

EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA CODE OF ETHICS

PREAMBLE

“Wise moral decisions will always acknowledge our interdependency; our moral choices are ours alone, but they bind us all to those who will be affected by them. So deciding for yourself what’s right or wrong does not mean deciding in isolation (Mackay, 2004, p.242).”

This Code of Ethics provides a framework for reflection about the ethical responsibilities of early childhood professionals. Following a national process of consultation, principles emerged which are indicative of the values we share as early childhood professionals in Australia. The Code is intended for use by all people who work with or on behalf of children and families in early childhood contexts.

In developing this second edition of Early Childhood Australia’s Code of Ethics, the national working party was mindful of changes in the knowledge base of early childhood that have occurred over the last decade. New research has allowed significant changes in understandings to emerge that reposition children as citizens with entitlements and rights. Increasingly, children are seen as competent and capable and able to participate in the negotiation of their learning and social experiences. Additionally, societal and environmental changes at the local, national and global levels impact on children and families with consequent implications for our work. In recognition of the impact of globalisation and global sustainability, this revised Code identifies ethical responsibilities to work with children and families in order to address global issues locally.

Just as the world has changed for children and families, so it has changed for professionals who work with them. The notion of lifelong learning, reflective practice, researching with children, new methods of documenting and assessing children’s learning, and collaborating across traditional service and discipline boundaries are examples of contemporary requirements for early childhood professionals.

Inherent in this Code is the understanding that children learn within their family and community groups, bringing rich knowledge, a diversity of experiences and identities to their learning. Socio-cultural theories have moved our focus beyond individual children’s development to highlight the importance of social contexts to children’s learning and development. As children participate and learn in their communities they in turn influence those communities. Early childhood communities ought to be spaces and places where practices such as responsive listening can build connections and relationships which sustain and advance individual and collective wellbeing.

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Early childhood professionals have a strong history of advocating on behalf of children and their families. This revised code builds on this tradition by making explicit the ethical responsibility to take action in the face of injustice and when unethical practice occurs.

This code is not intended to, and could not possibly provide easy answers, formulae, or prescriptive solutions for the complex issues early childhood professionals face in their work. As an aspirational document, it does provide a basis for critical reflection, a guide for professional behaviour and principles to inform individual and collective decision-making.

These values underpin the principles in this Code of Ethics:

- *Respect*
- *Democracy*
- *Honesty*
- *Integrity*
- *Justice*
- *Courage*
- *Inclusivity*
- *Social and cultural sensitivity*
- *Education*

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In this Code of Ethics the protection and wellbeing of children is paramount and therefore speaking out or taking action in the presence of unethical practice is an essential professional responsibility.

I. In Relation to Children, I will:

1. Act in the best interests of all children.
2. Respect the rights of children as enshrined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1991) and commit to advocating for these rights.
3. Recognise children as active citizens participating in different communities such as family, children's services and schools.
4. Work with children to help them understand that they are global citizens with shared responsibilities to the environment and humanity.
5. Respect the special relationship between children and their families and incorporate this perspective in all my interactions with children.
6. Create and maintain safe, healthy environments, spaces and places, which enhance children's learning, development, autonomy, initiative, self-worth, dignity and show respect for their contributions.
7. Respond to the special rights of children and families with additional needs.
8. Acknowledge the uniqueness and potential of all children, in recognition that early childhood is important in its own right.
9. Acknowledge the significance of children's cultural and linguistic identities.
10. Work to ensure young children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, economic status, family structure, lifestyle, ethnicity, religion, language, ability, culture, or national origin.
11. Acknowledge children as competent learners, and build active communities of engagement and inquiry.
12. Honour the child's right to play, as both a process and context for learning.
13. Respond to the socio-cultural nature of children's learning and development and acknowledge cultural and linguistic rights.

II. In Relation to Families, I will:

1. Listen to and learn from families, in order to acknowledge and build upon their strengths and competencies, and support them in their role of nurturing children.
2. Assist each family to develop a sense of belonging and inclusion.
3. Strive to develop positive relationships based on mutual trust and open communication.

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4. Support partnerships with families and engage in shared decision making where appropriate.
5. Acknowledge the rights of families to make decisions about their children.
6. Respect the uniqueness of each family and strive to learn about their culture, structure, lifestyle, customs, language, beliefs and kinship systems.
7. Develop shared evaluation and assessment practices of children's learning and communicate this in ways that families understand.
8. Maintain confidentiality and respect the right of the family to privacy.
9. Acknowledge that each family is affected by the community context in which they operate.
10. Be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of children and families and respond in ways that empower and maintain the dignity of those children and families.

III. In Relation to Colleagues, I will:

1. Encourage my colleagues to accept and adhere to this Code and take action in the presence of unethical behaviours.
2. Build collaborative relationships based on trust, respect and honesty.
3. Acknowledge and support the diversity, personal strengths and professional experience, which my colleagues bring to their work.
4. Make every effort to use constructive methods to resolve differences of opinion in the spirit of collegiality.
5. Share and build knowledge, experiences and resources with my colleagues.
6. Collaborate with my colleagues to generate a culture of continual reflection and renewal of best practices in early childhood.

IV. In Relation to Communities, I will:

1. Learn about the communities that I work within and enact curriculum programs, which are responsive to those contexts and community priorities.
2. Connect with the services and agencies within the communities that support children and families.
3. Acknowledge the connectedness of local, national and global communities of children and families in order to promote shared aspirations for all children's health and wellbeing.
4. Advocate for the development and implementation of laws and policies that promote child friendly communities and work to change those that interfere with child and family wellbeing.
5. Utilise knowledge and research to advocate for universal access to a range of high quality early childhood programs for all children.
6. Work to promote community understanding of how young children learn in order that appropriate systems of assessment and reporting are used to benefit children.

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V. In Relation to Students, I will

1. Afford professional opportunities and resources for students to demonstrate their competencies.
2. Acknowledge and support the diversity, personal strengths, professional knowledge and experience, which students bring to the placement.
3. Model professional best practice for students.
4. Know the requirements of the student's individual institutions and communicate openly with the representatives of that institution.
5. Provide ongoing constructive feedback and assessment that is fair and equitable.
6. Implement strategies that will empower students to make positive contributions to my workplace.
7. Maintain confidentiality in relation to students, staff members and curriculum programs.

VI. In Relation to my Employer, I will:

1. Support workplace policies and working conditions that are fair, non-discriminatory and are in the best interest of children and families.
2. Support and promote ongoing professional development within my work team.
3. Adhere to lawful policies and procedures and when there is conflict, attempt to effect change through constructive action within the organization or seek change through appropriate procedures.

VII. In Relation to Myself as a Professional, I will:

1. Base my work on contemporary perspectives on research, theory, content knowledge, early childhood best practice and my understandings of the children and families with whom I work.
2. Regard myself as a learner who undertakes critical self-study, continuing professional development and engages with current curriculum developments.
3. Seek and build collaborative professional relationships
4. Acknowledge the power dimensions within professional relationships.
5. Act in ways that advance the interests and standing of my profession.
6. Work within the limits of my professional role and avoid misrepresentation of my professional competence and qualifications.
7. Mentor new early childhood professionals.
8. Advocate in relation to issues that impact on my profession and on young children and their families.

VIII. In Relation to the Conduct of Research, I will;

1. Recognise that research includes my routine documentation and investigations of children’s learning and development as well as more formal research projects undertaken with and by external bodies.
2. Be responsive to children’s participation in research negotiating their involvement taking account of matters such as safety, fatigue, privacy and their interest.
3. Support research to strengthen and expand the knowledge base of early childhood, and where possible, initiate, contribute to, and facilitate such research.
4. Make every effort to understand the purpose and value of proposed research projects and make informed judgments as to the participation of myself, colleagues, children, families and communities.
5. Ensure research in which I am involved meets standard ethical procedures including informed consent, opportunity to withdraw and confidentiality.
6. Ensure that images of children and other data are only collected with informed consent and are stored and utilised according to legislative and policy requirements.
7. Represent the findings of all research honestly and use the information in the best interests of children and families.

DEFINITIONS

In this Code of Ethics, terms are given the following meanings:

Children – A. child between the ages of birth and eight years of age

Families – The people who have significant care responsibilities for and/or kinship relationships with the child.

Early Childhood Professional – A person who is employed to work with children and families in formal care and education contexts.

Communities – Groups of people who identify as having shared values and intentions such as family groups, classroom groups, religious groups, ethnic groups, kinship groups.

Employer - An individual or organisation which employs early childhood professionals

Student – A person undertaking study at a secondary or tertiary institution.

The Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics (2006) was developed by a national working party consisting of Lennie Barblett (Convenor), John Bucknell, Sandra Cheesman, Margaret Clyde, Lyn Fasoli, Catharine Hydon, Anne Kennedy, Linda Newman, Lois Pollnitz, Gilian Styles, Louise Thomas and Christine Woodrow.

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