



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Ethics in Action

A practical guide to implementing the ECA Code of Ethics

DR LENNIE BARBLETT, CATHARINE HYDON AND DR 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.

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Printed in China by RR Donnelley Asia
Printing Solutions Ltd

ISBN10 1-86323-049-1

ISBN13 978-1-86323-049-0

Acknowledgement of Country

Early Childhood Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to the Elders both past and present.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the many ECA members and non-members who use the Code and have contributed significantly to the review of the ECA *Code of Ethics*. More importantly we would like to acknowledge the sector's commitment to ethical practice, which is impressive, as is the preparedness to grapple with the complexities of contemporary practice with children and their families.

Thank you also to the contributors to this Guide, and the many people we have consulted regarding the content—your suggestions have been invaluable.

ECA would like to thank its members and friends for their significant contribution to the review of the ECA *Code of Ethics*.

Note: permission has been granted to use the direct quotes included in this Guide.

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Foreword

A message from The Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia (2008–2014)

Early childhood education is a profession that calls on the very highest ethical standards. In educating and caring for our most vulnerable and precious citizens these standards must be clearly articulated and translated into practice with integrity and constant dedication. They must be grounded firmly in values and beliefs that are understood and shared by professionals working collaboratively. This is particularly important when educators and carers are tasked with nurturing young children in partnership with families, where relationships must be based on strong foundations of trust and honesty.

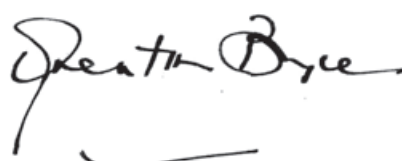
Absolute trust in educators and teachers is critical because children's identity and capacity to communicate are emerging, along with a developing sense of agency and competence as learners. The Early Childhood Australia (ECA) *Code of Ethics* (the Code) invites childhood professionals to reflect deeply on the values, principles and commitments that underpin their understanding of children, families and their work in education and care.

The Code stands as a source of personal inspiration and reflection. It is also a powerful resource and guide for building a deeper and collegial comprehension of the ethical and complex nature of childhood professionals' work with children, families, communities and colleagues.

ECA is to be commended for its long history of supporting and promoting the ethical dimensions of professional work and identity in the early education and care sector. The first Code was developed in 1990 with subsequent revisions in 2006 and 2016. More than 60 000 copies of the latest iteration of the Code have been distributed, indicating that the profession has a firm and true commitment to ethical practice.

This guide to the implementation of the *Code of Ethics* is a significant element of ECA's ongoing priority to ensuring that the Code is well understood and used by childhood professionals.

It will be a valued resource for many years to come.



Introduction

The notion of ethics demands the attention of professionals working with children and families because their work is complex and they often face issues for which there are no simple solutions or easy answers. Ethical values and beliefs shape the way professionals think, decide, act and relate to others. Codes of ethics identify the distinctive and prized values and beliefs of a profession to provide guidance for professionals in their work and decision making. Having a code of ethics is considered one of the hallmarks or features of being a profession.

Early Childhood Australia's *Code of Ethics* (the Code) (ECA, 2016) invites childhood professionals to reflect deeply on the values, principles and commitments that underpin their understanding of children, families and the work of education and care. The Code is not only a private matter, a source of personal inspiration and reflection, it is also a powerful resource and guide for building a deeper and collegial understanding about the ethical and complex nature of childhood professionals' work with children, families, communities and colleagues.

The Code's values and aspirations are made tangible by their capacity to influence and change the way the profession works. Taking action in response to reflection is an indicator of professional commitment to the Code's principles. As childhood professionals' understanding of the ethical nature of their work grows, their actions reflect this increased professional knowledge.

The Code, developed for and by the childhood education and care profession, is a 'living' document. It provides guidance and emphasises the importance of an ethical framework that:

... enables individuals and groups to think critically, to question commonplace assumptions and to contest dominant discourses and constructions—and by doing so to make the invisible visible and the familiar strange (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 47).

If a code of ethics is to be a living document that is understood and embedded in all aspects of professional identity and life, then it must be promoted and made accessible through a range of resources and support strategies. Early Childhood Australia (ECA) acknowledged the ethical dimensions of professionals' work when it adopted its first Code in 1990 and the subsequent revisions in 2006 and 2016. This Guide to the implementation of the *Code of Ethics* is an important element of ECA's ongoing commitment to ensuring the Code is understood and used by childhood professionals.

The aims of the Guide

The ECA *Ethics in action: A practical guide to implementing the ECA Code of Ethics* (the Guide) aims to support and provoke deeper thinking around ethics and what it means **to be** and **to act** as an ethical professional. Research in professional ethics, key national policy documents, ECA position statements and practice wisdom underpin and inform the Guide, which also draws on previous ECA resource booklets (Barblett, Hydon & Kennedy, 2008; Fasoli & Woodrow, 1991).

The Guide is a practical resource for professionals working with families and children aged from birth to 12 years in different ways and in a range of settings, including:

- informal and formal education and care programs
- child and family centres
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs
- home-based programs
- outreach and mobile services
- hospital-based programs
- early intervention services
- early years of school.

In addition, the Guide is a resource for professionals involved in educating and training childhood professionals about the ethical responsibilities of becoming and being a professional. Professionals responsible for mentoring or coaching and staff appraisals will also find the Guide a valuable resource for initiating conversations about the Code and professional identity (Section 2 provides further details on how to use the Guide in these contexts).

Profession: A disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards. This group positions itself as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and is recognised by the public as such. A profession is also prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others (Professional Standards Council, 2016).

Terminology

In this Guide the term 'professional' is used to include all those who work with families and children from birth to 12 years. The Guide also uses the term 'childhood professional' (ECA, 2016) when discussing issues or presenting examples particularly relevant to those working in education and care settings.

Other terms such as 'educator', 'staff' or 'colleagues' are used in some examples when they seem the most appropriate terms. These terms are also used by some of the professionals whose reflections on ethics are cited throughout the Guide. The Guide uses examples that reflect a range of settings and age groups as well as examples applicable to any setting or age group.

Childhood professional: All those who work with children in education and care services (ECA, 2016).

Overview of the Guide

The Guide is divided into three sections. Each section has a particular focus and content.

Section 1: Introduction to ethics; the rationale for and history of ECA's *Code of Ethics*; ethical approaches and workplaces and ethical decision-making processes.

Section 2: Practical ways to use the Code, including a range of Practice Tools to support practical engagement with professional ethics.

Section 3: Deeper consideration of ethical approaches from individual and collective perspectives, including issues about children's rights as they relate to the Code's principles and commitments.

Setting: Includes schools, long day care, family day care, outside school hours care, vacation care, early learning centres.