

# NAEYC CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

## **Preamble**

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NAEYC recognizes that those who work with young children face many daily decisions that have moral and ethical implications. The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct offers guidelines for responsible behavior and sets forth a common basis for resolving the principal ethical dilemmas encountered in early childhood care and education. The statement of Commitment is not part of the Code but is a personal acknowledgment of an individual's willingness to embrace the distinctive values and moral obligations of the field of early childhood care and education.

The primary focus of the code is on daily practice with children and their families in programs for children from birth through 8 years of age, such as infant/toddler programs, preschools, child care centers, hospitals and child life settings, family child care homes, kindergartens, and primary classrooms. When the issues involve young children, then these provisions also apply to specialists who do not work directly with children, including program administrators, parent educators, early childhood educators, and officials with responsibility for program monitoring and licensing.

## ***Core values***

Standards of ethical behavior in early childhood care and education are based on commitment to the following core values that are deeply rooted in the history of the field of early childhood care and education. We have made a commitment to

- Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle
- Base our work on knowledge of how children develop and learn
- Appreciate and support the close bond between the child and family
- Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture\*, community and society
- Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague)
- Respect the diversity in children, families, and colleagues
- Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect

\* The term culture includes ethnicity, racial identity, economic level, family structure, language, and religious and political beliefs, which profoundly influence each child's development and relationship to the world.

## ***Conceptual framework***

The Code sets forth a conception of our professional responsibilities in four sections. Each section addresses an area of professional relationships: (1) with children, (2) with families, (3) among colleagues, and (4) with the community and society. Each section includes an introduction to the primary responsibilities of the early childhood practitioner in that context. The introduction is followed by a set of ideals (I) that reflect exemplary professional practice, and a set of principles (P) describing practices that are required, prohibited, or permitted.

**The ideals** reflect the aspirations of practitioners. **The principles** guide conduct and assist practitioners in resolving ethical dilemmas.\* Both ideals and principles are intended to direct practitioners to those questions which, when responsibly answered, can provide the basis for conscientious decision making. While the Code provides specific direction for addressing some ethical dilemmas, many others will require the practitioner to combine the guidance of Code with professional judgement.

The ideals and principles in this Code present a shared framework of professional responsibility that affirms our commitment to the core values of our field. The Code publicly acknowledges the responsibilities that we in the field have assumed and in so doing supports ethical behavior in our work. Practitioners who face situations with ethical dimensions are urged to seek guidance in the applicable parts of this Code and in the spirit that informs the whole.

### ***Ethical dilemmas always exist***

Often, “the right answer”– the best ethical course of action to take– is not the obvious. There may be no readily apparent, positive way to handle a situation. When one important value contradicts another, we face an ethical dilemma. When we face a dilemma, it is our professional responsibility to consult the Code and all relevant parties in seeking the most ethical resolution.

## **Section I: Ethical Responsibilities to Children**

Childhood is a unique and valuable stage in the human life cycle. Our paramount responsibility is to provide care and education in settings that are safe, healthy, nurturing, and responsive for a child. We are committed to supporting children’s development, respecting individual differences and helping children learn to live, play and work cooperatively. We are also committed to promoting children’s self-awareness, competence, self-worth, resiliency and physical well-being.

## **Ideals:**

- I-1.1 – To be familiar with the knowledge base of early childhood care and education and to stay informed through continuing education and training.
- I-1.2 – To base program practices upon current knowledge and research in the field of early childhood education, child development and related disciplines, as well as on particular knowledge of each child.
- I-1.3 – To recognize and respect the unique qualities, abilities and potential of each child.
- I-1.4 – To appreciate the vulnerability of children and their dependence on adults.
- I-1.5 – To create and maintain safe and healthy settings that foster children’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development and that respect their dignity and their contributions.
- I-1.6 – To use assessment instruments and strategies that are appropriate for the children to be assessed, that are used only for the purposes for which they were designed, and that have the potential to benefit children.
- I-1.7 – To use assessment information to understand and support children’s development and learning, to support instruction, and to identify children who may need additional services.
- I-1.8 – To support the right of each child to play and learn in an inclusive environment that meets the needs of children with and without disabilities.
- I-1.9 – To advocate for and ensure that all children, including those with special needs, have access to the support services needed to be successful.
- I-1.10 – To ensure that each child’s culture, language, ethnicity, and family structure are recognized and valued in the program.
- I-1.11 – To provide all children with experiences in a language that they know, as well as support children in maintaining the use of their home language and in learning English.
- I-1.12 – To work with families to provide a safe and smooth transition as children and families move from one program to the next.

## **Principles:**

- P-1.1 – **Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. *This principle has precedence over all others in this Code.***
- P-1.2 – We shall care for and education children in positive emotional and social environments that are cognitively stimulating and that support each child’s culture, language, ethnicity, and family structure.
- P-1.3 – We shall not participate in practices that discriminate against children by denying benefits, giving special advantages, or excluding them from programs or activities on the basis of their sex, race, national origin, religious beliefs, medical condition, disability, or the martial status/family structure, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs or other affiliations of their families. (Aspects of this principle do not apply in programs that have a lawful mandate to provide services to a particular population of children.)
- P-1.4 – We shall involve all those with relevant knowledge (including families and staff) in decisions concerning a child, as appropriate, ensuring confidentiality of sensitive information.
- P-1.5 – We shall use appropriate assessment systems, which include multiple sources of information, to provide information on children’s learning and development.
- P-1.6 – We shall strive to ensure that decisions such as those related to enrollment, retention, or assignment to special education services, will be based on multiple sources of information and will never be based on a single assessment, such as a test score or a single observation.
- P-1.7 – We shall strive to build individual relationships with each child; make individualized adaptations in teaching strategies, learning environments, and curricula; and consult with the family so that each child benefits from the program. If after such efforts have been exhausted, the current placement does not meet a child’s needs or the child is seriously jeopardizing the ability of other children to benefit from the program, we shall collaborate with the child’s family and appropriate specialists to determine the additional services needed and/or the placement option(s) most likely to ensure the child’s success. (Aspects of this principle may not apply in programs that have a lawful mandate to provide services to a particular population of children.)
- P-1.8 – We shall be familiar with the risk factors and symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse, and physical, emotional, educational and medical neglect. We shall know and follow state laws and community procedures that protect children against abuse and neglect.
- P-1.9 – When we have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, we shall report it to the appropriate community agency and follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken. When appropriate, parents or guardians will be informed that the referral will be has been made.

P-1.10 –When another person tells us of his/her suspicion that a child is being abused or neglected, we shall assist that person in taking appropriate action in order to protect the child.

P-1.11 –When we become aware of a practice or situation that endangers the health, safety or well-being of children, we have an ethical responsibility to protect children or inform parents and/or others who can.

## **Section II. Ethical Responsibilities to Families**

Families are of primary importance in children’s development. (The term *family* may include others, besides parents, who are responsibly involved with the child.) Because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child’s well-being, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the home and early childhood program in ways that enhance the child’s development.

### **Ideals:**

I-2.1 –To be familiar with the knowledge base related to working effectively with families and to stay informed through continuing education and training.

I-2.2 – To develop relationships of mutual trust and create partnerships with the families we serve.

I-2.3 – To welcome all family members and encourage them to participate in the program.

I-2.4 – To listen to families, acknowledge and build upon their strengths and competencies, and learn from families as we support them in their task of nurturing children.

I-2.5 – To respect the dignity and preferences of each family and to make an effort to learn about it’s structure, culture, language, customs, and beliefs.

I-2.6 – To acknowledge families’ child rearing values and their right to make decisions for their children.

I-2.7 –To share information about each child’s education and development with families and to help them understand and appreciate the current knowledge base of the early childhood profession.

I-2.8 – To help family members enhance their understanding of their children and to support the continuing development of their skills as parents.

I-2.9 – To participate in building support networks for families by providing them with opportunities to interact with program staff, other families, community resources, and professional services.

## **Principles:**

P-2.1 – We shall not deny family members access to their child’s classroom or program setting unless access is denied by court order or other legal restriction.

P-2.2 – We shall inform families of program philosophy, policies, curriculum, assessment system and personnel qualifications, and explain why we teach as we do—which should be in accordance with our ethical responsibilities to children (see Section I).

P-2.3 – We shall inform families of and, when appropriate, involve them in policy decisions.

P-2.4 – We shall involve family in significant decisions affecting their child.

P-2.5 – We shall make every effort to communicate effectively with all families in a language that they understand. We shall use community resources for translation and interpretation when we do not have sufficient resources in our own programs.

P-2.6 – As families share information with us about their children and families, we shall consider this information to plan and implement the program.

P-2.7 – We shall inform families about the nature and purpose of the program’s child assessments and how data about their child will be used.

P-2.8 – We shall treat child assessment information confidentially and share this information only when there is a legitimate need for it.

P-2.9 – We shall inform the family of injuries and incidents involving their child, of risks such as exposures to communicable disease that might result in infection, and of occurrences that might result in emotional stress.

P-2.10 – Families shall be fully informed of any proposed research projects involving their children and shall have the opportunity to give or withhold consent without penalty. We shall not permit or participate in research that could in any way hinder the education, development, or well-being of children.

P-2.11 – We shall not engage in or support exploitation of families. We shall not use our relationship with a family for private advantage or personal gain, or enter into relationships with family members that might impair our effectiveness in working with their children.

P-2.12 – We shall develop written policies for the protection of confidentiality and the disclosure of children’s records. These policy documents shall be made available to all program personnel and families. Disclosure of children’s records beyond family members, program personnel, and consultants having an obligation of confidentiality shall require familial consent (except in cases of abuse or neglect).

P-2.13 – We shall maintain confidentiality and shall respect the family’s right to privacy, refraining from disclosure of confidential information and intrusion into family life. However, when we have reason to believe that a child’s welfare is at risk, it is permissible to share confidential information with agencies as well as with individuals who have a legal responsibility in the child’s interest.

P-2.14 – In cases where family members are in conflict, we shall work openly, sharing our observations of the child, to help all parties involved make informed decisions. We shall refrain from becoming an advocate for one party.

P-2.15 – We shall be familiar with and appropriately refer families to community resources and professional support services. After a referral has been made, we shall follow up to ensure that services have been appropriately provided.

### **Section III: Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues**

In a caring, cooperative workplace, human dignity is respected, professional satisfaction is promoted, and positive relationships are developed and sustained. Based upon our core values, our primary responsibility to colleagues is to establish and maintain settings and relationships that support productive work and meet professional needs. The same ideals that apply to children also apply as we interact with adults in the workplace.

#### ***A–Responsibilities to Co-workers***

##### **Ideals:**

I-3A.1 – To establish and maintain relationships of respect, trust, confidentiality, collaboration and cooperation with co-workers.

I-3A.2 – To share resources with co-workers, collaborating to ensure that the best possible early childhood care and education program is provided.

I-3A.3 – To support co-workers in meeting their professional needs and in their professional development.

I-3A.4 – To accord co-workers due recognition of professional achievement.

##### **Principles:**

P-3A.1 – We shall recognize the contributions of colleagues to our program and not participate in practices that diminish their reputations or impair their effectiveness in working with children and families.

P-3A.2 – When we have a concern about the professional behavior of a co-worker, we shall first let that person know of our concern, in a way that shows respect for personal dignity and for the diversity to be found among staff members, and then attempt to resolve the matter collegially and in a confidential manner.

P-3A.3 – We shall exercise care in expressing views regarding the personal attributes or professional conduct of co-workers. Statements should be based on firsthand knowledge, not hearsay relevant to the interests of children and programs.

P-3A.4 – We shall not participate in practices that discriminate against a co-worker because of sex, race, national origin, religious beliefs or other affiliations, age, marital status/family structure, disability, or sexual orientation.

### ***B–Responsibilities to Employers***

#### **Ideals:**

I-3B.1 – To assist the program in providing the highest quality of service.

I-3B.2 – To do nothing that diminishes the reputation of the program in which we work unless it is violating laws and regulations designed to protect children or is violating provisions of this Code.

#### **Principles:**

P-3B.1 – We shall follow all program policies. When we do not agree with program policies, we shall attempt to effect change through constructive action within the organization.

P-3B.2 – We shall speak or act on behalf of an organization only when authorized. We shall take care to acknowledge when we are speaking for the organization and when we are expressing a personal judgement.

P-3B.3 – We shall not violate law or regulations designed to protect children and shall take appropriate action consistent with this Code when aware of such violations.

P-3B.4 – If we have concerns about a colleague’s behavior, and children’s well-being is not at risk, we may address the concern with that individual. If children are at risk or the situation does not improve after it has been brought to the colleague’s attention, we shall report the

colleague's unethical or incompetent behavior to an appropriate authority.

P-3B.5 – When we have a concern about circumstances or conditions that impact the quality of care and education within the program, we shall inform the program's administration or, when necessary, other appropriate authorities.

### ***C–Responsibilities to Employees***

#### **Ideals:**

I-3C.1. – To promote safe and healthy working conditions and policies that foster mutual respect, cooperation, collaboration, competence, well-being, confidence and self-esteem in staff members.

I-3C.2 – To create and maintain a climate of trust and candor that will enable staff to speak and act in the best interests of children, families, and the field of early childhood care and education.

I-3C.3 – To strive to secure adequate and equitable compensation (salary and benefits) for those who work with or on behalf of young children.

#### **Principles:**

P-3C.1 – In decisions concerning children and programs, we shall draw upon the education, training, experience, and expertise of staff members.

P-3C.2 – We shall provide staff members with safe and supportive working conditions that honor confidences and permit them to carry out their responsibilities, through fair performance evaluation, written grievance procedures, constructive feedback, and opportunities for continuing professional development and advancement.

P-3C.3 – We shall develop and maintain comprehensive written personnel policies that define program standards. These policies shall be given to new staff members and shall be available and easily accessible for review by all staff members.

P-3C.4 – We shall inform employees whose performance does not meet program expectations of areas of concern and, when possible, assisted in improving their performance.

P-3C.5 – We shall conduct employee dismissals for just cause, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. We shall inform employees who are dismissed for the reasons for their termination. When a dismissal is for cause, justification must be based on evidence of inadequate or inappropriate behavior that is accurately documented, current, and available for the employee to review.

P-3C.6 – In making evaluations and recommendations, we shall make judgements based on fact and relevant to the interests of children and programs.

P-3C.7 – We shall make hiring, retention, termination and promotion decisions based solely on a person’s competence record of accomplishment, ability to carry out the responsibilities of the position, and professional preparation specific to the developmental levels of children in his/her care.

P-3C.8 – We shall not make hiring, retention, termination and promotion decisions based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, national origin, culture, disability, age, or sexual preference. We shall be familiar with and observe laws and regulations that pertain to employment discrimination.

P-3C.9 – We shall maintain confidentiality in dealing with issues related to an employee’s job performance and shall respect an employee’s job performance and shall respect an employee’s job performance and shall respect an employee’s right to privacy regarding personal issues.

#### **Section IV: Ethical Responsibilities to Community and Society**

Early childhood programs operate within the context of their immediate community made up of families and other institutions concerned with children’s welfare. Our responsibilities to the community are to provide programs that meet the diverse needs of families, to cooperate with agencies and professions that share the responsibility for children, to assist families in gaining access to those agencies and allied professionals, and to assist in the development of community programs that are needed but not currently available.

As individuals, we acknowledge our responsibility to provide the best possible programs of care and education for children and to conduct ourselves with honesty and integrity. Because of our specialized expertise in early childhood development and education and because the larger society shares responsibility for the welfare and protection of young children, we acknowledge a collective obligation to advocate for the best interests of children within early childhood programs and in the larger community and to serve as a voice for young children everywhere.

The ideals and principles in this section are presented to distinguish between those that pertain to the work of the individual early childhood educator and those that more typically are engaged in collectively on behalf of the best interests of children– with the understanding that individual early childhood educators have a shared responsibility for addressing the ideals and principles that are identified as “collective.”

#### ***Ideals (Individual):***

I-4.1 – To provide the community with high-quality early childhood care and education programs

and services.

***Ideals (Collective):***

- I-4.2 – To promote cooperation among professionals and agencies and inter-disciplinary collaboration among professions concerned with addressing issues in the health, education, and well-being of young children, their families, and their early childhood educators.
- I-4.3 – To work, through education, research, and advocacy, toward an environmentally safe world in which all children receive health care, food, and shelter, are nurtured; and live free from violence in their home and their communities.
- I-4.4 – To work, through education, research, and advocacy, toward a society in which all young children have access to high-quality early care and education programs.
- I-4.5 – To work to ensure that appropriate assessment systems, which include multiple sources of information, are used for purposes that benefit children.
- I-4.6 – To promote knowledge and understanding of young children and their needs. To work toward greater societal acknowledgment of children’s rights and greater social acceptance of responsibility for the well-being of all children.
- I-4.7 – To support policies and laws that promote the well-being of children and families, and to work to change those that impair their well-being. To participate in developing policies and laws that are needed, and to cooperate with other individuals and groups in these efforts.
- I-4.8 – To further the professional development of the field of early childhood care and education and to strengthen its commitment to realizing its core values as reflected in this Code.

***Principles (Individual):***

- P-4.1 – We shall communicate openly and truthfully about the nature and extent of services that we provide.
- P-4.2 – We shall apply for, accept, and work in positions for which we are personally well-suited and professionally qualified. We shall not offer services that we do not have the competence, qualifications, or resources to provide.
- P-4.3 – We shall carefully check references and shall not hire or recommend for employment any person whose competence, qualifications, or character makes him or her unsuited for the position.
- P-4.4 – We shall be objective and accurate in reporting the knowledge upon which we base our program practices.

- P-4.5 – We shall be knowledgeable about the appropriate use of assessment strategies and instruments and interpret results accurately to families.
- P-4.6 – We shall be familiar with laws and regulations that serve to protect the children in our programs and be vigilant in ensuring that these laws and regulations are followed..
- P-4.7 – When we become aware of a practice or situation that endangers the health, safety, or well-being of children, we have an ethical responsibility to protect children or inform parents and/or others who can.
- P-4.8 – We shall not participate in practices that are in violation of laws and regulations that protect the children in our programs.
- P-4.9 – When we have evidence that an early childhood program is violating laws or regulations protecting children. We shall report the violation to appropriate authorities who can be expected to remedy the situation.
- P-4.10 – When a program violates or requires its employees to violate this Code, it is permissible, after fair assessment of the evidence, to disclose the identity of that program.

***Principles (Collective):***

- P-4.11 – When policies are enacted for purposes that do not benefit children, we have a collective responsibility to work to change these practices.
- P-4.12 – When we have evidence that an agency that provides services intended to ensure children’s well-being is failing to meet its obligations, we acknowledge a collective ethical responsibility to report the problem to appropriate authorities or to the public. We shall be vigilant in our follow-up until the situation is resolved.
- P-4.13 – When a child protection agency fails to provide adequate protection for abused or neglected children, we acknowledge a collective ethical responsibility to work toward the improvement of these services.

**\*Revision of NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, April 2005**

## **NAEYC STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT**

As an individual who works with young children, I commit myself to furthering the values of early childhood education as they are reflected in the ideals and principles of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct.

***To the best of my ability I will***

- Never harm children

- Ensure that programs for young children are based on current knowledge and research of child development and early childhood education.
- Respect and support families in their task of nurturing children.
- Respect colleagues in early childhood care and education and support them in maintaining the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct.
- Serve as an advocate for children, their families, and their teachers in community and society.
- Stay informed of and maintain high standards of professional conduct.
- Engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection, realizing that personal characteristics, biases and beliefs have an impact on children and families.
- Be open to new ideas and be willing to learn from the suggestions of others.
- Continue to learn, grow, and contribute as a professional.
- Honor the ideals and principles of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct.

The Statement of Commitment is not part of the Code but is a personal acknowledgment of the individual's willingness to embrace the distinctive values and moral obligations of the field of early childhood care and education. It is recognition of the moral obligations that lead to an individual becoming part of the profession.