naeyc®

Position Statement

Adopted by the NAEYC National Governing Board July 2025

Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators

National Association for the Education of Young Children

Along with core knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions, early childhood educators who work in homes, centers, and schools have professional, ethical responsibilities. These responsibilities guide the ethical decision making and behaviors that support each and every child's healthy development, learning, and well-being.

A Position Statement Held on Behalf of the Early Childhood Education Profession

Disponible en Español: NAEYC.org/educadores

Relationship Between the Five Foundational Position Statements

NAEYC's position statements are developed with and for early childhood educators. The "Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators" position statement outlines the ethical responsibilities that are part of professional relationships. It works with other important NAEYC documents to help educators and systems leaders define developmentally appropriate practice, set professional standards and competencies for early childhood educators, outline standards for early childhood programs, and work toward advancing equity. These five foundational position statements are grounded in NAEYC's core values and vision.

Starting in 2017, NAEYC engaged the early childhood education field in developing and revising the five foundational position statements, increasing their consistency and connections. For example, the ethical responsibilities of early childhood educators described in this statement work closely together with the "Professional Standards and Competencies" to lay out the model professional practices that promote the development, learning, and well-being of young children. Those practices draw from and are based on elements in the "Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education" and "Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)" statements, which emphasize that all children deserve learning opportunities that help them thrive by building on their unique set of individual and family strengths.

Additionally, the ethical responsibilities in this statement align with and reinforce the decisions educators make in the context of their programs, as described in the "Developmentally Appropriate Practice" and "Early Childhood Program Standards" statements.

NAEYC's Foundational Documents

Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators: A Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children
Copyright © 2025 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. All rights reserved.

Permissions
NAEYC accepts requests for limited use of our copyrighted material. For permission to reprint, adapt, translate, or otherwise reuse and repurpose content from the final published document, review our guidelines at NAEYC.org/resources/permissions.

DISCLAIMER
THE CODE OF ETHICS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS (THE CODE) IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE REQUIREMENTS OF AN EMPLOYER, LOCALITY, STATE, TERRITORY, AND/OR DISTRICT. IT DOES NOT SUPERSEDE APPLICABLE LAWS, RULES, OR REGULATIONS RELATED TO TOPICS ADDRESSED IN THE CODE. NEITHER NAEYC NOR ITS OFFICERS, DIRECTORS, MEMBERS, EMPLOYEES, OR AGENTS WILL BE LIABLE FOR ANY LOSS, DAMAGE, OR CLAIM WITH RESPECT TO ANY LIABILITIES, INCLUDING DIRECT, SPECIAL, INDIRECT, OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES INCURRED IN CONNECTION WITH THE CODE OR RELIANCE ON THE INFORMATION PRESENTED.

Purpose

The "Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators" outlines the essential ethical responsibilities for the early childhood education profession. This means it speaks to a set of professional ethics—the moral responsibilities that go beyond personal beliefs and that guide decision making and behavior in a workplace.

The Code is intended to be helpful to all individuals who care for and promote the learning, development, and well-being of children birth through age 8 in all early childhood settings, as well as program administrators and those involved in educator preparation and support. The accompanying "Statement of Commitment" provides a way for individuals in the early childhood field to acknowledge and embrace the distinctive values and ethical obligations an early childhood education professional has to young children, families, and other educators. Individuals who commit to upholding the Code and programs that promote awareness of and adherence to it help to strengthen the field's professionalism and ethical behavior.

Although not all issues educators confront have a moral or ethical component, early childhood educators do face daily ethical challenges, often without sufficient support or resources. Early childhood educators navigate hard decisions that may conflict with our personal beliefs or well-being, while also working within systems that can be inequitable or unjust. All practitioners can use the Code as a guide for and defense of ethical conduct and decision making, especially when navigating complex dilemmas that require professional judgment.

The ethical standards in this Code of Ethics focus on areas of practice over which early childhood educators have professional autonomy and decision-making authority. The Code guides educators' responsibilities to others—children, families, colleagues, employers, communities, and society. While society has a responsibility to support early childhood educators, and educators have ethical and moral responsibilities to ourselves and our own well-being, the purpose of this Code is not to address the ethical obligations that others have toward educators, nor the responsibilities educators have to ourselves.

A Future Purpose

In the future, members of the early childhood education profession who are licensed to practice, as outlined by the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*, would be required to follow a code of ethics just like other licensed professionals.

Many fields—such as social work, nursing, audiology, teaching, and engineering—have codes of ethics that guide professional practice and conduct, and that hold individuals within the profession accountable to that code. In a licensed profession, behavior that is determined to be unethical can lead to consequences up to and including losing a professional license.

This "Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators" could one day be adapted to serve this purpose in early childhood education. It could provide state licensure bodies with a profession-led framework that can guide early childhood educators' professional, ethical conduct and protect families, children, and the public from unethical practices by institutions or individuals within the profession.

Structure

This position statement begins with the articulated position and core values that are categorized to guide early childhood educators in their professional relationships with (1) children, (2) families, (3) colleagues and employers, and (4) community and society.

The statement then outlines the ethical responsibilities **for early childhood educators working with young children**, **families, and other educators** in those same four categories of professional relationships. Then, it expands on specific responsibilities for **program administrators** and those **involved in the professional preparation of early childhood educators (adult educators)**. These areas were previously covered in separate, supplemental documents. However, they have been brought together to streamline the responsibilities, increase ease of access, and reflect the inclusion of all individuals who are members of the early childhood education profession as outlined in the consensus *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*.

Each section of the current version of the Code includes a brief introduction, followed by a list of essential ethical responsibilities. With the exception of **Responsibilities 1.1 and Admin 1.1**, the responsibilities begin with practices that are positively required (what we must do) and move to those that are prohibited (what we must not do). Where positively required responsibilities have negative corollaries (i.e., because we must do X, we must NOT do Y), the items are cross-referenced in parentheses.

Key core values and responsibilities inform a "Statement of Commitment" for individuals that has been included at the end of the Code of Ethics position statement. It may also be used as a standalone document for individuals to voluntarily sign.

This Code of Ethics concludes with a glossary of terms. Additional information, including the research that informs the Code of Ethics along with its history and context, are available on NAEYC's website. The structure of this document does not allow for the inclusion of all practical implications in ethical decision making; rather, additional resources will be shared on an ongoing basis to help early childhood educators navigate complex ethical situations—especially when values come into conflict and the right course of action is unclear.

The Position

Along with core knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions, early childhood educators who work in homes, centers, and schools have professional, ethical responsibilities. These responsibilities guide the ethical decision making and behaviors that support each and every child's healthy development, learning, and well-being.

Core Values

These core values are shaped by the past, relevant to the present, and responsive to the future. They serve as the foundation for early childhood educators' professional practice.

Early childhood educators should apply these values to **all relationships we have in professional contexts** including those with children, families, colleagues, and staff:

- Respect and support the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each and every individual.
- Respect and support the diversity of individuals and groups, including their backgrounds and lived experiences.
- Recognize that all individuals—children and adults—thrive within relationships based on trust and respect.

These values apply specifically to professional practice with **children**:

- Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable part of the human life cycle.
- Base professional practice on up-to-date and accurate knowledge of how children develop and learn.
- Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society.

These values apply specifically to professional practice with **families**:

- Recognize families' primary role in children's learning and development.
- Appreciate, value, and support the bond between children and their families.
- Respect and support families in their task of nurturing children.

These values specifically apply to professional practice between and among **colleagues and employers**:

- Be open to ideas and willing to learn.
- Recognize the importance of maintaining and contributing to a supportive and fulfilling work environment.
- Commit to and support continuous reflection, professional learning, and growth.
- Use research and insights from relevant disciplines, including adult development and learning.

These values specifically apply to professional practice in **community and society**:

- Serve as an advocate for children, their families, and their teachers in community and society.
- Recognize the importance of and advocate for a knowledgeable, competent, diverse, and well-compensated early childhood education workforce working across all settings.
- Actively contribute to the well-being of the community.

Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Early Childhood Education Communities

The nondiscrimination and inclusion principles in the "Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators" apply equally to children, families, and educators. Except for programs that serve specific age groups or those legally required or permitted to serve certain populations, early childhood educators have an ethical duty to reject all discriminatory practices. This includes but may not be limited to discrimination based on race, national origin, age, immigration status, home language, medical condition, disability, marital status, family structure, sexual orientation of family members or caregivers, sex, gender identity, gender expression, religious beliefs, faith orientation, or other family affiliations.

Ethical Responsibilities for Early Childhood Educators Working with Young Children, Families, and Other Educators

1. Ethical Responsibilities to Children

Early childhood educators have many ethical responsibilities and relationships, but our first and most important obligation is to ensure the safety and well-being of the children in our care. Our highest priority is to provide education and care that is safe, healthy, nurturing, and responsive for each and every child. No matter where we work, we are committed to supporting each child's development, encouraging joyful learning, and respecting individual differences. We are also committed to promoting children's self-awareness, self-worth, physical and mental well-being, competence, and resiliency.

Early childhood educators:

1.1—Do not harm children. This means we do not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating. This responsibility has precedence over all others in this Code.

1.2—Provide care and education in nurturing environments that support children's emotional, social, cultural, and learning needs. These environments should be developmentally appropriate, cognitively stimulating, and affirming. (*For related prohibitions, see 1.10.*)

1.3—Support children's well-being.

a. Encourage the development of strong bonds and trusting relationships between and among children, families, educators, and communities.

b. Recognize the many strengths and qualities that each young child brings to the early learning program as a unique individual and as a member of a family, culture, and community.

c. Build bonds with families and communities to promote those strengths and qualities, including by creating consistency and stability between the program and home(s).

d. Work to build individual relationships by adapting teaching strategies, learning environments, and curricula so that each child can benefit.

1.4—Use assessments that are appropriate and, whenever possible, valid, unbiased, and reliable. Draw from multiple sources of information to accurately understand and evaluate children's learning, development, and experiences in the program. (*For related prohibitions, see 1.9.*)

1.5—Apply program policies and practices relating to children consistently, fairly, and without bias. (*For related prohibitions, see 1.11.*)

1.6—Maintain the confidentiality of a child's information, images, and data, including assessment data, sharing only when there is a legitimate need.

1.7—Stay informed about the risk factors and signs of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse and physical, emotional, educational, and medical neglect.

a. Follow state laws and community procedures (including reporting, informing, connecting with resources and community supports, and completing any follow-up requirements) that protect children against abuse and neglect when there is reasonable cause to suspect harm.

b. Assist in taking appropriate action or informing a parent, legal guardian, and/or others who can act when another person shares a suspicion that a child is being harmed.

c. Consider the risk and impact of unsubstantiated reporting and reflect on how biases and stereotypes can influence reporting.

1.8—Use digital technologies, interactive media, and artificial intelligence responsibly, intentionally, and only in ways that protect privacy, are developmentally and age appropriate, and have clear benefits to children.

a. Align technology with efforts to support each child's learning, strengthen family connections, and provide equitable access for children with special needs.

b. Use technology tools to help children develop inquiry skills and mindful digital habits that prepare them for the modern world.

c. Monitor and remain vigilant about children's use of technology and media to protect them from exploitative online content.

1.9—Do not base high-stakes decisions—such as those related to enrollment, retention, or assignment to special education services—on a single assessment, such as a test score or a single observation.

1.10—Do not suspend or expel young children. If, after all reasonable supports have been exhausted, a program is unable to meet a child's needs and/or the child's continued placement seriously jeopardizes a safe learning environment for others, then educators must work to engage in a collaborative, respectful process with the family and relevant professionals to determine the most supportive next steps for alternate options. (This principle may not apply to programs legally required to serve a particular population of children.)

1.11—Do not engage in discriminatory policies and practices that deny benefits, provide unfair advantages, or exclude children from programs or activities based on their abilities or identities. (This principle may not apply to programs legally required to serve a particular population of children.)

A Note About Technology

Technology changes rapidly. So far, research indicates that, when used responsibly and intentionally, technology, interactive media, and artificial intelligence can be tools to support developmentally appropriate practice and family engagement. However, research is also clear that technology can cause harm to children and adults. Updated and evolving guidance for early childhood educators on the use of technology can be found through NAEYC's technology position statement and related professional development and practice supports. The guidance will continue to evolve as technology does.

2. Ethical Responsibilities to Families

Families play a primary role in children's learning and development. We recognize a core responsibility to communicate, cooperate, and collaborate with each child's home, family, and community by building relationships based on mutual trust and respect, and in ways that enhance a child's development and well-being.

Early childhood educators:

2.1—Develop reciprocal relationships with each child's family.

a. Uphold every family's right to make decisions for and with their children.

b. Actively involve families in decisions about their children.

c. Invite and support families to contribute to overall program planning and implementation.

2.2—Work to create a respectful environment for and a working relationship with all families. (*For related prohibitions, see 2.12.*)

2.3—Provide prospective and current families with complete, honest, and nonbiased information about the program, including enrollment practices, philosophy, policies, curriculum, assessment systems, cultural practices, and staff qualifications.

2.4—Make every effort to engage in two-way communication with families, in their preferred language. Seek external support for translation and interpretation as needed, which may include responsible use of artificial intelligence and interactive technology.

2.5—Respond positively to families' requests when they align with program philosophy, standards of practice, and available resources. (*For related prohibitions, see 2.13.*)

2.6—Apply program policies and practices relating to families consistently, fairly, and without bias.

2.7—Share screening and assessment information and results in ways that are accessible to families, honor knowledge families have about their own children, convey children's strengths, and acknowledge the limitations of the evaluation instruments.

2.8—Ensure that parents and legal guardians can access their children's records and classrooms or program settings, unless a court order or legal restriction prohibits it.

2.9—Respect families' right to privacy and work with families to protect children's data, images, and information. (This principle does not apply in cases where a child's welfare is at risk and it becomes critical to share confidential information with agencies, organizations, and/or individuals who have legal responsibilities to intervene in the child's interest.)

2.10—Keep families informed about injuries and incidents involving their children, potential exposure to communicable diseases, and events that could cause emotional stress.

2.11—Stay informed about community resources and support services, referring families as needed and following up as much as possible to ensure they receive appropriate support.

2.12—Do not use relationships with families for personal gain or enter into relationships that could compromise professional judgment or negatively impact children.

2.13—Do not comply with family requests that could cause physical or emotional harm to children based on professional expertise and judgment. In such cases, clearly explain the reason(s) for not honoring the request and work with the family to find an alternative solution.

3. Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues and Employers

A caring, cooperative workplace respects human dignity, fosters professional satisfaction, and nurtures positive relationships. Guided by our core values, our primary responsibilities to our colleagues—including other educators, other staff, volunteers, and employers —are to create and maintain inclusive environments and respectful relationships that promote meaningful work and that support each individual's physical and mental well-being. *Specific responsibilities that program administrators, directors, and owners have to their staff are outlined in the section entitled "Ethical Responsibilities Specific to Program Administrators."*

A—RESPONSIBILITIES TO COLLEAGUES

Early childhood educators:

3A.1—Recognize and honor the perspectives, strengths, and contributions of colleagues. (*For related prohibitions, see 3A.5 and 3A.6*)

3A.2—Respect confidentiality regarding job performance and uphold the right to privacy regarding personal and personnel issues.

3A.3—Consider our own biases and exercise caution when expressing views about colleagues' personal attributes or professional conduct. *(For related prohibitions, see 3A.6)*

3A.4—As applicable, raise concerns about a colleague's behavior, competence, fairness, ethics, or accuracy in a respectful manner that honors personal dignity and differences. (*For related prohibitions, see 3A.5.*)

a. If children's well-being is not at risk, make every effort to resolve the matter collegially and confidentially.

b. If children are at risk or the issue remains unresolved after addressing it with the colleague, report the colleague's unethical or incompetent behavior through official channels or to an appropriate authority.

3A.5—Do not engage in practices that harm colleagues' reputations or interfere with their ability to effectively support children and families.

3A.6—Do not participate in practices that discriminate against a colleague.

B—RESPONSIBILITIES TO EMPLOYERS

Early childhood educators:

3B.1—Follow all program policies. If educators disagree with a policy, seek to make changes through constructive action. (*For related prohibitions, see 3B.5.*)

3B.2—Report concerns about circumstances or conditions that impact the quality of education and care to the program's administration or, when necessary, other appropriate authorities.

3B.3—Speak or act on behalf of an organization only when authorized and clearly distinguish between official statements and personal opinions.

3B.4—Stay informed about laws and regulations that protect children's health and safety and ensure that these laws and regulations are followed. (*For related prohibitions, see 3B.5.*)

3B.5—Do not participate in practices that violate laws or regulations designed to safeguard children. If educators are aware of such violations, take appropriate action in accordance with this Code.

4. Ethical Responsibilities to Community and Society

Early childhood education programs function within a broader community that includes families and other entities that support children's well-being. As members of a broader community, early childhood education programs (and the people who work within them) try to meet the diverse needs of families; cooperate and coordinate with other agencies, programs, and professions that share responsibility for children; help families connect with each other, as well as with available services and supports; and contribute to the development and resourcing of community programs that are needed but unavailable.

Our specialized expertise in early childhood education and development also leads us to recognize our collective duty to advocate for children. This includes speaking up for their needs within early childhood programs and in the broader community, serving as a voice alongside young children and their families.

Early childhood educators:

4.1—Communicate openly, clearly, objectively, and honestly about what we do and why we do it with the public and relevant oversight bodies. This includes communication about services, scope, and purpose. (*For related prohibitions, see 4.7.*)

4.2—Base opinions when evaluating issues, practices, products, or programs on professional perspectives, relevant experiences, knowledge of child development, and established standards of practice.

4.3—Exercise care and caution when recommending the use/purchase of commercial products or services to families or the public, particularly if the products or services have been heavily advertised or sponsored.

4.4—Educate ourselves about the systems, policies, and practices that contribute to inequitable and unethical outcomes for children and actively work to change them.

4.5—Recommend for employment only people whose competence, qualifications, and character make them well-suited for the position.

4.6—Exercise caution when considering whether to report concerns or disclose program identities to the public or the media. Ensure that children are not placed at risk if a public report is deemed necessary.

4.7—Do not mislead families or the public by offering services without the necessary competence, qualifications, or resources to provide them.

Society Also Has Ethical Obligations to Early Childhood Educators

Young children's access to equitable learning opportunities depends upon the ethical treatment of early childhood educators. This means that—just as educators have ethical responsibilities to community and society—so too do families, employers, institutions of higher education, policymakers, and the public have a responsibility to support and invest in early childhood educators in recognition of their essential, complex, and valuable work.

"Developmentally Appropriate Practice" and "Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education" position statements outline specific recommendations for policies and actions that individuals, organizations, and institutions can make to fulfill their obligations to early childhood educators so that educators can fulfill our obligations to children and families.

Community members, leaders, families, and other stakeholders can and should also work alongside early childhood educators to advocate for investments that support educators' success and well-being. These investments should move toward a future in which each and every child has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated ECE workforce across all states and settings.

Ethical Responsibilities Specific to Program Administrators

Early childhood educators who are administrators—such as child care center directors, school principals, and those who operate, own, or manage a family child care program—have many teaching and management duties. As administrators, we are leaders both within our programs and in the broader community. Our responsibilities may include guiding educational practices, selecting and implementing curricula and assessments, managing daily operations and budgets, building and maintaining strong relationships with families, staff, and oversight bodies, and representing the field to the public.

Early childhood programs vary in their structure, funding, mission, and oversight. Administrators must work within these systems while keeping the program stable and maintaining its reputation through licensing, quality ratings, and/or accreditation. Administrative tasks include hiring, onboarding and supervising staff, keeping the facility or home safe, and managing finances.

Administrators are responsible for making sure the program's mission is reflected in its policies and procedures. We are also committed to ongoing professional development and to supporting the continued education of our staff. In addition, we may advocate for children and families, working to ensure access to high-quality, inclusive early learning environments.

Because our work is broad and complex, administrators often face ethical challenges, such as making decisions about enrollment policies, staffing, and balancing the needs of families, licensing agencies, boards, and funders.

This section outlines administrators' ethical responsibilities toward: (a) personnel we supervise and/or employ, and (b) sponsoring agencies and governing boards.

ADMIN 1: RESPONSIBILITIES TO PERSONNEL

Administrators:

Admin 1.1—Do not allow staff to engage in any activities or practices that could cause physical or emotional harm to a child.

Admin 1.2—Ensure staff have a safe, supportive workplace that respects diversity, protects privacy, assures physical and psychological well-being, promotes professional growth, and supports ethical decision making.

Admin 1.3—Create an environment that supports the full participation of all children and families, including those with special needs. This includes a responsibility to seek resources that support needed adaptations.

Admin 1.4—Empower and equip staff in using a strengths-based approach that fosters children's positive and joyful learning and development.

Admin 1.5—Lead and support staff in making informed decisions about if, how, and when to appropriately select, use, integrate, and evaluate technology, interactive media, and artificial intelligence to meet the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and linguistic needs of young children.

Admin 1.6—Act proactively when conflicts arise between family members and staff, helping all parties express their needs and perspectives to work through disagreements and to support informed decision making. Ensure that all voices and perspectives are heard; this includes assisting families in effectively communicating their concerns, using interpretation and mediation, if and as needed.

Admin 1.7—Recognize, value, and draw upon different kinds of education, training, experiences, and expertise of staff when making decisions about children and programs.

Admin 1.8—Offer staff ongoing professional development and advancement opportunities that are research-based and relevant.

Admin 1.9—Train and hold staff accountable for understanding all relevant standards and regulations.

Admin 1.10—Develop and maintain written policies protecting confidentiality, responsible use of technology (including artificial intelligence), and the sharing of children's records. These policies must be made available to all program staff and families.

Admin 1.11—Ensure that children's records are only ever shared beyond parents or legal guardians, staff, and confidential consultants when there is family consent—except in cases of suspected abuse or neglect.

Admin 1.12—Develop and maintain comprehensive and clearly written personnel policies that outline program standards and expectations. Provide these policies to all new staff and ensure that they are easily accessible.

Admin 1.13—Apply all personnel policies consistently, fairly, and without bias and ensure all personnel records are kept confidential.

Admin 1.14—Take appropriate action to address any violations of policies.

Admin 1.15—Follow all employment laws and regulations and make hiring, retention, promotion, and termination decisions based solely on a person's qualifications, performance, and ability to fulfill the role. (*For related prohibitions, see Admin 1.20.*)

Admin 1.16—Understand and comply with rules and agreements established by unions or other organizations representing staff interests.

Admin 1.17—Evaluate the performance of all staff regularly.

a. Inform staff whose performance does not meet expectations, provide feedback, and offer coaching and additional support when possible.

b. Ensure staff are aware of grievance procedures if they disagree with their performance evaluation.

Admin 1.18—Conduct personnel dismissals lawfully and ethically.

a. In cases of termination, ensure there is documented, current, and accurate evidence of misconduct or poor performance.

b. Share the reasons for termination with staff who are dismissed.

Admin 1.19—Provide accurate and truthful personnel evaluations, judgments, and references.

Admin 1.20—Do not make hiring, retention, promotion, and termination decisions based on personal characteristics or identities.

ADMIN 2: RESPONSIBILITIES TO SPONSORING AGENCIES AND GOVERNING BODIES

Administrators:

Admin 2.1—Review all program policies from sponsoring agencies and governing bodies to assess the extent to which they serve the best interests of children.

a. Raise concerns if directives from a sponsoring agency or governing body do not align with the best interests of children.

b. Comply with all relevant regulations and standards that do align with the best interests of children.

Admin 2.2—Carry out job responsibilities conscientiously and with the goal of fulfilling all role-related responsibilities.

Admin 2.3—Manage resources responsibly and accurately account for their use.

Admin 2.4—Evaluate programs using agreed-upon standards and report findings to appropriate authorities.

Admin 2.5—Communicate necessary information honestly and thoroughly while maintaining confidentiality unless disclosure is required.

Admin 2.6—Confirm that any external research the program allows, facilitates, or participates in is appropriately designed to reflect the diversity of the populations upon whom its results may have future impacts. (*For related prohibitions, see Admin 2.7 and 2.8.*)

Admin 2.7—Do not allow, facilitate, or participate in research that could hinder the well-being, development, or education of children or staff.

Admin 2.8—Do not involve children in research projects without fully informing parents or legal guardians and giving them the opportunity to consent or decline without penalty.

Ethical Responsibilities Specific to Adult Educators

Early childhood educators working in professional preparation and training programs have a key responsibility to help adult learners (or "students") develop the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to support young children's well-being, learning, and development. Our role includes both guiding adult learners and ensuring that the field has well-prepared, caring, competent professionals to work with children and families.

To meet this responsibility, adult educators must follow the "Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators," which outlines the essential skills, dispositions, and practices required for working with children from birth through age 8 across all early learning settings. The "Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education" position statement provides key recommendations for preparing early childhood educators to create fair and inclusive learning opportunities for all children.

As we focus on training and supporting adult learners, adult educators face unique ethical challenges. These challenges arise within a complex network of relationships, including those with practicum sites, colleges and universities, and agencies that provide professional development. While these entities, agencies, and institutions also have ethical obligations to early childhood education students, teachers, and faculty members, those responsibilities are beyond the scope of this Code of Ethics.

This section outlines early childhood adult educators' ethical responsibilities toward: (a) adult learners in training classes and higher education courses, (b) partnership and practicum sites, and (c) institutions of higher learning and agencies that provide professional training.

PREP 1: RESPONSIBILITIES TO ADULT LEARNERS

Adult educators:

Prep 1.1—Provide learning experiences that meet the unique needs and strengths of adult learners; adapt to their learning styles, cultures, languages, practice settings, and career stages; and offer equitable pathways for success.

Prep 1.2—Offer high-quality educational experiences that prepare adult learners to support children's development, communicate with families, use technology, interactive media, and artificial intelligence appropriately and intentionally, and maintain their own health and well-being. (*For related prohibitions, see Prep 1.8.*)

Prep 1.3—Clearly communicate expectations for conduct, academic integrity, performance, writing standards, and responsible use of technology (including artificial intelligence). (*For related prohibitions, see Prep 1.9.*)

Prep 1.4—Protect the confidentiality of adult learners by sharing only necessary information through appropriate professional channels and only with those who need to know.

Prep 1.5—As applicable, ensure adult learners have access to a diversity of practicum and field experiences—both in-person and virtually—that take their current workplaces into account and that offer opportunities for them to benefit from qualified staff and mentors who can effectively support their development.

Prep 1.6—Provide programmatic and additional support to help adult learners who struggle in the training, class, or program, but who are deemed to have the potential to work effectively with young children. If additional support does not lead those students toward meeting academic and practical expectations, however, adult educators should turn toward helping them explore alternative educational or career paths.

Prep 1.7—Assist adult learners who raise concerns about a colleague's competence, fairness, or ethics by helping them clarify their concerns and take appropriate action, which may include following institutional policies for addressing complaints.

Prep 1.8—Do not sell products or services for personal gain in the context of training and coursework unless they are directly relevant, serve educational goals, and the connection is disclosed upfront.

Prep 1.9—Do not promote or advance adult learners who have shown that they do not possess the required knowledge, do not relate positively and effectively with children and families, or may cause harm to children's physical, emotional, or psychological well-being. Institutional policies and procedures that prevent such adult learners from completing a program must be followed.

PREP 2: RESPONSIBILITIES TO PRACTICUM SITES

Adult educators:

Prep 2.1—Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of adult learners, mentors, and administrators and ensure all are well-prepared for practicum experiences.

Prep 2.2—Recognize the partnership between early childhood programs and education preparation programs. Work collaboratively to meet expectations and provide necessary support.

Prep 2.3—Ensure qualified staff regularly supervise practicum experiences to support adult learners' professional development and to safeguard children's well-being.

Prep 2.4—Protect the privacy of programs, teachers, families, and children—including on all social media platforms—and instill this professional responsibility in adult learners.

Prep 2.5—Move adult learners to a more suitable placement when a practicum placement is not beneficial to the adult learner or to the children.

PREP 3: OBLIGATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING AND AGENCIES PROVIDING TRAINING

Adult educators:

Prep 3.1— Teach and provide training only in areas where we have appropriate experience and expertise or can acquire it.

Prep 3.2—Ensure course and training content aligns to the "Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators" position statement.

Prep 3.3—Evaluate adult learners fairly and without bias, using standards that align with both the mission of the institution and accepted practice in the field.

Prep 3.4—Maintain course integrity by following approved descriptions and updating content based on current research.

Prep 3.5—Keep professional roles distinct when interacting with an adult learner in multiple capacities (i.e., instructor, employer, supervisor). Provide feedback appropriate for each role.

Statement of Commitment

This "Statement of Commitment" is my personal pledge to uphold the core values and ethical responsibilities of early childhood educators.

At the heart of this Commitment is a guiding principle that early childhood educators have embraced throughout the history of the Code of Ethics: *Above all, we do not harm children*. This means that "*we do not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating. This responsibility has precedence over all others in this Code.*"

By signing this statement, I affirm my professional dedication to conducting myself with honesty and integrity in upholding the responsibilities outlined in the "Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators."

PRINTED NAME:

_____

SIGNED NAME:

_____

NAME OF PROGRAM:

_____

LOCATION:

_____

DATE:

_____

Glossary of Terms

This list of terms was adapted from existing position statements. Additional terms and full definitions can be found via www.NAEYC.org/position-statements. For ease of reference, the list is organized into terms that are specific to ethics, morality, and values, followed by those that are more generally applicable to early childhood education.

Core values: The shared commitments of a profession that guide its members in making a contribution to society. There is a difference between personal values and the core values of a profession.

Ethical dilemma: A situation in which an individual must choose between conflicting values and responsibilities.

Ethical responsibilities: Behaviors that one must or must not engage in (i.e., prohibitions).

Ethics: The study of right and wrong, including moral choices, responsibilities, and the effects of decisions on relationships.

Morality: People's views of what is good, right, and proper; their beliefs about their obligations; and their ideas about how they should behave.

Personal values: Qualities or principles that individuals believe to be important and strive to uphold for themselves, others, and society.

Professional ethics: The moral responsibilities of a profession that go beyond personal beliefs and that guide decision making and behavior in the workplace.

Adult educator: A professional who teaches early childhood educators inclusive of those in degree-granting educator preparation programs, as well as those providing credentials, nondegree training, and mentorship in early childhood education settings.

Adult learner/student: An individual training to work in early childhood education, whether already working or preparing to work with children from birth to age 8. This includes high school and college students under 18 who meet these criteria.

Administrator: An individual responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating an early childhood education program for infants and toddlers, preschoolers, kindergartners, or children in primary grades. The administrator's setting may vary and may include a child care center, family child care home, or school. The administrator's title may vary and may include director, family child care owner or operator, site manager, administrator, program manager, early childhood coordinator, and principal.

Bias: Attitudes or stereotypes that favor one group over another. Explicit biases are conscious beliefs and stereotypes that affect one's understanding, actions, and decisions; implicit biases work in an unconscious manner. An anti-bias approach to education explicitly works to end all forms of bias and discrimination.

Colleague: A fellow educator, administrator, or adult educator, including coworkers and volunteers. Colleagues may work in the same program or different programs.

Early childhood education profession: Members of the ECE profession include early childhood educators, higher education faculty, and pedagogical and instructional leaders in early learning settings.

Early childhood educator: An individual who cares for and promotes the learning, development, and well-being of children birth through age 8 in all settings, meeting guidelines of the profession to establish a foundation for children's lifelong learning and success.

Equitable learning opportunities: Learning opportunities that help each and every child thrive by building on their unique set of individual and family strengths—including cultural background(s), language(s), abilities and disabilities, and experiences.

Family: A child's family includes a parent, parents, or other adults who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth, kinship, and/or adoption or placement, and who, together, assume some key responsibilities for the raising and nurturing of children.

Gender identity and expression: A social concept that reflects how individuals identify themselves. Traditionally viewed as a binary category of male/female linked to an individual's sex, gender identity and expression can also be viewed as fluid and expansive.

Inclusion: The belief and practice that all children, regardless of ability or identity, have the right to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society.

Mentor: An experienced early childhood professional who provides guidance and counsel and who may work with adult learners in an early childhood program.

Technology: Encompassing the broad and expanding range of digital and virtual materials, devices, and tools, such as computers, tablets, televisions, whiteboards, mobile devices, cameras, electronic toys, games, e-book readers, and other analog devices, as well as other tools that may be part of or be powered by interactive media and artificial intelligence.

Research, History, and Other Resources

Additional information, including descriptions of the research, history and methodology grounding the revision of the Code of Ethics are available on NAEYC's website.

Acknowledgments

NAEYC is deeply grateful to the members of the Code of Ethics Workgroup and the Senior Advisors who generously shared their expertise, time, and perspectives as we collectively revised this position statement:

- Leah Austin, President and CEO, The National Black Child Development Institute
- **Angela C. Baum, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor, Early Childhood Education, University of South Carolina
- Raquel Diaz, President Elect FLAEYC and Senior Partnership Manager, The University of Florida Lastinger Center
- Cynthia DiCarlo, Professor of Early Childhood Education, Louisiana State University
- **Mélanie Dixon, Director, Professional Practice, College of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario, Canada
- Christyn Dundorf, Codirector, Teaching Preschool Partners
- Zeynep Isik-Ercan, President, National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators, and Department Chair of Early Childhood, Rowan University
- **Stephanie Feeney, Professor Emerita of Education, University of Hawaii at Manoa
- Benita Flores-Muñoz, Member of the NAEYC Commission on Early Childhood Higher Education Accreditation and Professor Emerita of ECE, Del Mar College
- Robin Fox, Interim Provost, University of Wisconsin Whitewater
- **Nancy Freeman, Professor Emerita of Early Childhood Education, University of South Carolina
- *Stacey French-Lee (Chair), Clinical Associate Professor, Executive Director of the Campus Child Development Program, Early Childhood and Elementary Education, Georgia State University
- Heidi Friedel, NAEYC Faith-Based Interest Forum Facilitator, Early Childhood Consultant, and Staff Support Specialist for ECE Subhub
- Eugene Geist, Associate Professor, Louisiana State University
- Georgia Goldburn, Executive Director, Hope For New Haven, and Cofounder, CERCLE
- *Brian Johnson, Assistant Dean, James Madison College at Michigan State University
- Sim Loh, Family Partnership Coordinator, Children's Village
- Andrea Maldonado, Director of Quality Assessment and Recognition, National Association for Family Child Care
- **Eva Moravcik, Professor, Honolulu Community College, and Site Coordinator, Leeward Community College Children's Center
- Meir Muller, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of South Carolina
- Ernesto Muñoz, Senior Project Manager of Curriculum Literacy, University of Texas
- Richelle Patterson, Senior Policy Analyst, National Education Association
- Anu Sachdev, President, ACCESS, and Adjunct ECE Faculty, East Stroudsburg University
- *Ian Schiefelbein, ECE Faculty, Central New Mexico Community College
- Ashley Simpson, BIPOC Educator Recruitment and Retention Strategies Program Manager, Aurora Public School District
- *Toni Sturdivant, Director of Early Learning, Mid-America Regional Council
- Tracy Weston, GAEYC District 1 Representative and Cofounder, Noah's Ark Preschool Academy of Terrell Inc.
- *Reginald Williams, Full Professor of Early Childhood Education, South Carolina State University

*NAEYC Governing Board Members (current and former)

**Senior Advisors

Listed affiliations are consistent with Workgroup and Senior Advisor roles at the time each person initially participated in the process.

The Workgroup and Senior Advisors were primarily supported by NAEYC staff members Meghan Salas Atwell and Lauren Hogan.

NAEYC is grateful to our funders and supporters who make this work possible, including those who have donated through the Marilyn M. Smith Applied Research Fund. Finally, NAEYC thanks the many NAEYC members, nonmembers, researchers, educators, faculty members, advocates, and others who provided valuable guidance, input, and feedback on this statement as it was revised.