**Off-Site Play Area Policy**

**Play Environment**

Our childcare centre is located on a peaceful, 5-acre natural property designed to support children’s development through:

* Multiple **natural play centres**.
* A wide variety of **play-based learning activities**.
* Spaces for **quiet reflection and downtime**.

Children engage in daily outdoor learning and exploration within these dedicated play zones, supported by a curriculum that fosters creativity, inquiry, and well-being.

**Off-Site Forest Exploration**

Occasionally, we may plan curriculum extensions that involve **guided exploration into the forested area** located directly behind our property.

**Forest Access and Safety:**

* Access to the forest is through a **gate at the rear of the property**, which always remains closed.
* The gate is **only accessible during scheduled, educator-led off-site visits**.
* These visits are planned **intentionally and in advance** to align with specific learning objectives.

**Safety and Supervision**

Safety is our top priority during all off-site activities. When accessing the forested area:

* **Risk assessments** are completed before each visit.
* Educator maintains **required staff-to-child ratios** and conducts **regular head counts**.
* Children are **briefed on safety expectations** and boundaries before entering the forest area.
* A **first aid kit, emergency contact list, and mobile phone** are always carried.
* Children wear **vests and lanyards** for added visibility and safety.

**Parent Communication and Consent**

* Parents are given as much notice in advance when a forest exploration is planned.
* Consent forms are not required as forest visits are a fundamental part of our program at Growing Pines. However, families may choose to keep their children home to avoid participation in our off-site forest explorations if they wish to.
* Additional notice may be provided depending on the nature of the activity or time of year.

**Educational Value**

Exploring the nearby forest allows children to:

* Develop a deeper connection to nature.
* Engage in **inquiry-based learning**.
* Participate in **environmental education** and build **resilience**, **teamwork**, and **self-regulation** through physical and imaginative play.

All off-site experiences are extensions of our child-centered curriculum and are designed to enrich the children's sense of wonder and discovery.

**6. Policy Review**

This policy is reviewed **annually** or immediately following any incident or safety concern during an off-site visit. Updates are made to reflect current best practices and licensing requirements.