

# CODE OF ETHICS

## BACKGROUND

A code of ethics is a set of statements about appropriate and expected behaviour of members of a professional group and, as such, reflects its values. The Code that follows was developed by a National Working Party of the Australian Early Childhood Association, with considerable input from the field, and therefore, is a code that is owned by the field, not imposed upon it. The Code has been developed to inform and guide the decisions and behaviour of all personnel involved both directly and indirectly in the provision of early childhood services for children between birth and eight years of age.

Although oriented towards those who are in daily contact with children and their families, the Code is also intended as a guide for those who work in other capacities, for example as tertiary educators, administrators, policy-makers and advisory staff. Their work impacts significantly on the ethical behaviour of early childhood personnel in the field.

Young children are especially vulnerable. They have little power over their lives and few skills with which to protect themselves. This places early childhood personnel in a relationship of special trust, one that is powerful, important, and easily violated. The vulnerability and powerlessness of children and the recognition of the multi-faceted dimensions of the role of early childhood personnel serve to highlight the special importance of a code of ethics. As early childhood personnel carry out their work with and on behalf of young children and their families, they often face situations that involve a conflict of their responsibilities and professional values.

A code of ethics is not intended to, and could not possibly, provide easy answers, formulae, or prescriptive solutions for the complex professional dilemmas they face in their work. It does provide a basis for critical reflection, a guide for professional behaviour, and some assistance with the resolution of ethical dilemmas.

Adherence to this code necessarily involves a commitment to:

- View the well-being of the individual child as having fundamental importance.
- Acknowledge the uniqueness of each person.
- Consider the needs of the child in the context of the family and culture, as the family has a major influence on the young child.
- Take into account the critical impact of self-esteem on an individual's development.
- Base practice on sound knowledge, research and theories, while at the same time recognising the limitations and uncertainties of these.
- Work to fulfill the right of all children and their families to services of high quality.

## CODE OF ETHICS STATEMENT

### **I In Relation to Children, I Will:**

1. Acknowledge the uniqueness and potential of each child.
2. Recognise early childhood as a unique and valuable state of life and accept that each phase within early childhood is important in its own right.

3. Honour the child's right to play, in acknowledgement of the major contribution of play to developments.
4. Enhance each child's strengths, competence and self-esteem.
5. Ensure that my work with children is based on their interests and needs and lets them know they have a contribution to make.
6. Recognise that young children are vulnerable and use my influence and power in their best interests.
7. Create and maintain safe, healthy settings, which enhance children's autonomy, initiative, and self-worth, and respect their dignity.
8. Help children learn to interact effectively, and in doing to learn to balance their own rights, needs and feelings with those of others.
9. Base my work with children on the best theoretical and practical knowledge about early childhood as well as on particular knowledge of each child's development.
10. Respect the special relationship between children and their families and incorporate this perspective in all my interactions with children.
11. Work to ensure that young children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, race, religion, language, ability, culture, or national origin.
12. Acknowledge the worth of the cultural and linguistic diversity that children bring to the environment.
13. Engage only in practices which are respectful of, and provide security for, children and in no way degrade, endanger, exploit, intimidate, or harm them psychologically or physically.
14. Ensure that my practices reflect consideration of the child's perspective.
15. Be aware that I am a role model for children.

## **II In Relation to Families, I Will:**

1. Encourage families to share their knowledge of their child with me and share my general knowledge of children with them so that there is a mutual growth and understanding in ways that benefit the child.
2. Strive to develop positive relationships with families that are based on mutual trust and open communication.
3. Engage in shared decision-making with families.
4. Acknowledge families' existing strengths and competence as a basis for supporting them in their task of nurturing their child.
5. Acknowledge the uniqueness of each family and the significance of its culture, customs, language and beliefs.
6. Maintain confidentiality.
7. Respect the right of the family to privacy.
8. Consider situations from each family's perspective, especially if differences or tensions arise.
9. Assist each family to develop a sense of belonging to the services in which their child participates.
10. Acknowledge that each family is affected by the community context in which it operates.

## **III In Relation to Colleagues, I Will:**

1. Support and assist colleagues in their professional development.
2. Work with my colleagues to maintain and improve the standard of service provided in my work place.

3. Promote policies and working conditions which are non-discriminatory, and that foster competence, well-being and positive self-esteem.
4. Acknowledge and support the issue of the personal and professional strengths which my colleagues bring to the work place.
5. Work to build an atmosphere of trust, respect and candor by:
  - Encouraging openness and tolerance between colleagues.
  - Accepting their right to hold different points of view.
  - Using constructive methods of conflict resolution, and maintaining appropriate confidentiality.
6. Acknowledge the worth of the cultural and linguistic diversity which my colleagues bring to the work place.
7. Encourage my colleagues to accept and adhere to this Code.

**IV In Relation to the Community and Society, I Will:**

1. Provide programs which are responsive to community needs.
2. Support the development and implementation of laws and policies which promote the well-being of children and families, and which are responsible to community needs.
3. Be familiar with and abide by laws and policies which relate to my work.
4. Work to change laws and policies which interfere with the well-being of children.
5. Promote cooperation among all agencies and professions working in the best interests of young children and families.
6. Promote children's best interests through community education and advocacy.

**V In Relation to Myself as a Professional, I Will:**

1. Update and improve my expertise and practice in the early childhood field continually through formal and informal professional development.
2. Engage in critical self-reflection and seek input from colleagues.
3. Communicate with and consider the views of my colleagues in the early childhood profession and other professions.
4. Support research to strengthen and expand the knowledge base of early childhood, and where possible, initiate, contribute to, and facilitate such research.
5. Work within the limits of my professional role and avoid misrepresentation of my professional competence and qualifications.
6. Work to complement and support the child rearing function of the family.
7. Be an advocate for young children, early childhood services, and my profession.
8. Recognise the particular importance of formal qualifications in early childhood studies, along with personal characteristics and experience, for those who work in the early childhood profession.
9. Act in the community in ways that enhance the standing of the profession.

Revised: August 2007

Revised: September 2009

To be revised: September 2011