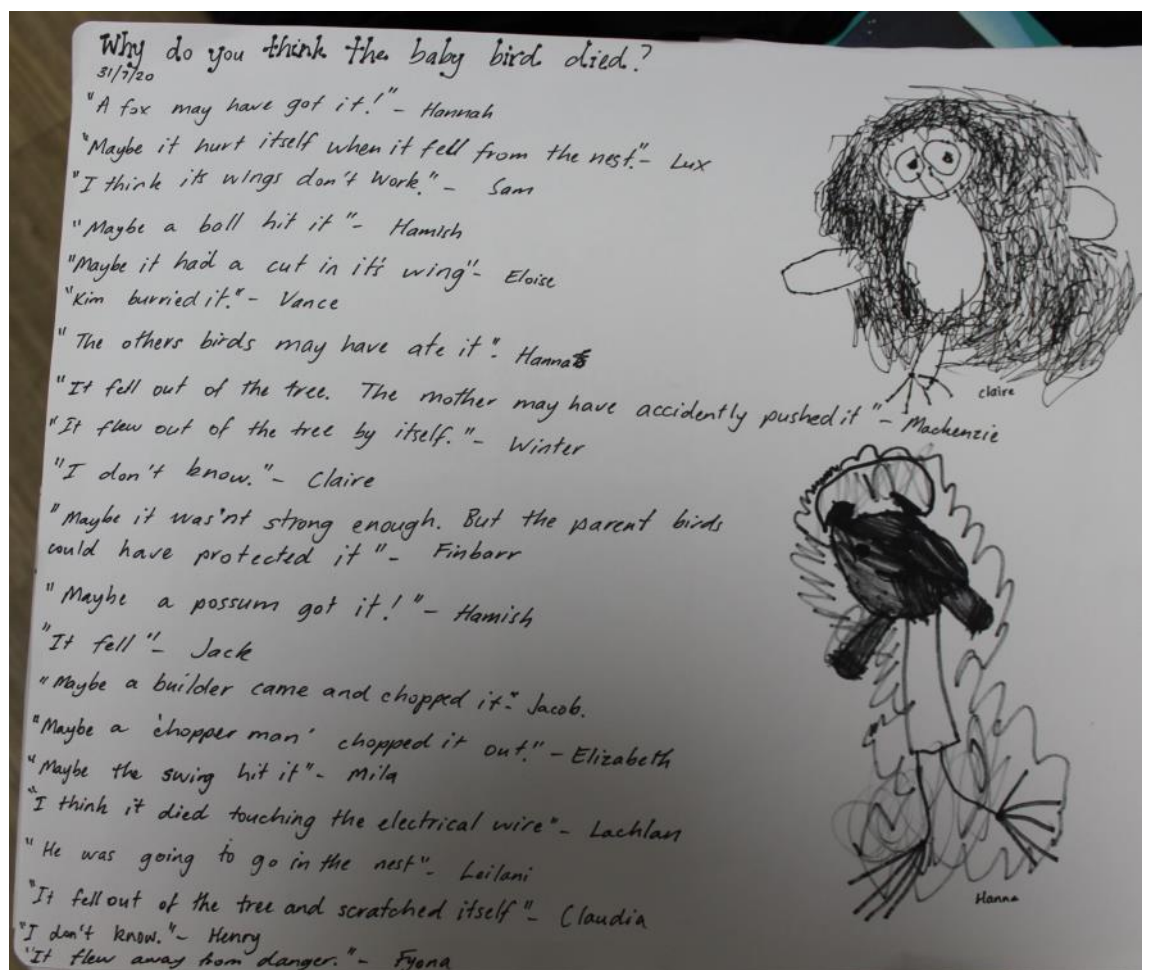
It was difficult for some children to understand why the bird had died and they had many questions. We decided to do some further research to answer these questions "Why was the baby bird on the ground?"

After researching we discovered:

- Small birds are called a fledgling;
- Fledglings have feathers covering their bodies;
- Birds may fall out of their nests if there is overcrowding in the nest;
- Fledglings may try and fly but are not strong enough to get back up in the tree;
- If you notice a baby bird on the ground and the parent birds are not feeding it you can call a vet or the RSPCA.

By doing this research, it gave us knowledge as to what to do if we notice a fledgling on the ground in future. In our group, we have been labelling thoughts (Red thoughts) "The bird died" or "It got killed" (Green Thoughts) "This often happens with birds", "Next time, I know who to call for help" and "I am more informed in what to do".

As adults we can often shelter children from the harsher, more difficult and less desirable aspects of life including death. However these moments, where the attachment may not be strong, can provide great opportunities to learn, explore emotions and develop understandings about life-cycles.

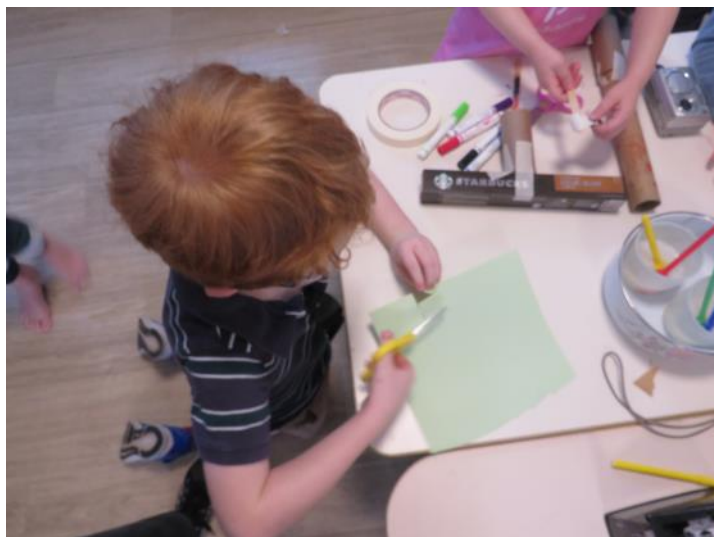


There are many wonderful benefits of fostering independence in young children including increased self-esteem, fine motor control, sense of responsibility, having a go, being persistent and learning from failure and disappointment. Building independence in your child is also good for you. The more your child can do on their own, the less you need to do for them!

Repetition is the key to building independence. Practice, practice, practice. Children need many trials to be successful. Before you jump in and offer help, take a step back and watch. Your child may be able to complete the task successfully on their own. You can help by providing enough time for your child to process and recall what they need to do, and time to complete the task. Sometimes this may mean you need to plan extra time to get out the door, so that you don't end up dressing them or putting shoes on because it's quicker for you to do it and now you are in a hurry.

Many parents have commented on how well the children are able to carry their belongings into kindy since they have been saying goodbye at the gates and practising walking in and doing their unpacking jobs independently. This is something the children started practising at the beginning of term 2. At the beginning they needed more adult support and verbal reminders, but by practising and taking the time they needed to work through the tasks, now they can recall what to do and when they are not sure, they check the visual list on our door to work out what to do next. Practice, practice, practice!

We've also noticed that when belongings are forgotten and left at home it mostly seems to be because Mum forgot! Occasionally Dad forgot, but mostly we hear, "Mum forgot my hat, water bottle, bag etc". Taking responsibility for packing their own belongings is an important part of building confidence in their own ability to manage their day. Sometimes things do go wrong or get forgotten. If children forget something it is important for them to feel disappointment and move on. If you forget your hat, the logical consequence is to play in the shaded areas. Forgot your library bag? That's ok, you can remember for next week and choose a book then. If you have no water bottle today, you can ask for a spare one. Bouncing back and managing when something goes wrong or is forgotten builds resilience and problem solving skills. Great life skills to have!



According to John Marsden in his book *"The Art of Growing Up"*, parents need to start working with teachers and schools to shape a resilient, adaptable and creative generation optimistic about taking on the joys and challenges of adulthood, and who believe the world can be changed for the better. He's adamant that parents are the single most important influence over the kind of adults young people become. If a child's life is built on good, healthy, strong foundations they can manage any of life's difficulties that come along and enjoy the highlights, but if your life is built upon weak, feeble, rocky foundations, everything will collapse given the slightest pressure.

Here are his tips for parents which may be particularly useful given the challenges 2020 has brought to our lives.

1. *Give children space- let them roam, let them be bored. Don't over plan their lives. Cut back on after school activities*
2. *Keep away from those ghastly soulless, sterile playgrounds and shopping malls. Look for real places, wild spaces.*
3. *Be an adult – say no to your children at least once a day. If the role of adult in your family is vacant, then one of your children will fill it and it won't be pretty.*
4. *Don't take up all the space – if you are dominating and loud, your children are highly likely to become passive, lacking spirit and personality and/or sullen.*
5. *Believe about 40 per cent of the dramatic stories your children tell you of the injustices, corruption and satanic practices happening at school.*
6. *Teach them empathy – When they win a sporting match, remind them that their jubilation was only possible because someone else – the losers – have been made to feel awful.*
7. *Help them develop language skills – Don't finish their sentences. Don't correct them if they mispronounce a word. They'll work it out sooner or later. Ask open-ended questions.*
8. *Make sure they have regular jobs at home – And that those jobs are done to a consistently high standard.*
9. *Don't whinge about the miseries of your adult life – A lot of children now are fearful about growing up because their parents paint such a grim picture.*
10. *Teach them to be very wary of people who know absolutely everything – The colour of truth is always grey.*

Snippets from Before & After Kindy Care

Rainy afternoons at After Care often mean altering our program and being flexible. Recently we had a sudden downpour that sent us all back up from the sandpit to the shelter of the veranda where we thought we would stay dry. How wrong we were! The jumpers and shoes that we carefully had lined up also got wet and we had wet bottoms while we ate afternoon tea. The children's resilience and ability to adapt was proven in the giggles coming from the bathroom while they looked at their wet hair in the mirror as they washed their hands. (Hayley)



It's really wonderful to see how much the children have grown this term. One morning, one of the boys was concerned he didn't have enough blocks for his tower, so another boy suggested "why don't we put our blocks together and make one big one together". They all worked on their building together for the rest of the morning. (Tahni)

The Before and After Kindy Care program has always responded to community needs. More recently, some families who had previously booked their child in permanently have adjusted their lives to fit in with kindy session hours. This is enabling some families to take a casual place when required. We are pleased that we can be flexible to continue to support families.

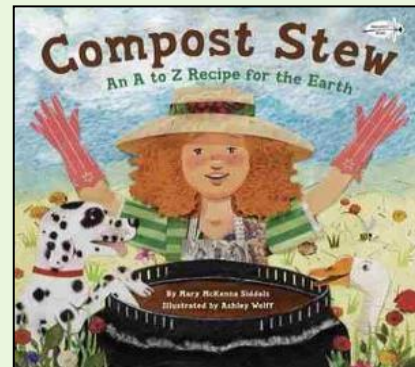


Sustainability: we love Compost!



The children are used to sorting their rubbish and adding their fruit and vegetable scraps to the compost bin or worm farm. This is a real-life everyday sustainable experience. Understanding why we sort the rubbish is just as important as how. Being a part of the process of making the compost, adding fruit and vegetable scraps, egg shells, shredded paper and leaves before turning the compost bin engages children. They are better able to internalise the information we share with them. It makes their learning real and meaningful.

The book *Compost Stew* provides specific information about what goes into making compost which prompted another question, *How long does it take for the “ingredients” like banana skins to rot and decompose?* A great question to investigate!



The De-Composing Experiment

Some children are experimenting with different materials- banana peels, a plastic yoghurt cup and a plastic bag, to see if they decompose and how long it takes for them to change into compost. This experiment also affords an opportunity for children to watch for a long time.

Thinking out loud and wondering together is a great tool and especially when we ask questions like...

- ‘What do you think will happen?’
- ‘What do you know about that?’
- ‘What do you remember about....?’

Children’s wonderings and questions are great prompts for other sustainable investigations. Other questions individual children and groups are investigating include:

What do you do with worm wee?

How do you make paper?

Why are there dead bees in the playground?

Noticing increased activity with the stingless native bees and wondering why.

Useful links!

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73sGgmZoMBQ&vl=en> *Plastic Planet*’ by Natracare is a short 6-minute animated film which talks about ways children can help to keep The World and our environments ‘happy’.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IP0Ch1Va44> *How is paper made?*
- <https://g.co/kgs/3n5Hvb> *When Goldilocks went to the house of the bears* (song)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aol1JOa1rBo&mc_cid=9e93cd8ba5&mc_eid=330d920c59 Nina Black reads *No Way Yirrikipayi!*
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G85frXnwEko> A useful video showing Motor Skill Development and Hand Writing which may be useful for parents in understanding some of the foundational skills.
- <https://www.learnwithmyfantasticfingers.com/video-improve-fine-motor> hands-on developmental activities to improve children's posture, fine motor & prewriting skills, develop attention.

Thinking about Prep

As much as I feel I'm still getting used to this year, this is the time when many parents are thinking about next year. Some parents have had discussions with their child's teacher to gain further insights to support their decision-making about whether their child is ready for school or needs more time. Others have met with school administrators and teachers and are already making plans. In past years, MPC has hosted a Parent Information Evening with a focus on **Moving to Prep**. We generally include discussions about:

- School readiness and transitioning.
- Continuity between kindy and prep.
- What happens at the beginning of the prep year? (Age appropriate pedagogy).
- Literacy and Numeracy: How can I help prepare my child?
- Tips for helping your child get organised!
- Helpful links.

This is the year of making adjustments with sharing information! Below is a little teaser with more information to follow via email from your group teacher. Please remember that we are happy to discuss with you how your child is going at kindy and we can be great sounding boards for challenges you may be dealing with at home.

We also invite parents who have had children go to Prep in the last couple of years to share their tips and insights. Please talk with your child's teacher or email leanne@mpc.net.au.

This is a *To Do list* devised by Janette (Unit 2/3 day group teacher) for her own children which she found very helpful.

