TAMAR VALLEY STEINER SCHOOL
LAUNCESTON-TASMANIA

Bush School Handbook

2026

378a St Leonards Road,
St Leonards, Tasmania,
7250

'Not all classrooms have four walls'

In 2012, our fledgling Rainbow Playgroup started regularly taking children into the bush at Trevallyn.

In 2016 we became Tamar Valley Steiner School. Bush School was immediately incorporated as a regular part of the teaching week for all classes.

Since 2016 we have run many hundreds of nature based learning activities at Trevallyn. We have a multi-faceted focus on outdoor learning at Tamar Valley Steiner School. One of the core values of our school and parent community is to develop a deep connection to nature and a reverence for the natural world. Steiner Education sees outdoor learning as fundamental to the healthy development and education of the child. Bush School is a wonderful setting that helps us support through our Steiner approach the emotional, social and intellectual development of each child.

Our Bush School Education Program

Tamar Valley Steiner School's bush school, provides a valuable nature connection and outdoor learning experience within the surrounds of our local, natural bush for all of our students from Kindergarten to year 6.

The bush school is an educational experience for children held exclusively outdoors. Whatever the weather, children are encouraged to take the lead in playing, exploring and learning in a bush or natural environment.

Forest schools have been operating successfully in Northern Europe for over 50 years. Bush Kinders are also becoming more common on the mainland in Australia, including Mt Barker Waldorf School in SA and Westgarth Kindergarten in Victoria.

The ideals of the forest kindergarten approach align with the Steiner curriculum by giving children the opportunity to experience and experiment at length with the natural elements and forces of nature. Natural objects are endlessly varied and provide limitless options for creative play. Children are given opportunities to learn about risk and making decisions. The natural world gives them the opportunity to develop their physical strength and motor skills in enhanced ways. Navigating uneven ground and undergrowth, spontaneously finding balancing logs, building shelters from natural materials and finding tiny unique treasures. Bush School also draws on the work of the Wilderness Awareness School, who have extensively studied and taught indigenous ways of learning about nature across the world. Children's connection to nature is strongly influenced by the enthusiasm and depth of connection of their adult role models. Teachers and assistants actively learn alongside children; constantly noticing and leading the children into further exploration of their environment. Children play stalking and hiding games, wonder at the marks left behind by animals, collect different parts of plants and become aware of the movements and sounds of birds, insects and animals around them. They are actively encouraged to overcome their fears of nature and negative reactions to different textures and different creatures. This is role modelled by the Teachers and Assistants and these situations are treated as opportunities for learning and experimentation, rather than situations of fear or anxiety. Understanding dangers and limitations is a key aspect of learning at Bush School.

Learning to be safe and developing a healthy respect for danger is integral to every bush school outing. It is established through strong role modelling and boundaries set through the safety messages (see p.8-11).

We do however have a very firm line on risk and every bush school activity is guided by our attention to the many possible risks. How we assess and manage those risks is detailed in this handbook. All staff and helpers on bush school have regular training and are familiar with the protocols and safety rules in this handbook.

We hope you find the information contained in this booklet useful and welcome any feedback you would like to provide.

Bush School Location

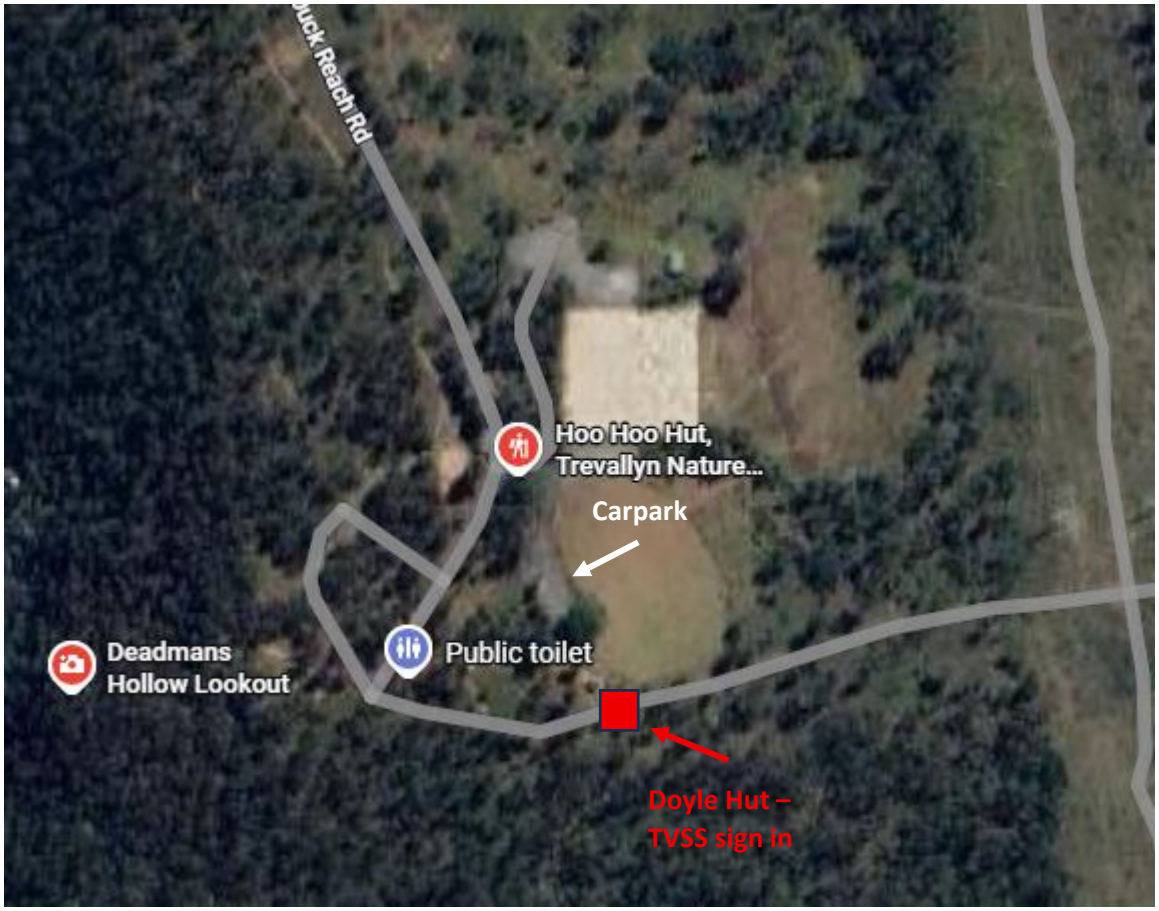
Unless otherwise advised, the Village Green located in Trevallyn Nature Recreation Area will be the normal drop off and pick up point.

Trevallyn Nature Recreation Area

From Launceston's West Tamar Hwy (A7), take the turnoff to Lake Trevallyn. Follow signs to Village Green/Hoo Hoo Hut.

This multiple-use park caters for many recreational activities, both land and water based. At the Village Green/Hoo Hoo Hut day use area, there are two wonderful picnic huts. The Village Green has an excellent surface, especially for ball games and kite flying. The D.T. Doyle Hut has accessible picnic facilities including sheltered picnic tables and BBQ. Nearby, the Hoo Hoo Hut has sheltered picnic tables and BBQ. Toilets are located between the two picnic areas. (Parks and Wildlife Tasmania http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/)

Images below show the carpark and sign -in location for our students K- 3, with students in Classes 4 -6 dropped a small walk down the hill from the carpark at the remainder of what was the Hoo Hoo Hut location.



Staff

While the students are at Trevallyn Nature Recreation Area their care will be provided by their usual bush school staff. In the lower primary, this is often their Class Teacher, but as students grow older, they might have a specialist outdoor teacher. Depending on student numbers and additional needs, additional staff may be allocated. There is a minimum of two staff for each primary school class. For Kinder students, the supervision ratio will 1:10 or lower, for Primary students, it will be 1:15 or lower. These ratios have been set for the full range of activities children may engage in at Trevallyn as listed in this handbook. Any activity the teacher wishes to undertake that is not listed will require a sperate risk assessment and hence a review of staff numbers required.

Bush School Drop off & Collection of Children

Morning Bush School
Staff will be present from 8.30 am.
Please do not leave your child with staff until 8.30am as they will not be ready to take duty of care until then.

TERM 1, 2026 BUSH SCHOOL – UPDATES WILL BE PROVIDED DURING THE YEAR VIA AUDIRI

Kinder

Drop off:	Dropped off by parents at the Village Green, Duck's Reach Road in the Trevallyn Reserve between 8.30 and 8.50 each Wednesday
Kinder Pick up:	Picked up by parents from the Village Green at 12pm or Returning to the AP after kinder care program on the bus with Prep staff.
AP Kinders	Bus leaves Trevallyn at 12:00 pm

Prep, Class 1 and 2/3

Drop off:	To be dropped off by parents at the Village Green, Duck's Reach Road in the Trevallyn Reserve between 8.30 and 8.50 each Wednesday
Pick up:	To be picked up by bus at 12.00 pm and returned to St Leonards and can be collected at normal finish of day, 3pm.

All day Bush School – weeks 2, 5 and 8 unless notified otherwise
Classes 4, 4/5, 6

Drop off	To be dropped off by parents at the Hoo Hoo Hut location, a short walk down the hill from the village green.
Pick up:	Pick up by bus at 2.00pm and returned to St Leonards by 2:45 and can be collected at normal finish of day, 3pm

Any temporary changes to this routine must be approved by the Principal and any adjustment must be consistent with all expectations and requirements of this policy.

Preparation
Bush school is all -weather. In extreme weather conditions, bush school will be cancelled. Nevertheless, the weather conditions that children experience at Bush School are more extreme than while at school. This is partly because the site is more exposed because of its location on high, hilly country, and also because there is no indoor space where they can retreat. Careful preparation for Bush school is required to ensure children have what they need to stay warm, hydrated and safe.

For arrival at Bush school, both children and parents are reminded that children need to:

- Arrive at Bush school or school wearing appropriate clothing (long pants, sturdy shoes, and a hat). Please carefully read further detail on page 7 for key information and Protective Clothing Policy and ensure you have purchased any necessary items before your child's first Bush School.
- Apply sunscreen before the session.
- Bring a full water bottle, fruit and a healthy snack for morning tea, a packed lunch, and a healthy snack for afternoon tea. For Prep children (and in the instance that Kinder children are transported to school), lunch and afternoon tea will be eaten on return to school. Please note children may get very hungry at Bush School.

Cancellation
Bush School runs in most weather conditions so children can experience nature across the seasons. However, if the weather is likely to become unsafe, sessions may be cancelled, modified, or moved to an alternative location.

From the start of 2026, a site reconnaissance has been conducted and all bush school staff inducted into sites within the Trevallyn reserve that are more suitable when weather conditions are close to the thresholds that might trigger a cancellation. Staff will choose locations and activities that minimise the children's exposure to adverse weather in those conditions. Staff will also monitor conditions and make decisions about whether conditions are as forecast and if early collection is needed at any point.

Cancellation is triggered when forecasts (as monitored through the **Bureau of Meteorology**) predict:

- temperatures of 34°C or above (including "feels like"),
- very cold conditions (maximum for the session feels like below 8°C),
- sustained heavy rainfall,
- hail warnings,
- electrical storm activity,
- strong winds (at or above "strong breeze" levels),
- flood warnings affecting access or site safety,
- Fire Danger Ratings above Moderate,
- Total Fire Bans, or
- poor air quality (AQI above 100).

Staff monitor forecasts in the week leading up to a session, with final checks conducted the afternoon prior and again on the morning of Bush School. Decisions are made in consultation with school leadership, prioritising student and staff safety. Families will be notified of cancellations or alternate arrangements via the school messaging system—generally by 6:00pm the evening before, or by 8:00am on the day if conditions change. Parents are asked to check communications before leaving home and remain contactable during Bush School hours in case conditions require early relocation or collection.

Procedures for Drop off and Collection of children

Parents are responsible for:

- **Reading and being familiar with the handbook**
- **Ensuring children have appropriate clothing as per the School's protective clothing requirements and sufficient food and water**
- **Bringing relevant issues to the attention of staff.**

- **Supervising their child/ren who are not enrolled in Bush School, such as siblings of a child attending bush school.**

Drop off

Staff are responsible for:

- Ensuring the attendance sheet is located at the Bush School site.
- Checking that the clothing of children on arrival at Bush School meets the guidelines provided in the Protect Clothing Policy (more detail below) and understand that if they don't, that staff will need to take the necessary steps to ensure that your child has access to appropriate clothing (more on the school's procedure for Ensuring appropriate Protective clothing below).
- Following the school's attendance procedures to ensure non-attendance is followed up.
- Checking the attendance sheet after all children have arrived (approximately 20 minutes after the commencement of the session) that children who are signed in are in attendance. If required, sign children in noting that a staff member signed.
- Reminding parents or authorised persons of the procedures for the delivery and collection of children from Bush School.

Parents are responsible for:
Adhering to the following delivery procedure:

- **Sign the child in using the attendance sheet and record the actual time of arrival.**
- **Place child's bag/backpack with change of clothes and full water bottle at the meeting point**
- **Ensure that the children are dressed as per the Protective Clothing guidelines.**
- **Ensure the staff are aware your child is in attendance.**

Note: If on arrival, Bush School is not set up on site, this means that the session has been cancelled (for example, due to extreme forecast weather or staff absence).

Collection

Staff are responsible for:

- Ensuring the attendance sheet is located at the Bush School site.
- Notifying parents by Audiri if there is a new location for collection because, for example, the Bush School group has been forced to change locations due to unforeseen safety reasons.
- Ensuring parents sign their child out before releasing duty of care to parents.
- Ensuring that they can maintain supervision of the children which might include requesting parents or authorised persons to speak to them at another time, or to make an appointment.

Parents are responsible for adhering to the following collection procedure:

- **Sign the child out using the attendance sheet and record the actual time of departure.**
- **Ensure the staff are aware you have collected your child.**
- **Be responsible for the supervision of the child once signed out, while still at the Bush School Site**
- **Collect the child's belongings (bag, water, hats)**
- **Remove child's waterproof clothing and place in dirty clothing bag.**
- **Being mindful of minimising distraction of supervising staff.**
- **Refer to school's general protocol for drop-off and collection of children, and notification of changes to collection by authorised person and late collection.**

Protective and appropriate clothing & footwear

It is important that Bush School participants wear appropriate and protective clothing and footwear which:

- allows children to move freely and undertake activities such as climbing, balancing, running, puddle jumping.
- keeps children warm and dry in cold/wet weather.
- protects children from the damaging effects of the sun, UV rays in warm weather and high UV conditions.
- prevents sunburn, bites, scratches, and stings (even in warm weather, long sleeve tops and long pants are recommended - this clothing should be loose fitting and light)
- Where possible is made from natural fabrics which allow the clothing to breathe and is comfortable against the skin.

In the case of footwear, it should keep feet and toes covered and has a flexible and gripped sole to allow children to climb and balance on uneven surfaces.

The following table provides examples of recommended clothing and unacceptable clothing:

	Warm Weather	Cold Weather / Rain
Recommended clothing and footwear	Light loose fitting long sleeve tops and long pants, broad brimmed hat*, closed toe shoes	Base Layer: Thermal underwear top and bottom* Mid-Layer: Long pants and top Top Layer: Warm jumper (and a second lighter jumper on colder days) Outer Layer: Waterproof and windproof jacket and waterproof pants (K- 3) Footwear: Waterproof shoes/boots (e.g. gumboots), warm socks* Other: beanie, waterproof gloves*
Not recommended	Short sleeved tops, long skirts or dresses, shorts	Skirts, dresses (incompatible with waterproof pants), cotton clothing*
Unacceptable clothing and footwear	Open toe shoes, sandals, thongs, crocs, singlet tops	Non-waterproof clothing unless worn under waterproof clothing

Highlighted items are considered 'essential' and must be provided or the school will follow up using the steps outlined on page 9 to ensure the children have them if attending Bush School.

*Avoid cotton in layer next to skin and top layers as it does not have good insulating properties. Clothing maintains warmth by trapping warm air near skin. When cotton gets wet, it ceases to insulate because the air pockets in the fabric fill with water. Wet cotton will also not wick moisture away from skin and so will feel wet and cold. Thermal, wool and fleece are good alternatives that will maintain insulating properties and wick moisture, keeping children warm even when wet.

Change of clothes: All children participating in Bush School are required to bring a change of clothes and footwear as these may become wet and muddy. It is recommended that the spare clothing include:

- Spare top and bottoms of appropriate thickness/weight for the weather on the day
- Spare underwear (and singlet in winter)

- 2 pairs of socks
- 1 pair of gumboots (it is not recommended that gumboots are worn at all times due to the restriction of movement they impose)
- Waterproofs: Light rainproof suit worn over clothing, which includes a jacket with a hood, and pants or overalls, which zip up over clothing.

Managing for Warmth to avoid Hypothermia/Exposure

During a bush school session, educators regularly check children for wet clothing. Wet clothing will be changed as soon as practical.
Educators will engage children in active movement during cold or wet weather.
Educators will carry a kit to ensure that children can be kept warm in case of emergency.

Steps School will take to ensure students have appropriate clothing

The school has a duty of care to ensure that children do not become unwell due to exposure to the elements. Bush school involves a much greater degree of exposure. The following are the steps the school will take to ensure that children are protected from the elements. This is an important element of our risk and wellbeing management.

Proactive:
Before the first Bush School and wet Bush school of the year:

- The school will notify parents of all hot weather and wet or cold weather gear requirements for Bush School or excursion participation through the following means:
  - Parent Handbook listing clothing requirements
  - Reminder 1 week prior to the first bush school of the year.
  - Reminder 1 week prior to cold and wet weather change (possibly first week of term 2)
  - Reminder the Friday before the first Bush School Day or the first cold or wet bush school day.
- HATS: The school regularly notifies parents that hats are required at school every day during Term 1 and Term 4
- WET/COLD WEATHER GEAR: The school will notify parents that wet weather gear MUST be packed in students' bags on the Monday prior to the first wet bush school of the year.
  - For Students in K-2, this is a jacket and wet weather pants plus at least one warm jumper
  - For Students in 3-6, this is at least a rain jacket plus at least one warm jumper
- Class teachers on the Monday before the first wet bush school of the year will check that children have suitable wet weather clothes packed in their bag.
- On Monday pm Teachers will alert admin if a student does not have suitable wet weather gear and School Admin will text parents who have failed to pack wet weather gear to ensure it is packed for the following day, restating that it is a requirement to attend Bush School.

If Student does not have essential appropriate clothing for Bush School participation on Wednesday, the school's management process will be:
First Incident:
- The school will keep spare hats, wet weather, cold weather gear for one-off lending to children (Teachers to ensure they have spare jackets and hats packed)

- Admin will send a reminder message to parents of protective clothing requirements. A small hire/washing fee will be charged to parents for the clothing borrowed that day and parents will be reminded of what happens on the second incidence.

Second Incident:
- If a child does not have suitable wet weather gear on a wet day, either for morning bush School parents will be asked to take the child home, or for afternoon bush school parents will be contacted to collect their child.
If they are unable to be collected or the parent declines to collect the child/take the child home this incident will be treated as if a subsequent incident.

Subsequent incidents:
- On subsequent failures to pack expected gear the school will stock new hats, synthetic fleece jumpers, rain jackets (and pants for younger children) that will be disbursed and billed to parents.

Bush School Safety Messages

General Bush School Safety

Bush School is held in a public space with public access. It provides a natural environment where everything changes. Bush School has been carefully planned and comprehensive risk assessments completed however the nature of Bush School means we will encounter situations we have no control over. Bush School is an opportunity to develop children's ability to be safe and know how to access help when out in the general community.
Our key safety messages will be:

- Always play where you can see a teacher or helper.
- Don't touch or pick up animals and insects without the help of a teacher or helper.
- Do not approach or pat dogs unless with a teacher or helper.
- Don't speak to stranger unless you are with a teacher or helper.
- If you feel unsafe, go and find a teacher or helper.
- Ask a teacher or helper if you need to go to the toilet.
- Ask a teacher or helper before you climb a tree.
- Carry and play with sticks in an appropriate and safe manner.
- Don't go near water unless a teacher or helper is supervising.
- No picking or eating any parts of plants or things found in nature.

Emergency Evacuation Safety

If we need to evacuate from Bush School, we need to have familiar routines in place to safely and calmly evacuate:

- When the teachers indicate, children need to quickly assemble near the teachers.
- Children are instructed to listen for their name and answer clearly and loudly if called.
- Follow directions given by the teacher.
- Staff will evacuate all students to the Village Green where the buses will pick the children up and return them to the school campuses.
- In case of immediate danger Emergency Services will be called and details of the situation communicated

Stick Safety

Sticks are one of the most interesting pieces of nature for the children and they can't resist picking them up and playing with them. We will be handling and playing with sticks at Bush School. We will be teaching the children the safest way to do this, including:

- No hitting people with sticks
- Always drag a large, long stick behind you when walking
- No directing sticks at others
- No throwing.

Dog Awareness & Safety

Children are instructed to do the following:

- Stand still if a dog comes running towards you. Ignore the dog, no eye contact and keep your hands open by your side.
- If a dog knocks you over, curl up into a ball.
- Never approach a dog by yourself, ask and approach with a teachers or helper
- Always ask the owner before patting a dog
- Only pat below the collar not head.
- Wash hands after patting a dog.

Tree Climbing Safety

Bush school will be the perfect place for climbing trees and may be something we do regularly. Climbing a tree can build confidence and coordination, problem solving, skills and strength. Children perceive climbing as fun and can strive to climb to the highest point and test their abilities. It's our job as Bush School staff to support children to climb safely and help them make decisions about risk and teach them strategies to make their own safe choices.
An extract from Kidsafe "Tree Climbing" publication states the following:
"Children should be encouraged to climb safe trees. Playing outside in a tree gives them direct contact with nature". We aim to support our children to do this by following the rules outlined below:

<u>Tree climbing rules</u>

- Teachers and helpers together with the children will choose a suitable tree to climb.
- A suitable tree:
    - Has low branches to easily start climbing;
    - Has strong branches – approx. 15 cm in diameter are best for climbing.
    - Position of tree proximity from hard surfaces, buildings, fences etc.
- Children's clothing will be checked to make sure that loose or flapping clothing does not create an additional hazard.
- Children will not take any objects or ropes up the tree with them.
- Children only climb tree after the above risk assessment has been done and while a teacher or helper is supervising.
- The teachers or helper and children will choose the maximum climbing height.
- The teachers or helper and children will choose the maximum number of children to climb in the tree.
- The teachers or helpers will give verbal support and encouragement but will not lift children onto a higher branch.
- The children will have 3-point contact at all times for example 2 feet and a hand or 2 hands and a foot.

Hygiene

While at Bush School, hygiene messages are the same as when at School, but we use different methods to clean our hands. At Bush School the children have water and anti-bacterial hand wash. The children will be encouraged to wash their hands before eating and after toileting. The children will thoroughly wash their hands when returning to school.

Spider/Snake Awareness & Safety

Bush School is held in a natural environment, and we will come across living creatures. We will use our experiences in Bush School with living creatures to educate the children, develop their knowledge and understanding. Snakes are more active from September to April, teachers and helpers and children will be more aware at this time.

- Teachers and helpers and children will be aware of possible habitats such as long grass, hollow logs near water and rocks or in sunny spots and be cautious or avoid these
- Leave snakes and spiders alone.
- If they encounter a spider and snake
    - Move away quietly and calmly.
    - Tell a teachers or helper.

Stranger Safety

Bush School is conducted in the local community and in public parklands. We will encounter new people or "strangers" and at times we will communicate with them. We would like to use our experiences at Bush School to teach children about being safe around new people.
Our key messages to children are:

- Play near teachers and helpers – you should be able to always see and hear a teacher or helper.
- Do not approach or talk to a new person without a teachers or helper
- If you feel unsafe, quickly go, and find a teacher or helper. Use a loud voice if you need help.
- Never take anything from a stranger and never follow a stranger.
- Look after your friends and tell a teacher or helper if you think a friend needs help.

Fire Safety

Fires are fascinating for children and provide another avenue for children to experience the elements and learn about their natural environment. At times, children will participate in fire-making and tending during Bush School. At all times that a fire is lit, a teacher or helper will stay with the fire to supervise the children.
Our safety messages about fire are:

- Always keep a safe distance from the fire, observing the marked area around the fire (a circle of sticks or similar will mark a zone around the fire that the children must not enter unless they are older children who have been given permission by staff to light and/or manage a fire)
- Move cautiously while close to the fire.
- All burning sticks are to stay in the fire.
- Use extra caution if wearing highly flammable materials.

Water Safety

Water features are abundant at Bush School, during the wetter times of the year, surface water collects in pools, deep puddles and there are also dams. Children will get wet as they play and

experiment with water, teachers and helpers will ensure that children are wearing their waterproof clothing before they go near water and closely monitor children for wetness in colder weather.
Our safety messages about water are:

- Make sure a teacher or helper is supervising you near water.
- Make sure you are wearing appropriate waterproof clothing before you play in water.
- In colder weather, avoid lots of splashing and walking in deep water so that clothing doesn't get wet.

References

Snake Safety www.chw.edu.au/poisons/bites_stings.htm
Stranger Safety http://www.safety4kids.com.au