

SUSTAINABILITY



What to look out for at your centre:

Inside

Toys/resources:

Sustainable craft materials—being aware of where the product has come from, who has produced the material and what will happen to the final product.

- Buy toys/furniture that are wooden, fabric, cardboard or metal over plastic and, when possible, locally made. Consider what is likely to break and how easy it will be to repair. Make quality and durability more important than cost when it comes to purchases.
- Try to fix or replace broken or missing parts of toys or puzzles rather than replacing them. There are companies that will make new puzzle pieces.
- Purchase books and music that reflect respect for the environment.
- Provide heuristic play opportunities for babies by collecting treasure baskets full of natural materials. There are two great articles on www.littleacornstomightyoaks.co.uk that provide more information on items that can be included.

Why are sustainability issues important for Playcentre?

Starting a vegetable garden or planting fruit trees and bushes are often the first steps a centre will take towards teaching sustainability. The lessons learned from taking care of plants encompass so many different areas of learning and are so valuable. However, the idea of sustainability can be broadened so that we are offering our children an environment where responsible stewardship of the earth is promoted in all aspects of the daily running of Playcentre.

Looking at energy use, cleaning products, purchasing and use of resources, and the products we promote through fundraising can be evaluated. Even traditional areas of play like playdough and collage can be considered: is it okay to produce dough from a food source when the final product cannot be re-used or composted? Would clay or daily baking be a more sustainable approach? Sometimes it is hard to think about changing traditional areas or ways of play because they are so familiar to us.

If we focus on what we want our children to view as valuable and let their futures be our guide then some changes may become obvious. Becoming more sustainable may lead to other benefits as well, in terms of cost and manageability of resources within the centre.

Playcentre families are great at practical changes and most have a strong environmental focus already. We are sure Playcentre can lead the way as a sustainable and environmentally focused early childhood option.

Centre activities

Go on excursions that provide children opportunities to learn more about the local environment or places that care for the environment

Fundraising with sustainable practices in mind (selling worm castings, seedlings etc.)

Promotion of libraries (toys and books) to centre families

Encourage swapping of toys, clothing and books

Create an awareness of surrounding geography; names of specific local mountains, rivers or lakes. Provide opportunities where environmental vocabulary is used and children can see their place in the land

Encourage an awareness of topical environmental issues through discussion or sharing of books

Promotion of local environmental events like tree plantings, or rubbish clean-up days

Administration/ Management:

- Promotion of waste free lunch boxes by encouraging reusable containers, providing containers to collect compostable materials, and creating a culture where recycling becomes a habit.
- Recycle ink cartridges or refill them, reduce paper use, promote paper free correspondence.
- Use recycling bins in centres and offices.
- Purchase food that has been locally produced, has little packaging, is organic or has been bought in bulk; consider embedded water and transportation.
- Share ideas with families – through the children and through newsletters.
- Look at switching to eco-friendly cleaning products and those you can buy in bulk. Remember to follow the recommended ratio for ones that require dilution.
- Consider installing insulation, efficient heating, and energy efficient light bulbs.
- When needing to make repairs to the building, consider environmentally friendly building materials. Utilise sustainable design principles, e.g. sky lights, light-coloured paints, passive heating/cooling.

outside

- Natural play areas that reflect what is important in the local environment.
- Outside areas that promote care for local birds, animals, and insects by providing them with food, shelter and water.
- Landscaping with plants that are suitable for the environment.
- Encourage children to dress appropriately so outside play is an option in all weather conditions.
- Model care for outside areas by collecting rubbish, caring for plants and fixing equipment.
- Growing plants that are of use (fruit, herbs and vegetables for eating, flax for weaving and making dye, willow for weaving etc).
- Provide areas with natural materials for play; pine cones, sawdust, shells, stones, clay etc.
- Collect rainwater in tanks and encourage conservation of use.
- Use of solar, wind and water to demonstrate energy (windmill, solar oven, solar shower, water wheel).

Ideas for trips

Local conservation centres

Refuse stations

Local rivers, lakes or beaches

Wildlife parks or animal rescue centres

Second hand shops or resource recovery centre