

Early Learning Service Closure Policy

Protocol Statement

Uniting Early Learning is committed to:

- Ensuring all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children attending the service
- Maintaining the safety and protection of children, staff and families by;
 - Providing clear and consistent guidance in times of local emergencies that can involve a pre-emptive and/or voluntary closure of the service
 - Supporting the right of all children to feel safe, and be safe, at all times
 - Fulfilling duty of care obligations under the law by protecting children from any reasonable, foreseeable risk of injury or harm.

Executive Summary

Business continuity is essential and Uniting Early Learning endeavors to operate services without disruption. In the case of emergency and/or when a pre-emptive closure is unavoidable, all stakeholders will be informed as soon as practicable. Timely communication ensures a clear understanding of the relevant procedures to be undertaken. Safeguarding the children in our care in the event of a critical incident is paramount. A risk assessment will be undertaken before any closure decisions are made.

Current Environmental Context

All emergency and voluntary closures are approved by the Approved Provider and /or Authorised Delegate.

The emergency closure of a service/program will be enforced for any of the following circumstances:

- Bushfire-at risk register (BARR) are required to pre-emptively close if they are located in a Bureau of Meteorology district where a code red fire danger rating day has been determined
- Any situation that requires a service premise to be locked down
- Any situation or event that poses an imminent or severe risk to the persons at the service premise
- Where a principal of a local school, in a rural area, informs of a planned closure due to an extreme weather forecast
- In the case of a utility breakdown/disruption
- When an unexpected absence of staff does not allow the correct educator to child ratios to be maintained and there is no option available to allow the service to operate within legislation
- Severe outbreak of a notifiable infection/disease.

Child Care Subsidy period of emergency

The Australian Government Department of Education may declare a Child Care Subsidy (CCS) period of emergency in parts of Victoria or Tasmania for an event that:

- Affects a widespread area
- Has a severe impact on the lives of a significant number of people in that area, and
- Prevents children from attending a service or may make attending dangerous.

All of these conditions must apply for a CCS period of emergency to be declared.

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Support during a CCS period of emergency

During a period of emergency, can waive the gap fee for families if:

- A child does not attend care
- Your service is closed as a direct result of the emergency.

Gap fee waivers do not apply for partial closures or if children have attended part of the day.

During a CCS period of emergency, families in affected regions won't have to use their annual allocation (42 days) of allowable absences.

Children who live or attend a service in an affected region will get extra allowable absences for the duration of the CCS period of emergency.

These absences will be automatically applied in the Child Care Subsidy System if we declare a CCS period of emergency.

Other Service Closure days:

- Professional learning and planning days
- Annual leave of a Family Day Care educator
- Closure of service during end of year/ Christmas period (if the service is only open for a partial day at the commencement of the closure, families will only be charged the gap fee for the period of time the service is open)
- Any other day determined and approved by the Approved Provider
- Building renovation occurring in a room or area occupied by children.

Reference/Sources

- Fee Policy
- Emergency and Evacuation policy
- Emergency Management Plan
- Child Safety policy
- Safe travel policy
- Delivery & collection policy
- Code of conduct policy
- Children's Services Act 1996
- Children's Services Regulation 2009, R31, 73, 111, 155, 157, 160
- Early Years Management Policy Framework Part 1 and 2 Department of Education and Training 2016
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010: S3 (3), 168
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulations 75,
- Kindergarten funding guide Department of Education and Training (Vic) 2018
- National Quality Standard, Quality Area 6
- Tasmanian Licensing Standards for Centre Based Child Care Class 5 (October 2014)

Authorisation

This policy was adopted by Uniting Early Learning on: 20/11/2023
Amended 17/01/2024

Review

This policy is to be reviewed by: 20/3/2025

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Roles and Responsibilities of the Service Closure Policy

Approved Provider or Authorised Delegate

- Evaluate the reasons for any closure of the service (ie, emergency, child free days, etc)
- Communicate with families at the beginning of the year about the days and times the service will operate and any known closures (refer to display templates)
- Determine when an emergency requires the closure of the service in order to protect children, staff and families
- Monitor the status of the emergency and determine when it is safe to re-open the service to staff, children and families
- Where appropriate, ensure regulatory and funding bodies are notified of any unexpected and emergency closures
- In the case of a CCS period of emergency, determine if the gap fee will be waived for the full days (not partial) the service is closed or child/ren can not attend during the notified period of emergency.

Responsible Person/Educators

- Request approval from the Approved Provider about planned closures
- Provide families with written information and reminders about upcoming voluntary closures
- Inform the Approved Provider immediately when an emergency arises
- Conduct a risk assessment before recommending an emergency closure
- Ensure that all staff, children and families are notified of the closure as soon as the decision to close has been made
- Implement and practice emergency and evacuation procedures (refer to *Emergency and Evacuation Policy*)
- In the case of a CCS period of emergency, if directed, waive the gap fee for the full days (not partial) the service is closed or child/ren can not attend during the notified period of emergency.

Parents

- Read and comply with this policy.

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Emergency closure notification procedures

Emergency: An emergency is any event which has an impact on the ability to care for or educate children under supervision. Unlike individual injuries, accidents, or incidents, emergencies are usually major events requiring special consideration and careful planning to ensure the safety of children and adults. Examples of potential emergencies are:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bushfires 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal fires and smoke
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Severe storms, flooding and internal flooding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pandemic and communicable diseases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earthquake/Tornado 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chemical hazard or gas leak
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violent incidents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bomb threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead or asbestos contamination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faulty sewage system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate or unsafe water supply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rodent, roach, or vermin infestation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power outages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff sickness making it impossible to maintain correct ratios
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accidental damage or vandalism to the setting making it unfit for purpose 	

Each service will have an Emergency Management Plan (EMP) providing details of appropriate local responses to emergencies.

Should an Emergency arise which requires the voluntary closure of the service the following procedure will be implemented.

Developing Emergency Situation Prior to Service Opening for the day

- 1) A decision should be made as early as is possible on whether the centre will open for the day. In making this decision the following steps should be followed:
 - a. Approved provider in consultation with the Responsible Person discuss the possibility of closure, taking into account all information gathered such as health warnings or alerts, advice of extent of affected areas, notifications from other sources ie. local radio, local councils and government departments, closure of businesses/ schools in the area and obtain advice regarding possible hazards and health consequences.
 - b. If it is decided to close the service, the Responsible Person (or authorised delegate) is required to inform all staff not yet at the service of the closure and contact any emergency services and inform the Emergency Management Coordinator at the Departments regional office.
 - c. The Program Manager (or authorised delegate) will contact all families to explain the situation and advise them that the service will be closed.
 - d. A notice will be displayed on the entrance door to the premises, if a staff member has attended the premises
 - e. To cover staffing cost commitments, fees will be charged as normal for closure due to emergency situations.
 - f. If a Child Care Subsidy period of emergency has been declared, families will not be charged the gap fee for the full-service closure days.

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Sample message or notice to families for a service closure

It is important this information is written down prior to calling or providing information to families so a consistent message is delivered

Dear Families,

A situation has occurred today that requires/has required our service to close to ensure the safety of children, families and our staff.

Details are included below for your information.
(delete this line if using as phone script)

At what time did the situation occur, or when did we become aware of the situation?	
What happened?	
What did children see?	
What staff were present?	
Were emergency services involved?	
What was the outcome of the event?	
Are any children or staff requiring medical treatment?	
Will the service be operating tomorrow?	
Where can you get more information?	
Contact number for queries:	
Please note: Fees will still be charged to cover staffing costs	

We appreciate your support and understanding during this time.

If we can assist you in anyway, please let us know.

Kind regards

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Sample message or notice to families during a CCS period of emergency

It is important this information is written down prior to calling or providing information to families so a consistent message is delivered

Dear Families,

The Australian Government Department of Education has declared a Child Care Subsidy emergency due tocommencing onDue to this emergency situation, the service will be closing today.

To ensure the health and safety of all children families and staff, we request you collect your child/ren as soon as possible.

You will not be charged the gap fee during the period of time determined by the Australian Government or for the period of time:

- The service remains closed due to the emergency or
- Your child/ren are unable to attend the service due to the emergency.

We will contact you to advise when the service will reopen.

Further information can be found here

[Help in an emergency - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

We appreciate your support and understanding during this time.

If we can assist you in anyway, please contact xxxxxx on

Kind regards

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