

The Code of Ethics: A guide for everyday practice

Lennie Barblett, Catharine Hydon, Anne Kennedy



About Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia actively promotes the provision of high-quality services for all young children from birth to eight years and their families, and supports the important role of parents. Early Childhood Australia is also the national umbrella organisation for children's services and a leading early childhood publisher.

About the Series

The *Research in Practice Series* is published four times each year by Early Childhood Australia.

The series aims to provide practical, easy to read, up-to-date information and support to a growing national readership of early childhood workers. The books bring together the best information available on wide-ranging topics and are an ideal resource for children's services workers and others interested in the care and education of young children.

Series Editor	Nick Craven
Edition Editor	Jenni Connor
Graphic Design	Marie Lake
Photographs	Andrew Sikorski

Thanks to Early Childhood Australia Tasmania Branch for their contribution to the production of this book.

Invitation to authors

If you are interested in writing for the *Research in Practice Series* or any other Early Childhood Australia publication, please contact the Publications Section for further information on the preparation of manuscripts and for a copy of the guidelines for contributors.

Membership, publishing and general enquiries

Early Childhood Australia Inc.
PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602
T: (02) 6242 1800
F: (02) 6242 1818
Sales line: 1800 356 900 (freecall)
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au
publishing@earlychildhood.org.au

© Copyright 2008

All rights reserved by
Early Childhood Australia Inc.

Material herein must not be reproduced
in any form without the written permission
of Early Childhood Australia Inc.

Registered for posting as a publication—
PP232100/00036
ISSN 1440-5148
ISBN10 1-921 162-21-X
ISBN13 978-1-921162-21-3

Printed by Goanna, Canberra

Contents

- ii About the authors
- 1 Introduction
- 2 What is the ECA Code of Ethics?
- 3 The importance of the Code of Ethics
- 4 Values in the Code of Ethics
- 7 What are ethical dilemmas or challenges?
- 9 Process for using the Code of Ethics
- 10 Ethical commitments in the Code of Ethics
- 24 Building ethical practice and awareness using the Code of Ethics
- 25 Conclusion
- 26 References and further reading



About the authors

Lennie Barblett

Qualifications: Dip Tch (Early Childhood); BEd (Hons); PhD.

Lennie worked as an early childhood teacher for 15 years in a number of diverse early childhood settings in rural, remote and metropolitan areas. Following this, she furthered her studies and is now a senior lecturer in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University. She is a keen researcher and works on a number of committees to further her advocacy work for young children. Lennie has been a longtime member of Early Childhood Australia, and has served on the National Executive Committee and recently as the Western Australian State President.

Catharine Hydon

Qualifications: Dip Tch (Early Childhood); MEd (Early Childhood).

Beginning as a kindergarten teacher, Catharine has managed a long day childcare centre in Melbourne, taught in a school-based program in Papua New Guinea and worked in a support and training role at the FKA Multicultural Resource Centre. She has been a longtime member of Early Childhood Australia, and co-founded Real Rights for Refugee Children. In 2003, Catharine was awarded the Barbara Creaser Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to early childhood education. She is the Victorian representative on the National Board of Early Childhood Australia and is currently the Early Years Strategy Project Manager for The Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Anne Kennedy

Qualifications: TITC; Dip Tch (Early Childhood); BEd (Early Childhood); MEd; EdD.

The ethics of early childhood education was the focus for Anne's doctoral research. She has recently retired from Monash University, where she worked in the Faculty of Education for 15 years. She has also worked in teacher education programs in the USA, Singapore and Sweden. In her current positions as the Chairperson for Community Child Care Association in Victoria and Vice President of FKA Children's Services, Anne is actively engaged in advocacy work for children and families.

Lennie, Catharine and Anne were members of the Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics national working party for the revised Code.

Introduction

The purpose of this book

This publication is written as a companion document to Early Childhood Australia's *Code of Ethics* (2006). It is a resource designed to assist early childhood professionals when using the Code for discussing and reflecting on ethical issues with colleagues, or for making their own ethical decisions.

The structure of this book

This book assists in the exploration of the Code of Ethics and how it can be used to support critical thinking and ethical decision making. The importance of the Code, the contexts in which it can be used, and its embedded values are featured. The book also describes how early childhood professionals can build ethical practices and awareness using the Code.

Ethical dilemmas or challenges are defined and each section of the Code is presented with an ethical exploration activity. Each ethical exploration has three aspects:

- ◆ 'Thinking' – to be used as an initial point to reflect on values, beliefs and practices before discussion.
- ◆ 'Talking' – where the questions can be used to stimulate discussion amongst colleagues or to raise questions for personal reflection.
- ◆ 'Action' – where the knowledge or insights gained through reflection and discussion can be applied to everyday ethical challenges or issues.



What is the ECA Code of Ethics?

Early Childhood Australia's *Code of Ethics* (2006) provides a framework for thinking about the ethical issues early childhood professionals encounter in their everyday work.

Rather than being a set of rules to follow, the Code is an aspirational document which provides an ethical compass—a 'resource for the journey' (Mackay, 2004, p. 14).

Committing to or using the Code is about being willing to recognise the complexities inherent in our work and the need to think carefully before acting.

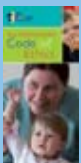
The Code is made up of eight sections which identify commitments to:

- ◆ children
- ◆ families
- ◆ colleagues
- ◆ communities
- ◆ students
- ◆ employers
- ◆ myself as a professional
- ◆ the conduct of research.

Contexts for the ECA Code of Ethics

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) adopted a Code of Ethics for the profession in 1990. Codes of ethics have been described as a guide to moral practice, a set of principles from which to understand our actions and relationships. This means that codes need to be revised regularly in order to reflect contemporary contexts.

The second edition of the ECA Code of Ethics was developed through a process of national consultation. The revised Code incorporates new research and reflects changes in the early childhood knowledge base. For example, the revised Code regards children as global citizens with the right to participate in the negotiation of their learning and social experiences. It also recognises that globalisation impacts on all Australian families and communities, and changes the nature of the work of early childhood professionals.



Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics is available on the Early Childhood Australia website: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code

Alternatively, you can order copies of the Code of Ethics brochure and poster (A1 size) through www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/shop or freecall 1800 356 900.

The importance of the Code of Ethics



The Code challenges professionals to take action in the face of practices that undermine the wellbeing of children and their families, and provides a platform for ongoing advocacy.

The Code is important because it is:

- ◆ **Symbolic**

The Code is an aspirational document symbolising professional commitments and ethical responsibilities, the profession's history and current obligations.

- ◆ **A way of looking**

The Code's principles provide a lens through which early childhood professionals can recognise or reconsider how children, families and communities have rights, entitlements and strengths. This ethical lens highlights complex issues including environmental sustainability, globalisation and technology. The Code reminds us that these issues impact on children and their families, which means that early childhood professionals must respond in their everyday practice.

- ◆ **A tool for advocacy**

The Code's principles support advocacy on behalf of or with children, families, communities and the profession. Early childhood professionals must take an ethical stance for the rights of children, including the right to play and freedom for self-expression as enshrined in the United Nation's *The convention on the rights of the child* (1989) and in principle 1.2 of the Code.

◆ **A way of uniting the sector**

The Code can help to unite the early childhood sector by providing a common language and shared values connected to working with children and their families.

◆ **A framework for reflective practice**

The Code can provide a context for reflection which helps to avoid 'group think' behaviour (e.g. 'we always do it that way') or a lack of individual responsibility (e.g. 'I was just doing my job').

◆ **A guide for decision making**

The Code signposts ethical principles to guide professional decision making.

◆ **A call to action**

The Code is a call to act in the face of unethical practices or policies, as the preamble states: '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.'

Values in the Code of Ethics

Each principle or commitment in the Code reflects or is based on a value position. Values are deeply-held beliefs which commit people to action, or underpin their responses to issues. Acting on value commitments requires personal qualities such as courage, honesty and perseverance.

The processes, values and qualities which underpin the Code are identified in the document as:

- ◆ respect
- ◆ democracy
- ◆ honesty
- ◆ integrity
- ◆ justice
- ◆ courage
- ◆ inclusivity
- ◆ social and cultural responsiveness
- ◆ education

Adopting the Code means honouring these values, qualities and processes.

Ethical exploration – Values

The following examples can be used to begin discussions about values that individuals may hold. It is important that all early childhood professionals understand their own values and aim to respect those of other people.

Thinking

Take time to think about the following questions:

- ◆ How are values formed?
- ◆ What values do you hold as important for your work with or on behalf of children and families?
- ◆ Have your values changed over time or with further experience?

Talking

Example 1

A staff member in a childcare centre tells a student teacher: 'Chinese families don't put underpants on their children. Also, the children have too many clothes or not enough clothes. We don't say anything to the parents as we don't want to offend them.'

Questions for discussion

- ◆ What values underpin this staff member's comments and beliefs about Chinese families?
- ◆ Are these beliefs consistent with valuing diversity and difference?

Example 2

A government department of education announces that all children entering school will be required to sit a school readiness test prior to starting. Results of the test will be used to stream the children on entry to school.

Question for discussion

- ◆ What values concerned with children's learning and development underpin this policy decision?



Example 3

At a preschool committee meeting, the members discuss what they will do with the surplus funds they have raised. There is great enthusiasm for using the money to bring in special visitors or experiences to support the children's learning. The preschool teacher argues that the money might be better spent on upgrading the outdoor environment to allow for more exploratory play and easier indoor-outdoor access.

Questions for discussion

- ◆ What values connected to programs underpin the committee's preferred option for spending the surplus?
- ◆ What values connected to programs underpin the teacher's preferred option for spending the surplus?

Action

- ◆ What have you learned from the exploration of different value positions in the above examples?
- ◆ How could you apply this knowledge in your professional work contexts?



The Code of Ethics: A guide for everyday practice

Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics is an aspirational guide to thinking about the ethical issues early childhood professionals encounter in their everyday work.

Authors Lennie Barblett, Catharine Hydon and Anne Kennedy were part of the national working party that developed the latest version of the Code of Ethics. Together they possess a wealth of experience in using the Code in everyday practice.

The authors assist educators and carers to use the Code in critical thinking and ethical decision making. They examine the relevance of the Code to the sector, exploring how it can be used in a diverse range of early childhood settings.

The book includes ethical exploration activities to help early childhood practitioners understand each section of the Code, and how they can be used to build ethical awareness.

The decisions that early childhood professionals make define their work. *The Code of Ethics: A guide for everyday practice* helps professionals ensure that these decisions reflect and respond to the complex ethical demands of everyday practice.

To subscribe to the Research in Practice Series
T: 1800 356 900 (freecall)
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au



Research in Practice Series
Early Childhood Australia Inc.
PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602
T: (02) 6242 1800 F: (02) 6242 1818
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au

Volume 15 No.1 2008

ISBN10 1-921162-21-X

ISBN13 978-1-921162-21-3



9 781921 162213