

Conceptual framework

The Code sets forth a framework of 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 by 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 the Code with professional judgment.

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.

Often “the right answer”—the best ethical course of action to take—is not 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 to find 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 each child. We are committed to supporting children’s development and learning; 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.

* There is not necessarily a corresponding principle for each ideal.