

# Working Through Ethical Dilemmas in the Early Childhood Profession

written by Pam Millar



Hanna Perkins Center  
for Child Development

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# Attendance

## Demographic Poll

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# Agenda

Participants will introduce themselves, their place of work, age group working with and years in the field. What they expect to learn in this presentation.

- I. What is a profession? A professional?
- II. What are professional ethics? Code of ethics? (30 min)
- III. Why do we need a code ethics? (30 min)
- IV. Early Childhood Profession; Ethics; Code of Conduct (45 min) NAEYC
- V. Working through dilemmas: Discussion of scenarios (45 min)
- VI. - group discussion and presentation
- VII. Wrap up; evaluations; comments

# Breakout discussion

**You will be put in a breakout group to discuss:**

- How do you describe your profession?
- How is your profession different than other professions?
- How do you perform your job responsibilities as a professional?

Be prepared to share.

***The instructor will move from group to group to assist if necessary.***

# What is a profession? A professional?

A **profession** is a [vocation](#) founded upon specialized [educational training](#), the purpose of which is to supply disinterested objective counsel and service to others, for a direct and definite compensation, wholly apart from expectation of other business gain.

A **professional** is about success and influence; having a reputation for excellence and being thought of as someone who exhibits professionalism under any circumstance. A professional adheres to their professional ethics at all times.

Profession	Job Description	Entry Level Education	Salary Range (2018)
Arts and Design Occupations	Opportunities in movies, tv, graphic design, florists, animation, industry, fashion	Bachelors Degree	26, 350 – 92,500
Community and Service Occupations	Social workers, counselors, religious workers, school counselors, rehab counseling	Bachelors – Masters Degree	33, 120 – 55, 410
<b>Education, Training, Library Occupations</b>	<b>Preschool, elementary, secondary, college instructors, assistant teachers, curators, museum workers, librarians</b>	<b>Bachelors – Masters Degree</b>	<b>26, 260 – 76, 000</b>
Healthcare/Healthcare Support Occupations	Nurses, physicians, surgeons, dentists Dietitians, trainers, RNs Dental Hygienists, EMT, Record Tech, Surgical Tech Home Health Care, Pharmacy Tech, Vet asst	Masters - Doctoral or professional Degree Bachelors Degree Postsecondary non-degree award  High School Diploma	68, 000 – 208, 00 46, 600 – 70, 000 32, 000 – 72, 000  23, 000 – 36, 000
Food Prep/Serving Occupations	Food prep, bartenders, chef, wait staff	High School Diploma	20, 000 – 45, 000
Protective Service Occupations	Police, detective, corrections officers, firefighters, security guards	High School Diploma – Post secondary non-degree award	26, 900 – 62, 900
Sales Occupations	Retail sales, Advertising, real estate, financial services, cashiers	High School Diploma – Bachelors Degree	21, 000 – 98, 7000



# Breakout discussion

**You will be put in a breakout group to discuss:  
If you were creating a Code of Ethics for your profession  
what would they include?**

(Professional Code of Ethics are the guidelines for responsible behavior in any profession)

**Be prepared to share.**

***The instructor will move from group to group  
to assist if necessary.***

# Professional Ethics/Code of Ethics

Professional Ethics encompass the personal, and corporate standards of behavior expected by professionals. Professionals in any occupation exercise special knowledge and skills from formal education and experience in the field. How professionals use their knowledge and skills is governed by the professional ethics assigned to their field. Professionals provide a service to the community.

Professional Code of Ethics are the guidelines for responsible behavior in any profession. Code of Ethics for any workplace/profession should address:

Honesty Integrity Transparency Accountability Confidentiality	Objectivity Respect Obedience to the law Loyalty
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Can you think of others?

# Why do we need a code ethics?

Aspects of working with young children that have ethical dimensions (Katz 1978) as applies to today's Early Childhood Education profession

## 1. The power and status of practitioners (teachers)

- Children are vulnerable and often powerless. As adults we must support children's development and welfare and not endanger children under our care. Young children can not defend themselves and often, lack the language to communicate when adults are uncaring, and abusive. Often, when older children report events of abuse, parents question if it really happened the way it was reported. Parents don't understand the impact of the mistreatment.
- Often, early childhood educators do not have the early childhood education specialized knowledge and competence that helps them understand what are age appropriate behaviors, milestones, and expectations. Without this knowledge, there can be misunderstandings regarding behaviors and teachers can overreact.
- Code of Ethics helps the teacher understand ethical obligations, resist temptations, and handle dilemmas wisely.

## 2. Multiplicity of clients (children, coworkers, employer, community, families)

- Primary responsibility and allegiance is to the CHILD, but parents have priorities that could be different than the child's needs. Balancing everyone's needs or demands is a constant challenge.
- Hard to keep the family and child as a priority when employer and community might require different priorities
- Code of Ethics helps teachers clarify the position of each client, and therefore, prioritizes their needs.



# Why do we need a code ethics?

## 3. Unifies early childhood educators with commitment to core values

- Appreciating Childhood as a unique and valuable stage of life
- Basing our work with children on knowledge of child development
- Appreciating and supporting the close ties between child and family
- Recognizing that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society
- Respecting the dignity, worth and uniqueness of each individual individual(child, family member, and colleague
- Respect diversity in children, family and colleagues
- Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect

# Early Childhood Profession; Ethics; Code of Conduct NAEYC

**Early Childhood Education Professional:** Individuals who work with children infancy to age 8 in groups or individually. ECEP use standards and competencies to define what they should know and do. ECEP work with children at an important period in a child's development...the development of a child's personality.

Standards of ethical behavior in the profession are based on commitment to core values which sets up a framework of professional **responsibilities** addressing an area of ECE professional relationships. **Principles** guide conduct and assist professionals in resolving ethical dilemmas, **ideals** reflect the aspirations of ECE professionals.

# **Professional Responsibilities**

**Ethical Responsibility to Children.** Early childhood educators main responsibility is to provide care and education in a safe, healthy and nurturing environment that is responsive for all children. This includes a commitment to supporting children's development and learning; respecting individual differences; and helping children learn to live, play and work cooperatively. We are committed to promoting children's self awareness, competence, self-worth, resiliency, and physical well-being.

**Ethical Responsibilities to Families.** Families\* are of primary importance in children's development. Because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child's well-being, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the home and early childhood program in ways that enhance the child's development.

**Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues.** In a caring, cooperative workplace, human dignity is respected, professional satisfaction 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.

# Professional Responsibilities

**Ethical Responsibilities to Community and Society.** 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 families 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.

As individuals, we acknowledge our responsibility to provide the best possible programs of care and education for children and to conduct ourselves with honesty and integrity. 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.

The ideals and principles in this section are presented to distinguish between those that pertain to the work of the individual early childhood educator and those that more typically are engaged in collectively on behalf of the best interests of children—with the understanding that individual early childhood educators have a shared responsibility for addressing the ideals and principles that are identified as “collective.”

# Breakout discussion

**You will be put in a breakout group to discuss:**

1. Which responsibilities do you think are difficult to adhere to? Why?
2. What qualities do you think an Early Childhood Professional needs to commit to these responsibilities?
3. Can you give an example of how you model ethical responsible behavior in your daily routine at work?

# Ethical Dilemmas: Group Activity and Presentation

Each of you has a dilemma to solve.

Here are questions to review before deciding what to do (NAEYC)

1. Determine the nature of the problem
  - Is it an ethical issue?
  - If it is an ethical issue, does it involve ethical responsibilities, then what does the Code mandate you do? Or is it an ethical dilemma, follow the next steps below.
2. Analyze the dilemma
  - Identify the conflicting responsibilities
  - Identify the stakeholders involved and affected by this situation (staff, families, children)
  - Brainstorm possible solutions
  - Consider finding a way to meet everyone's needs without having to make a difficult decision
  - Review the Ideals and Principles that apply to children and families in the NAEYC code
  - Based on the review and using your best professional judgement, what is the most ethical course of action in this situation

Case Study Questions:

- What are the key facts in this case?
- What dilemmas exist?
- What impact could these dilemmas have on the children in the program?
- What professional responsibilities arise? Professional principles?
- What is your course of action?



## Scenarios for discussion

1. You are concerned about a co-worker's harsh interaction with the children in the classroom when you are working alone with her. When the director enters, your co-worker is appropriate and child focused when she interacts with the children.
2. Your center paid for you and a few co-workers to attend an out of town conference where you could learn about classroom management strategies. The last day of the conference you attend a session that you and your co-worker think is boring, so, you begin writing notes to each other, passing them back and forth, discussing how boring the session is and how you will leave at the break and not return, and, after the break you leave and go shopping.
3. You are the director of the center. A parent comes to share with you that she and her husband have separated and her son is going to need some extra support. She would also like you to reassign him to another class because her soon to be ex is living with his current teacher.
4. Your co-worker is on Facebook and has recently friended a few of the parents of the children in your classroom. Her Facebook shares are very personal and sometime, she posts things about the other families.
5. The State Licensing person has entered the building for the review. The director runs into your classroom and tells you to take some of the children out of the building for a walk and not return until the licensing person is gone, she will call you, so take your cell.
6. While on a field trip to the park, you hear a co-worker talking about another child to a volunteer parent.
7. You become aware that your center director is using public funds for her own use.
8. The head teacher in your class seems to favor a particular child. You find out it is her niece. (No one else knows this).
9. One of your co-workers frequently calls off sick. When she returns she will laugh it off and talk to others about how she spent the day with friends, or family. Because she is out so often, due to illness, the director always asks her for a "return to work" slip from her doctor. You observe her one day falsifying a "return to work" slip on the computer.

If you have your own scenario, please use it.



## Review and Wrap Up

Questions? Comments? Concerns?

**Please complete the evaluation form we have sent via email.**

Thank you for your time and attention.



*Thank You*



# About Hanna Perkins Center

[www.hannaperkins.org](http://www.hannaperkins.org)

Hanna Perkins Center for Child Development is a non-profit partner with parents, educators and mental health professionals to help children understand and manage their emotions for success in school and life.

## Services include:

**HANNA PERKINS SCHOOL:** State-chartered kindergarten, preschool, parent/toddler program and dedicated Autism Spectrum Disorders

**HADDEN CLINIC:** Mental health assessment, counseling and therapy—from birth to 18, and for mothers struggling with postpartum depression.

**CONSULTATION AND TRAINING** with schools and early learning centers.

**CONTINUING EDUCATION** for educators, child care professionals and others who frequently work with children.