



Ethical Conduct: Responsible Behavior in Early Childhood Education

With the explosion of the use of social media and technology, the issue of **ethical conduct** has come front and center into the debate about how professionals should conduct themselves within their fields. This issue is particularly sensitive for early childhood educators because of their connection to children and families.

In this issue of the *Leadership Letter*, we'll explore how the Code of Ethical Conduct developed by NAEYC (an accepted national standard for the field) applies to our everyday lives working with children and families and how we, as leaders in our affiliates and states, are bound in that role by this code.

The *Code of Ethical Conduct* (2005) contains the following sections:

- ◆ Section 1: Ethical Responsibilities to Children
- ◆ Section 2: Ethical Responsibilities to Families
- ◆ Section 3: Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues
- ◆ Section 4: Ethical Responsibilities to Community and Society

As stated in the Code:

NAEYC recognizes that many daily decisions required of those who work with young children are of a moral and ethical nature. 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 education.

For a copy of the Code, go to <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSETH05.pdf>

Our Core Values As Defined in the Code of Ethical Conduct (2005)

As early childhood educators, we have "made a commitment to" :

- ⇒ Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle.
- ⇒ Base our work with children on knowledge of how children develop and learn.
- ⇒ Appreciate and support the 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).
- ⇒ Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect.

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Leadership Commission Members

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Online Professionalism: Be Careful What You Share

Interacting and connecting with others online has opened up a new world for early care and education providers. We can access resources, participate in interest forums or online communities, search for employment and connect with other educators across the world.....According to Kathryn Castle (2009), early childhood professionals enhance their knowledge base through participation in professional organizations, collaboration with others and serving as advocates. Online communities provide opportunities to do many of these things tied to professionalism.

The benefits of interacting in the online world however, come with responsibilities. As early childhood professionals we have ethical responsibilities to children, families, colleagues and employers. **The same ideals and principles that guide our behaviors in person, should guide our behaviors online.**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Code of Ethics (2005) communicates the importance of trust, respect and confidentiality in our relationships. **Maintenance of confidentiality to families includes updates, postings and photographs on social networking sites.**

Another key practice is to avoid practices that harm the reputation of our co-workers or the programs in which we work. Even on social networking sites used for personal use, our ethical responsibilities apply. In spite of using high privacy settings, which is recommended, people you may not want to see your page may be able to.

Just as online networking allows educators to connect across the world, when posting comments, photographs or links, imagine that anyone in the world can see it.

Refer to the NAEYC Code of Ethics and ask yourself if you have adhered to them. **If there is a concern about whether or not something is appropriate, it probably is not**

appropriate.

Take advantage of the many opportunities to benefit from interacting online with early care and education providers with similar concerns and interests...this is part of being a professional. **While interacting online however, keep in mind your commitment to the ethical principles of our field.** *Excerpted from an article by Dr. Helene Harte, originally published in the Spring 2011 edition of the SECA Reporter.*

You may also wish to access the article by Dr. Kathryn Castle that was mentioned at the beginning of this article. **"What Do Early Childhood Professionals Do?"** appeared in Volume 37, #3, pages 4-10 of *Dimensions of Early Childhood*. The issue of *Dimensions* is available on the "members only" section of the SECA website and archived on the *Dimensions* page. In order to access the article, you will need your SECA member ID to login on the home page of the website.

Defining Professional Values and Ethics

Professional values and ethics are a "set of moral principles and standards of conduct, supporting the moral prestige of professional groups in society. The tasks of professional ethics are to identify moral standards and assessments, judgments and concepts, characterizing people as representatives of a particular profession. Professional ethics develops norms, standards, requirements, typical to certain activities.

Ethics is designed to educate people, to help them to behave properly with others, to communicate at the workplace, etc. Professional ethics ought to follow the measurement standards of morality, adopted in order to regu-

late human behavior." Retrieved from <http://www.articlesbase.com/ethics-articles/professional-values-and-ethics-1663610.html>, 10/25/2012.

You'll find a Code of Ethics for Educators within your state's Department of Education's policies and guidelines.

From Florida: *The educator values the worth and dignity of every person, the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, acquisition of knowledge and the nurture of democratic citizenship.*

From Arkansas: *The professional, ethical educator contributes to the development and maintenance of a supportive student-centered learning community that values and promotes*

human dignity, fairness, care, the greater good and individual rights.

From North Carolina: *The professional educator acknowledges the worth and dignity of every person and demonstrates the pursuit of truth and devotion to excellence, acquires knowledge, and nurtures democratic citizenship.*

Our thanks go to these longtime SECA members who helped to revise the NAEYC Code of Ethics in 2005:

**Ruth Ann Ball (OK)
Nancy Freeman (SC)
Evelyn Wright Moore (TX)**

Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues

The *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct* defines how early childhood professionals should conduct themselves within the context of the workplace and in their capacity as employer or employee.

“In a caring, cooperative workplace, human dignity is respected, professional satisfactions 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.”

The statement includes “ideals” on which the basic principles in this sec-

tion are developed. Among those ideals are:

- 1) To establish and maintain relationships of respect, trust, confidentiality, collaboration and cooperation with co-workers.
- 2) To support co-workers in meeting their professional needs and development and accord co-workers due recognition of professional achievement.
- 3) To do nothing which diminishes the reputation of the program in which we work unless it is violating laws and regulations designed to protect children or is violating the provision of the Code.
- 4) 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.

Additionally, this section provides guidance (principles) on how an early childhood professional should present themselves to colleagues and the association.

- ***“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 judgment.”***
- ***“We shall recognize the contributions of colleagues to our program and not participate in practices that diminish their reputation or impair their effectiveness in working with children and families.”***

Excerpted/paraphrased from the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct*, Section III, 2005

Responsibilities to Community & Society

As early childhood professionals, we operate within our communities and states. We impact the quality of care that children receive and we help to frame the discussion at the community, state and national levels about policies that will support and enhance their development.

We are responsible for:

- ◇ Advocating on behalf of the children and families that we serve.
- ◇ Developing and managing programs that provide “high-quality” care to children.
- ◇ Ensuring that we personally are educated and trained about the newest practices that support child development.

- ◇ Joining with other professionals in the field to ensure that a “voice for children” is heard in the public policy debate.
- ◇ Cooperating and working together with professionals across agencies and disciplines to ensure that practices and initiatives benefit children and families.

“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 fami-

lies 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..... 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.”

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, Section IV, 2005



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*Promoting Quality Care and Education for
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The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is a regional organization committed to promoting quality care and education for young children and their families. SECA is committed to providing leadership and support to individuals and groups by:

- *Enhancing the quality of young children's lives through early childhood care and education.*
- *Supporting families in their roles of caring for their children.*
- *Fostering the professional growth and status of individuals working with young children and their families.*

SECA is a "Voice for Southern Children"

Your Board and Professional Ethics

According to the National Council of Nonprofits, "*The greatest threat to the not-for-profit sector is the betrayal of public trust, the disappointment of public confidence. Virtually all knowledgeable observers of the not-for-profit scene believe that an overwhelming proportion of not-for-profits are honorably run...that admirable context however, does not provide much protection to the sector when a sequence of highly publicized disgraceful not-for-profit misdeeds occurs.*" Joel Fleishman, Director of the Heyman Center on Ethics, Public Policy and the Professions, Duke University.

Ethical leadership in the non-profit sector is critical to the success of the organization. As members of the Board of your state or local affiliate, you have certain responsibilities to ensure that your role as a leader en-

ures **transparency** and **accountability** to your members.

The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits has developed a publication entitled, **Principles & Practices for Non-profit Excellence**. According to the publication, "*Nonprofits have an ethical obligation to their constituents and the public to conduct their activities with accountability and transparency. Nonprofits should regularly and openly convey information to the public about their mission, activities, accomplishments and decision-making processes.....Boards of directors should provide information to the public that describes their decisions and decision-making processes. They should make meeting agendas and descriptions of significant decisions available to those who request them. A nonprofit should provide its constituents with ongoing opportunities to interact with*

the board and management regarding its activities." Retrieved from <http://www.minnesotanonprofits.org/nonprofit-resources/principles-and-practices/transparency-and-accountability>, 10/30/2012

As you develop the policies and procedures for your affiliate/chapter, **you should consider adopting a Board Code of Ethics within those policies**. The Center for Nonprofit Excellence has developed a sample Code of Ethics that could serve as a model for you. For a copy of the sample Code, go to http://www.nascanet.org/Upload/DO_Training/6_Ethics/Code_of_Ethics_Sample.pdf. You'll find a simple Code that can become a part of your Board orientation and policies. **Remember: Accountability and transparency are the keys to a successful Board and non-profit organization.**