



THE ETHICS OF EXCURSIONS

On reading the title for this article, you might be asking yourself the question 'What has ethics got to do with excursions?' Articles about excursions for children are usually focused on issues such as meeting regulatory requirements, travel arrangements and documenting the outcomes.

In thinking about excursions, there are ethical issues that should have first priority in planning, implementing and evaluating an excursion. Giving priority to the ethics of excursions means thinking carefully about equity, inclusion and children's best interests.

Equity and inclusion

The principles of equity and inclusion are enacted through ensuring every child can access the experiences, activities and learning opportunities that are available, including the experience of an excursion. Some children may require additional support or modifications to an experience in order to fully participate. Providing additional support or making modifications enacts the principle of equity.

Children's best interests

Sometimes adults get excited about an excursion proposal without thinking carefully about whether or not it is in children's best interests. Just because an excursion with a group of children in a different setting went well, doesn't necessarily mean that it will be in another group of children's best interests to participate in the same experience. Excursions are meant to be enjoyable, relevant to children's lives and current interests as well as supporting or stimulating their learning.

It is also in children's best interests to consider excursions for particular age groups or particular groups of children. An excursion to an advanced adventure park

might be appropriate for older children because of their physical skills and greater capacity for risk taking. Educators also plan excursions that are enjoyed by and worthwhile for children of different ages and with different interests or abilities. For instance, an excursion to a large park might offer a wide range of experiences and opportunities for children of different ages and/or with different interests and abilities.

Sometimes excursions are planned without consideration of equity issues and children's best interests. Asking questions helps to ensure that ethical matters are considered before a decision is made about whether or not to go ahead with an excursion.

- How can we collaborate with children and families in seeking their views about an excursion? Families and children have a right to be consulted and to contribute to decisions about excursions. Responding to their concerns or ideas and providing a clear rationale about the purpose of a proposed excursion is an ethical responsibility.
- Is the cost of the excursion affordable for every family? If not, is there some other way the cost could be reduced or waived? Some services set aside a

small fund each year to cover or reduce the cost of excursions for families. If a proposed excursion is too costly for some families and there is no financial support available to cover the cost for these families, ethically it would be fairer to find a free or low-cost alternative experience.

- Can every child participate fully in the activities involved in the excursion? If some children are not able to fully participate, it is ethical to consider an alternative excursion or to consider strategies that would support a child to be fully engaged in the excursion activities. For instance, providing one adult to be with a child who finds it difficult to cope with new or unfamiliar experiences might ensure that the child can fully enjoy the excursion experience.
- How will we document and evaluate the experience and the outcomes from the children's participation in the excursion? How can we involve children in this process? Documenting and assessing the outcomes, both planned and unplanned, is part of professional accountability for the inclusion of an excursion in your program. Analysis of the assessment evidence helps to inform 'what next?' planning decisions.

Case example

Janani Nathan is an experienced family day care educator who regularly takes children on the train to the city to visit a range of interesting places. Janani explains that she values excursions because they are supporting children to:

- connect to and appreciate different contributions in their community
- learn how to navigate public transport
- practise road safety rules
- learn from new or revisited experiences
- have fun and enjoy each other's company through a shared experience.

A recent excursion with four children aged between three and four years to Federation Square in Melbourne is a good example of Janani's approach to excursions. Space doesn't allow me to discuss what happened on the excursion and all the planned and spontaneous learning and enjoyment that occurred, but the documentation about the excursion reveals an ethical approach:

- There was a sound rationale for the excursion based on consultation with the children and their families. The impetus for this excursion came about because the grandmother of one of the children was visiting from the country and she likes to join Janani and the children on excursions.
- The excursion was well planned and all regulatory requirements were addressed, which meets families' right to be informed. Grandma's presence meant that there were two adults to four children which met children's right to be safe and supported at all times.
- The excursion was documented and assessed by Janani and the children. The collaborative assessment of the value of the excursion led to a second excursion to the same exhibition for another group of children and to extension experiences based on what the children had learnt and enjoyed.



ECA's *Code of Ethics* (2006) and the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) provide reference points for thinking about the ethics of our work with children and families. Article 12 in the UN Convention promotes children's right to be consulted in matters that affect them. The *Code of Ethics* includes commitments to acting in the best interests of children and in non-discriminatory ways so that every child and family experiences a strong sense of inclusion. Using these principles when planning for an excursion means you are more likely to make ethically informed decisions in collaboration with children and families.

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References

Early Childhood Australia (ECA). (2006). *Code of Ethics*. Canberra: ECA. Available at: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au
United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: UNICEF.

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