



# Code of Ethical Conduct

## Supplement for Early Childhood Program Administrators

Adopted July 2006, Reaffirmed and Updated May 2011

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### A Position Statement Supplement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children

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*Adopted by the National Association for Family Child Care*

Administrators of programs for young children are responsible for overseeing all program operations, serving as leaders in their programs, and representing the field to the community. Early childhood program administrators are called upon to sustain relationships with a wide variety of clients. They interact with and have responsibilities to children, families, program personnel, governing boards and sponsoring agencies, funders, regulatory agencies, their community, and the profession.

Program administrators deal with unique responsibilities and ethical challenges in the course of managing and guiding their programs and assume leadership roles within and beyond their programs. As managers and leaders, they are called upon to share their professional knowledge and expertise with families, personnel, governing boards, and others; demonstrate empathy for the families and children they serve; and communicate respect for the skills, knowledge, and expertise of teaching staff, other personnel, and families. Administrators accept primary responsibility for executing the program's mission as well as developing and carrying out program policies and procedures that support that mission. They also make a commitment to continue their own professional development and the continuing education of the personnel in the program they lead. Administrators also may be advocates for all children being able to gain access to quality programming. Some of the challenges faced by administrators involve balancing their obligations to support and nurture children with their respon-

sibility to address the needs and safeguard the rights of families and personnel and respond to the requirements of their boards and sponsoring agencies.

### **Purpose of the Supplement**

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Like those in the field who work directly with young children, program administrators are regularly called upon to make decisions of a moral and ethical nature. The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (revised 2005, **reaffirmed and updated 2011**) is a foundational document that maps the ethical dimensions of early childhood educators' work in early care and education programs. Program administrators share the ethical obligations assumed by all early childhood educators—obligations that are reflected in the core values, ideals, and principles set forth in the Code. Administrators embrace the central commitment of the early care and education field—and the Code—to ensure the well-being and support the healthy development of young children.

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*Note:* This Supplement was reaffirmed by the NAEYC Governing Board in May 2011 and changes were made to Ideals and Principles that regard responsibilities to families to ensure alignment with current family engagement best practices in the field. In addition, references to the Code of Ethical Conduct, Section III, Part C: Responsibilities to Employees were deleted, as Section III, Part C was deleted in the May 2011 update of the Code.

Given the nature of their responsibilities, however, administrators face some additional ethical challenges. Conflicts often surface in the areas of enrollment policies; dealings with personnel; and relationships with families, licensors, governing boards, sponsoring agencies, and others in the community. The existing Code is a valuable resource that addresses many of the ethical issues encountered by administrators. However, it does not provide all of the guidance that they need to address the unique ethical issues that arise in their work. This Supplement offers additional core values, ideals, and principles related to the frequently recurring ethical issues encountered by administrators.

## Core values

In addition to the core values spelled out in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, early childhood program administrators commit themselves to the following additional core values.

We make a commitment to

- Recognize that we have many responsibilities—to children, families, personnel, governing boards, sponsoring agencies, funders, regulatory agencies, the community, and the profession—and that the well-being of the children in our care is our primary responsibility, above our obligations to other constituencies.
- Recognize the importance of and maintain a humane and fulfilling work environment for personnel and volunteers.
- Be committed to the professional development of staff.

## Conceptual framework

This document sets forth a conception of early childhood program administrators' professional responsibilities in five areas, some of which differ from those identified in the NAEYC Code. Each section addresses an area of professional relationships: (1) with children, (2) with families, (3) with personnel, (4) with sponsoring agencies and governing boards, and (5) with the community and society. The items in each section address the unique ethical responsibilities of administrators in early care and education settings.

## Ideals and principles

This Supplement identifies additional **ideals** that reflect exemplary practice (our aspirations) and **principles** describing practices that are required, prohibited, or permitted. The principles guide conduct and assist prac-

## Definitions

### *Administrator*

The individual responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating a child care, preschool, kindergarten, or primary grade program. The administrator's title may vary, depending on the program type or sponsorship of the program. Common titles include director, site manager, administrator, program manager, early childhood coordinator, and principal. (*Note:* The definition of *administrator* and other relevant text in this Supplement are consistent with the Leadership and Management standard of the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria.)

### *Personnel*

Staff members employed, directed, or supervised by an administrator. Here, unless otherwise noted, *personnel* includes all program staff and volunteers providing services to children and/or families. (*Note:* Because program administrators may be supervisors and not employers, we have adopted the terms *personnel* and *staff* in lieu of *employees* for this Supplement to the Code.)

tioners in resolving ethical dilemmas. Together, the ideals and principles are intended to direct practitioners to questions that, when responsibly answered, provide the basis for conscientious decision making. While the Code and this Supplement provide specific direction for addressing some ethical dilemmas, many others will require early childhood program administrators to combine the guidance of the Code and/or this Supplement with their best professional judgment.

The ideals and principles in the Code and this Supplement present a shared framework of professional responsibility that affirms our commitment to the core values of our field. The Code and the Supplement publicly acknowledge the responsibilities that early childhood professionals assume and, in so doing, support ethical behavior in our work. Practitioners who face situations with ethical dimensions are urged to seek guidance in the applicable parts of the Code/Supplement and in the spirit that informs the whole.

The ideals and principles in this Supplement are based on early childhood program administrators' descriptions of ethical dilemmas they have encountered in their work. They are designed to inspire and guide administrators toward actions that reflect the field's current understanding of ethical responsibility.

The Supplement also includes items from the NAEYC Code that directly relate to the work of administrators—some are duplicates of Code ideals or principles, and some are adaptations. Items from the Code that are repeated or adapted for this Supplement are cross-referenced with their corresponding ideals and principles, with the Code references indicated in parentheses. Other items that expand and extend the NAEYC Code were written specifically for this Supplement. (*Note:* There is **not** necessarily a corresponding principle for each ideal.)

## 1. Ethical responsibilities to children

The early childhood program administrator's paramount responsibility is to ensure that programs for children provide settings that are safe, healthy, nurturing, and responsive for each child. Administrators are committed to establishing and maintaining programs that support children's development and learning; promote respect for individual differences; and help children learn to live, play, and work cooperatively. Administrators are also committed to ensuring that the program promotes children's self-awareness, competence, self-worth, resiliency, and physical well-being.

### *Ideals*

- I-1.1 To ensure that children's needs are the first priority in administrative decision making, recognizing that a child's well-being cannot be separated from that of his/her family.
- I-1.2 To provide a high-quality program based on current knowledge of child development and best practices in early care and education.

### *Principles*

- P-1.1 We shall place the welfare and safety of children above other obligations (for example, to families, program personnel, employing agency, community). **This item takes precedence over all others in this Supplement.**
- P-1.2 We shall ensure that the programs we administer are safe and developmentally appropriate in accordance with standards of the field, including those developed and endorsed by NAEYC and other professional associations.
- P-1.3 We shall have clearly stated policies for the respectful treatment of children and adults in all contacts made by staff, parents, volunteers, student teachers, and other adults. We shall appropriately address incidents that are not consistent with our policies.

P-1.4 We shall support children's well-being by encouraging the development of strong bonds between children and their families and between children and their teachers.

P-1.5 We shall support children's well-being by promoting connections with their culture and collaborating with communities to ensure cultural consistency between the program and families' childrearing practices.

P-1.6 We shall make every effort to provide the necessary resources (staff, consultation, other human resources, equipment, and so on) to ensure that all children, including those with special needs, can benefit from the program.

P-1.7 We shall ensure that there is a plan for appropriate transitions for children when they enter our program, move from one classroom to another within our program, and when they leave.

P-1.8 We shall apply all policies regarding our obligations to children consistently and fairly.

P-1.9 We shall review all program policies set forth by sponsoring agencies and governing bodies to ensure that they are in the best interest of the children.

P-1.10 We shall express our professional concerns about directives from the sponsoring agency or governing body when we believe that a mandated practice is not in the best interest of children.

P-1.11 If we determine that a policy does not benefit children, we shall work to change it. If we determine that a program policy is harmful to children, we shall suspend its implementation while working to honor the intent of the policy in ways that are not harmful to children.

## 2. Ethical responsibilities to families

The administrator sets the tone for the program in establishing and supporting an understanding of the family's role in their children's development. Administrators strive to promote communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the home and the program in ways that enhance each child's development. Because administrators provide the link between the family and direct services for children, they often encounter ethical issues in this area of responsibility.

### *Ideals*

- I-2.1 To design programs and policies inclusive of and responsive to diverse families.
- I-2.2 To serve as a resource for families by providing information and referrals to services in the larger community.

I-2.3 To advocate for the needs and rights of families in the program and the larger community.

I-2.4 To support families in their role as advocate for their children and themselves.

I-2.5 To create and maintain a climate of trust and candor that fosters two-way communication and enables parents/guardians to speak and act in the best interest of their children.

### **Principles**

P-2.1 We shall work to create a respectful environment for and a working relationship with all families, regardless of family members' sex, race, national origin, immigration status, preferred home language, religious belief or affiliation, age, marital status/family structure, disability, or sexual orientation.

P-2.2 We shall provide families with complete and honest information concerning program philosophy, educational practices, and the services provided.

P-2.3 We shall make every attempt to use two-way communication to convey information in ways that are accessible by every family served.

P-2.4 We shall establish clear operating policies and make them available to families in advance of their child entering the program.

P-2.5 We shall develop enrollment policies that clearly describe admission policies and priorities.

P-2.6 We shall develop policies that clearly state the circumstances under which a child or family may be asked to leave the program. We shall refuse to provide services for children only if the program will not benefit them or if their presence jeopardizes the ability of other children to benefit from the program or prevents personnel from doing their jobs.

P-2.7 We shall assist families in finding appropriate alternatives when we believe their children cannot benefit from the program or when their presence jeopardizes the ability of other children to benefit from the program or prevents personnel from doing their jobs.

P-2.8 We shall apply all policies regarding obligations to families consistently and fairly.

P-2.9 In decisions concerning children and programs, we shall draw upon our relationships with families as well as each family's knowledge of their child. (See also P-3.7 in this Supplement.)

P-2.10 We shall respond to families' requests to the extent that the requests are congruent with program philosophy, standards of good practice, and the resources of the program. We shall not honor any request that puts a child in a situation that would create physical or emotional harm. In such instances, we shall communicate with the family the reason(s) why the request was not honored and work toward an alternative solution.

P-2.11 We shall work to achieve shared understanding between families and staff members. In disagreements, we shall help all parties express their particular needs and perspectives. (*Note: This is repeated in Section 3 [P-3.16] to emphasize the responsibility to both staff and family members.*)

### **3. Ethical responsibilities to personnel**

Early childhood program administrators are managers with the responsibility for providing oversight for all program operations, as well as serving as leaders in early care and education programs. They are responsible for creating and maintaining a caring, cooperative workplace that respects human dignity, promotes professional satisfaction, and models positive relationships. Administrators must exemplify the highest possible standards of professional practice both within and beyond the program. Ethical responsibilities to personnel include those that are related to working with staff they supervise and/or employ as well as the unions or groups that represent these staff. (*Note: Administrators' ethical responsibilities to coworkers and employers are included in the Code of Ethical Conduct, Section III, Part A and Part B.*)

#### **Ideals**

I-3.1 To create and promote policies and working conditions that are physically and emotionally safe and foster mutual respect, cooperation, collaboration, competence, well-being, confidentiality, and self-esteem.

I-3.2 To create and maintain a climate of trust and candor that enables staff to speak and act in the best interest of children, families, and the field of early care and education.

I-3.3 To coach and mentor staff, helping them realize their potential within the field of early care and education.

I-3.4 To strive to secure adequate and equitable compensation (salary and benefits) for those who work with or on behalf of young children.

I-3.5 To encourage and support continual development of staff in becoming more skilled and knowledgeable practitioners.

### **Principles**

P-3.1 We shall provide staff members with safe and supportive working conditions that respect human dignity, honor confidences, and permit them to carry out their responsibilities through performance evaluation, written grievance procedures, constructive feedback, and opportunities for continuing professional development and advancement.

P-3.2 We shall develop and maintain comprehensive written personnel policies that define program standards. These policies shall be given to new staff members and shall be easily accessible and available for review by all staff members.

P-3.3 We shall apply all policies regarding our work with personnel consistently and fairly.

P-3.4 We shall be familiar with and abide by the rules and regulations developed by unions or other groups representing the interests or rights of personnel in our programs.

P-3.5 We shall support and encourage personnel in their efforts to implement programming that enhances the development and learning of the children served.

P-3.6 We shall act immediately to prevent staff from implementing activities or practices that put any child in a situation that creates physical or emotional harm.

P-3.7 In decisions concerning children and programs, we shall draw upon the education, training, experience, and expertise of staff members. (See also P-2.9 in this Supplement.)

P-3.8 We shall work to ensure that ongoing training is available and accessible, represents current understandings of best practice, and is relevant to staff members' responsibilities.

P-3.9 We shall inform staff whose performance does not meet program expectations of areas of concern and, when possible, assist in improving their performance.

P-3.10 We shall provide guidance, additional professional development, and coaching for staff whose practices are not appropriate. In instances in which a staff member cannot satisfy reasonable expectations for practice, we shall counsel the staff member to pursue a more appropriate position.

P-3.11 We shall conduct personnel dismissals, when necessary, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. We shall inform staff who are dismissed of the reasons for termination. When a dismissal is for cause, justification must be based on evidence of inadequate or inappropriate behavior that is accurately documented, current, and available for the staff member to review.

P-3.12 In making personnel evaluations and recommendations, we shall make judgments based on fact and relevant to the interests of children and programs.

P-3.13 We shall make hiring, retention, termination, and promotion decisions based solely on a person's competence, record of accomplishment, ability to carry out the responsibilities of the position, and professional preparation specific to the developmental levels of children in his/her care.

P-3.14 We shall not make hiring, retention, termination, and promotion decisions based on an individual's sex, race, national origin, religious beliefs or other affiliations, age, marital status/family structure, disability, or sexual orientation. We shall be familiar with and observe laws and regulations that pertain to employment discrimination. (Aspects of this principle do not apply to programs that have a lawful mandate to determine eligibility based on one or more of the criteria identified above.)

P-3.15 We shall maintain confidentiality in dealing with issues related to an employee's job performance and shall respect an employee's right to privacy regarding personal issues.

P-3.16 We shall work to achieve shared understandings between families and staff members. In disagreements, we shall help all parties express their particular needs and perspectives. (*Note:* This is repeated from Section 2 [P-2.11] to emphasize the responsibility to both staff and family members.)

## **4. Ethical responsibilities to sponsoring agencies and governing bodies**

Programs providing early care and education operate under a variety of public and private auspices with diverse governing structures and missions. All early childhood program administrators are responsible to their governing and funding bodies. Administrators ensure the program's stability and reputation by recruiting, selecting, orienting, and supervising personnel; following sound fiscal practices; and securing and

maintaining licensure and accreditation. Administrators are also responsible for overseeing day-to-day program operations and fostering positive relationships among children, families, staff, and the community.

Administrators' responsibilities to sponsoring agencies and governing bodies are optimally met in a collaborative manner. Administrators establish and maintain partnerships with sponsoring agency representatives, board members, and other stakeholders to design and improve services for children and their families.

### ***Ideals***

- I-4.1 To ensure to the best of our ability that the program pursues its stated mission.
- I-4.2 To provide program leadership that reflects best practices in early care and education and program administration.
- I-4.3 To plan and institute ongoing program improvements.
- I-4.4 To be ambassadors within the community, creating goodwill for program sponsors as well as for the program itself.
- I-4.5 To advocate on behalf of children and families in interactions with sponsoring agency staff and governing body members for high-quality early care and education programs and services for children.

### ***Principles***

- P-4.1 We shall ensure compliance with all relevant regulations and standards.
- P-4.2 We shall do our jobs conscientiously, attending to all areas that fall within the scope of our responsibility.
- P-4.3 We shall manage resources responsibly and accurately account for their use.
- P-4.4 To ensure that the program's sponsoring agency and governing body are prepared to make wise decisions, we shall thoroughly and honestly communicate necessary information.
- P-4.5 We shall evaluate our programs using agreed-upon standards and report our findings to the appropriate authority.
- P-4.6 In presenting information to governing bodies we shall make every effort to preserve confidentiality regarding children, families, and staff unless there is a compelling reason for divulging the information.

## **5. Ethical responsibilities to community, society, and the field of early childhood education**

Like those of all early childhood educators, administrators' responsibilities to the community include cooperating with agencies and professionals that share the responsibility for children, supporting families in gaining access to services provided by those agencies and professionals, and assisting in the development of community programs and services.

Early childhood program administrators often have the knowledge, expertise, and education to assume leadership roles. For this reason, they are responsible to the community, society, and the field of early childhood education for promoting the education and well-being of young children and their families.

### ***Ideals***

- I-5.1 To provide the community with high-quality early care and education programs and services. (I-4.1)
- I-5.2 To serve as a community resource, spokesperson, and advocate for quality programming for young children. To serve as a conduit between the community and programs by coordinating and collaborating with key community representatives.
- I-5.3 To uphold the spirit as well as the specific provisions of applicable regulations and standards.
- I-5.4 To increase the awareness of the public and policy makers about the importance of the early years and the positive impact of high-quality early care and education programs on society.
- I-5.5 To advocate on behalf of children and families for high-quality programs and services for children and for professional development for the early childhood workforce.
- I-5.6 To join with other early childhood educators in speaking with a clear and unified voice for the values of our profession on behalf of children, families, and early childhood educators.
- I-5.7 To be an involved and supportive member of the early childhood profession.
- I-5.8 To further the professional development of the field of early childhood education and to strengthen its commitment to realizing its core values as reflected in NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct and this Supplement. (I-4.8).
- I-5.9 To ensure that adequate resources are provided so that all provisions of the Code of Ethical Conduct and this Supplement can be implemented.

### **Principles**

P-5.1 We shall communicate openly and truthfully about the nature and extent of services that we provide. (P-4.1)

P-5.2 We shall apply for, accept, and work in positions for which we are personally well-suited and professionally qualified. We shall not offer services that we do not have the competence, qualifications, or resources to provide. (P-4.2)

P-5.3 We shall carefully check references and not hire or recommend for employment any person whose competence, qualifications, or character makes him or her unsuited for the position. (P-4.3)

P-5.4 When we make a personnel recommendation or serve as a reference, we shall be accurate and truthful.

P-5.5 We shall be objective and accurate in reporting the knowledge upon which we base our program practices. (P-4.4)

P-5.6 We shall be knowledgeable about the appropriate use of assessment strategies and instruments and interpret results accurately to families. (P-4.5)

P-5.7 We shall be familiar with laws and regulations that serve to protect the children in our programs and be vigilant in ensuring that these laws and regulations are followed. (P-4.6)

P-5.8 We shall hold program staff accountable for knowing and following all relevant standards and regulations.

P-5.9 When we become aware of a practice or situation that endangers the health, safety, or well-being of children, we have an ethical responsibility to protect children or inform parents and/or others who can. (P-4.7)

P-5.10 We shall not participate in practices in violation of laws and regulations that protect the children in our programs. (P-4.8)

P-5.11 When we have evidence that an early childhood program is violating laws or regulations protecting children, we shall report the violation to appropriate authorities who can be expected to remedy the situation. (P-4.9)

P-5.12 We shall be honest and forthright in communications with the public and with agencies responsible for regulation and accreditation.

P-5.13 When a program violates or requires its employees to violate NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct, it is permissible, after fair assessment of the evidence, to disclose the identity of that program. (P-4-10)

P-5.14 When asked to provide an informed opinion on issues, practices, products, or programs, we shall base our opinions on relevant experience, knowledge of child development, and standards of best practice.

#### **Workgroup for the Development of the 2006 NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct Supplement for Program Administrators**

Mary Ambery, Paula Jorde Bloom, Richard Cohen, Anne Dorsey, Stephanie Feeney, Nancy Freeman, Marla Israel, Ellie Kaucher, Eva Moravcik, Beatriz Otero, Julie Powers, Martha Staker, Todd Boressoff (NAEYC Board Liaison), Peter Pizzolongo (NAEYC Staff)

The core NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct is online at [www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSETH05\\_supp.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSETH05_supp.pdf)

National Association for the Education of Young Children  
1313 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005-4101

