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## Early Childhood Australia's 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 early childhood professionals who work with or on behalf of children and families in early childhood settings.

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. Sociocultural 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 and dialogue can build connections and relationships which sustain and advance individual and collective wellbeing.

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.

The following values and processes are considered central to the Code of Ethics:

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

## Definitions

In this Code of Ethics, for the purposes of this document, these terms are given the following meanings:

**Children** – People between the ages of birth and eight years.

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

**Early childhood professional** – A person who works with or on behalf of children and families in early childhood settings.

**Communities** – Groups of people who identify as having shared values and intentions. These groups are recognised as complex, being simultaneously connected by commonality and diversity.

**Employer** – An individual or organisation which employs early childhood professionals.

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





# ECA code of ethics

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 on 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, engagement, initiative, self-worth, dignity and show respect for their contributions.
7. Work to ensure children and families with additional needs can exercise their rights.
8. Acknowledge the uniqueness and potential of all children, in recognition that enjoying their childhood without undue pressure is important.

9. Acknowledge the holistic nature of children's learning and the significance of children's cultural and linguistic identities.
10. Work to ensure children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, ability, economic status, family structure, lifestyle, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, or national origin.

11. Acknowledge children as competent learners, and build active communities of engagement and inquiry.
12. Honour children's right to play, as both a process and context for learning.

## 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. Develop positive relationships based on mutual trust and open communication.
4. Develop 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 planning, monitoring and assessment practices for children's learning and communicate this in ways that families understand.
8. Acknowledge that each family is affected by the community contexts in which they engage.

9. Be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of children and families and respond in ways that empower and maintain the dignity of all children and families.
10. Maintain confidentiality and respect the right of the family to privacy.

## III. In relation to colleagues, I will:

1. Encourage my colleagues to adopt and act in accordance with 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 personal strengths, professional experience and diversity which my colleagues bring to their work.
4. Make every effort to use constructive methods to manage 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 high-quality 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 people, services and agencies within the communities that support children and families.
3. Promote shared aspirations amongst communities in order to enhance children's health and wellbeing.



1. Advocate for the development and implementation of laws and policies that promote child-friendly communities and work to change those that work against child and family wellbeing.
2. Utilise knowledge and research to advocate for universal access to a range of high-quality early childhood programs for all children.
3. Work to promote community understanding of how children learn, in order that appropriate systems of assessment and reporting are used to benefit children.

#### **V. In relation to students, I will:**

1. Afford professional opportunities and resources for students to demonstrate their competencies.
2. Acknowledge and support the personal strengths, professional knowledge, diversity and experience which students bring to the learning environment.
3. Model high-quality professional practices.
4. Know the requirements of the students' 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 the workplace.
7. Maintain confidentiality in relation to students.

#### **VI. In relation to my employer, I will:**

1. Support workplace policies, standards and practices that are fair, non-discriminatory and are in the best interests of children and families.
2. Promote and support 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 organisation 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, high-quality early childhood practices and my understandings of the children and families with whom I work.
2. Regard myself as a learner who undertakes reflection, critical self-study, continuing professional development and engages with contemporary theory and practice.
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 other early childhood professionals and students.
8. Advocate in relation to issues that impact on my profession and on young children and their families.
9. Encourage qualities and practices of leadership within the early childhood profession.

#### **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, facilitate and disseminate such research.
4. Make every effort to understand the purpose and value of proposed research projects and make informed decisions 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 accurately.

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

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