

# VISION

Professionals who adhere to this Code of Ethics act in the best interests of all children and work collectively to ensure that every child is thriving and learning.

# DEFINITIONS OF TERMS IN ECA'S CODE OF ETHICS

**A CODE OF ETHICS**—defines the core aspirational values of the profession and provides guidance for professional decision making especially when there are conflicting obligations or responsibilities.

**CORE PRINCIPLES**—fundamental and prized values of the profession.

**FAMILIES**—the people who have significant care responsibilities for and/or kinship relationships with a child.

**CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL**—a person who works with or on behalf of children and families in education and care settings.

**COMMUNITIES**—a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common.

**COLLEAGUES**—includes employers and those with whom you work directly or more broadly.

**STUDENT**—a person undertaking study at a secondary or tertiary institution.

# PREAMBLE

Early Childhood Australia recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been nurturing and teaching children on this land for thousands of years. The *Code of Ethics* acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional ways of being and caring for children.

This *Code of Ethics* is informed by the principles in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1991) and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007). A Code of Ethics is an aspirational framework for reflection about the ethical responsibilities of childhood professionals who work with, or on behalf, of children and their families. In this *Code of Ethics* the protection and wellbeing of children is paramount and therefore speaking out or taking action in the presence of unethical practice is an essential professional responsibility.

Being ethical involves thinking about everyday actions and decision making, either individually or collectively, and responding with respect to all concerned. The *Code of Ethics* recognises that childhood professionals are in a unique position of trust and influence in their relationships with children, families, colleagues and the community, therefore professional accountability is vital.

# CORE PRINCIPLES

The core principles in this *Code of Ethics* are based on the fundamental and prized values of the profession. They act to guide decision making in relation to ethical responsibilities. These core principles require a commitment to respect and maintain the rights and dignity of children, families, colleagues and communities.

- Each child has unique interests and strengths and the capacity to contribute to their communities.
- Children are citizens from birth with civil, cultural, linguistic, social and economic rights.
- Effective learning and teaching is characterised by professional decisions that draw on specialised knowledge and multiple perspectives.
- Partnerships with families and communities support shared responsibility for children's learning, development and wellbeing.
- Democratic, fair and inclusive practices promote equity and a strong sense of belonging.
- Respectful, responsive and reciprocal relationships are central to children's education and care.
- Play and leisure are essential for children's learning, development and wellbeing.
- Research, inquiry and practice-based evidence inform quality education and care.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The first *Code of Ethics* for the Australian early childhood profession was developed in 1988; it was widely cited and used for 19 years. The first review of the *Code of Ethics* began in 2003 with the second version launched in 2007. The second review of the *Code of Ethics* began in 2014 with the third (current) version approved by the ECA National Board in February 2016.

ECA is grateful to everyone who has contributed to the development and ongoing review of the *Code of Ethics* including those who have participated in consultation surveys, forums and workshops over the years as well as those who have provided advice and oversight through their service on reference and advisory groups. We would particularly like to acknowledge those engaged in writing each version of the Code.



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A voice for young children

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PO Box 86, Deakin West, ACT 2600

1800 356 900 (freecall)

T: (02) 6242 1800

F: (02) 6242 1818

E: [eca@earlychildhood.org.au](mailto:eca@earlychildhood.org.au)

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)

# Code of Ethics



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## IN RELATION TO CHILDREN, I WILL:

- act in the best interests of all children
- create and maintain safe, healthy, inclusive environments that support children's agency and enhance their learning
- provide a meaningful curriculum to enrich children's learning, balancing child and educator initiated experiences
- understand and be able to explain to others how play and leisure enhance children's learning, development and wellbeing
- ensure childhood is a time for being in the here and now and not solely about preparation for the future
- collaborate with children as global citizens in learning about our shared responsibilities to the environment and humanity
- value the relationship between children and their families and enhance these relationships through my practice
- ensure that children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, sexuality, age, ability, economic status, family structure, lifestyle, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, or national origin
- negotiate children's participation in research, by taking into account their safety, privacy, levels of fatigue and interest
- respect children as capable learners by including their perspectives in teaching, learning and assessment
- safeguard the security of information and documentation about children, particularly when shared on digital platforms.



## IN RELATION TO COLLEAGUES, I WILL:

- encourage others to adopt and act in accordance with this Code, and take action in the presence of unethical behaviours
- build a spirit of collegiality and professionalism through collaborative relationships based on trust, respect and honesty
- acknowledge and support the diverse strengths and experiences of colleagues in order to build shared professional knowledge, understanding and skills
- use constructive processes to address differences of opinion in order to negotiate shared perspectives and actions
- participate in a 'lively culture of professional inquiry' to support continuous improvement
- implement strategies that support and mentor colleagues to make positive contributions to the profession
- maintain ethical relationships in my online interactions.



## IN RELATION TO THE PROFESSION, I WILL:

- base my work on research, theories, content knowledge, practice evidence and my understanding of the children and families with whom I work
- take responsibility for articulating my professional values, knowledge and practice and the positive contribution our profession makes to society
- engage in critical reflection, ongoing professional learning and support research that builds my knowledge and that of the profession
- work within the scope of my professional role and avoid misrepresentation of my professional competence and qualifications
- encourage qualities and practices of ethical leadership within the profession
- model quality practice and provide constructive feedback and assessment for students as aspiring professionals
- mentor new graduates by supporting their induction into the profession
- advocate for my profession and the provision of quality education and care.



## IN RELATION TO FAMILIES, I WILL:

- support families as children's first and most important teacher and respect their right to make decisions about their children
- listen to and learn with families and engage in shared decision making, planning and assessment practices in relation to children's learning, development and wellbeing
- develop respectful relationships based on open communication with the aim of encouraging families' engagement and to build a strong sense of belonging
- learn about, respect and respond to the uniqueness of each family, their circumstances, culture, family structure, customs, language, beliefs and kinship systems
- respect families' right to privacy and maintain confidentiality.



## IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY, I WILL:

- learn about local community contexts and aspirations in order to create responsive programs to enhance children's learning, development and wellbeing
- collaborate with people, services and agencies to develop shared understandings and actions that support children and families
- use research and practice-based evidence to advocate for a society where all children have access to quality education and care
- promote the value of children's contribution as citizens to the development of strong communities
- work to promote increased appreciation of the importance of childhood including how children learn and develop, in order to inform programs and systems of assessment that benefit children
- advocate for the development and implementation of laws and policies that promote the rights and best interests of children and families.

