



CODE OF ETHICS

August 2009

The Code of Ethics of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children is a public statement of principles and practice guidelines supported by the mission of DEC.

The foundation of this Code is based on sound ethical reasoning related to professional practice with young children with disabilities and their families and with interdisciplinary colleagues. Foremost, is our value of respecting the autonomy of families as they make decisions for their young children with disabilities while also practicing a mutual respect for our colleagues in the field. We, as early childhood professionals, practice within the principles and guidelines outlined below as well as uphold the laws and regulations of our professional licensure standards.

The Code's purpose is to: (1) identify the key principles guiding our professional conduct; and (2) provide guidance for practice and personal dilemmas in our conduct of research and practice. The Code is intended to assist professionals in resolving conflicts as they arise in practice with children and families and with other colleagues.

The following principles and guidelines for practice include:

- I. Professional Practice;
 - II. Professional Development and Preparation;
 - III. Responsive Family Practices; and
 - IV. Ethical and Evidence Based Practices.
- I. **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE** encompasses the practice principles to promote and maintain high standards of conduct for the early childhood special education professional. The early childhood special education professional should base his or her behaviors on ethical reasoning surrounding practice and professional issues as well as an empathic reflection regarding interactions with others. We are committed to beneficence acts for improving the quality of lives of young children with disabilities and their families. The guidelines for practice outlined below provide a framework for everyday practice when working with children and families and with other professionals in the field of early childhood special education.

Professional and Interpersonal Behavior

1. We shall demonstrate in our behavior and language respect and appreciation for the unique value and human potential of each child.
2. We shall demonstrate the highest standards of personal integrity, truthfulness, and honesty in all our professional activities in order to inspire the trust and confidence of the children and families and of those with whom we work.
3. We shall strive for the highest level of personal and professional competence by seeking and using new evidence based information to improve our practices while also responding openly to the suggestions of others.
4. We shall serve as advocates for children with disabilities and their families and for the professionals who serve them by supporting both policy and programmatic decisions that enhance the quality of their lives.



5. We shall use individually appropriate assessment strategies including multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews with significant caregivers, formal and informal assessments to determine children's learning styles, strengths, and challenges.
6. We shall build relationships with individual children and families while individualizing the curricula and learning environments to facilitate young children's development and learning.

Professional Collaboration

1. We shall honor and respect our responsibilities to colleagues while upholding the dignity and autonomy of colleagues and maintaining collegial interprofessional and intraprofessional relationships.
2. We shall honor and respect the rights, knowledge, and skills of the multidisciplinary colleagues with whom we work recognizing their unique contributions to children, families, and the field of early childhood special education.
3. We shall honor and respect the diverse backgrounds of our colleagues including such diverse characteristics as sexual orientation, race, national origin, religious beliefs, or other affiliations.
4. We shall identify and disclose to the appropriate persons using proper communication channels errors or acts of incompetence that compromise children's and families' safety and well being when individual attempts to address concerns are unsuccessful.

II. **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PREPARATION** is critical to providing the most effective services for young children with disabilities and their families. Professional development is viewed and valued as an ongoing process guided by high standards and competencies for professional performance and practice. Professionals acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work with a variety of young children with disabilities and their families within natural and inclusive environments promoting children's overall growth, development and learning, and enhancing family quality of life. Finally, professionals continually should seek and interpret evidence based information for planning and implementing individually appropriate learning environments linked to ongoing assessment and collaboration with parents and professional team members.

1. We shall engage in ongoing and systematic reflective inquiry and self-assessment for the purpose of continuous improvement of professional performance and services to young children with disabilities and their families.
2. We shall continually be aware of issues challenging the field of early childhood special education and advocate for changes in laws, regulations, and policies leading to improved outcomes and services for young children with disabilities and their families.
3. We shall be responsible for maintaining the appropriate national, state, or other credential or licensure requirements for the services we provide while maintaining our competence in practice and research by ongoing participation in professional development and education activities.
4. We shall support professionals new to the field by mentoring them in the practice of evidence and ethically based services.

III. **RESPONSIVE FAMILY CENTERED PRACTICES** ensure that families receive individualized, meaningful, and relevant services responsive to their beliefs, values, customs, languages, and culture. We are committed to enhancing the quality of children's and families' lives by promoting family well-being and participation in typical life activities. The early childhood special education professional will demonstrate respect for all families, taking into consideration and acknowledging diverse family structures, culture, language, values, and customs. Finally, families will be given equal voice in all decision making relative to their children. The following practice guidelines provide a framework for enhancing children's and families' quality of lives.



Enhancement of Children’s and Families’ Quality of Lives

1. We shall demonstrate our respect and concern for children, families, colleagues, and others with whom we work, honoring their beliefs, values, customs, languages, and culture.
2. We shall recognize our responsibility to improve the developmental outcomes of children and to provide services and supports in a fair and equitable manner to all families and children.
3. We shall recognize and respect the dignity, diversity, and autonomy of the families and children we serve.
4. We shall advocate for equal access to high quality services and supports for all children and families to enhance their quality of lives.

Responsive Family Centered Practices

1. We shall demonstrate our respect and appreciation for all families’ beliefs, values, customs, languages, and culture relative to their nurturance and support of their children toward achieving meaningful and relevant priorities and outcomes families’ desire for themselves and their children.
2. We shall provide services and supports to children and families in a fair and equitable manner while respecting families’ culture, race, language, socioeconomic status, marital status, and sexual orientation.
3. We shall respect, value, promote, and encourage the active participation of ALL families by engaging families in meaningful ways in the assessment and intervention processes.
4. We shall empower families with information and resources so that they are informed consumers of services for their children.
5. We shall collaborate with families and colleagues in setting meaningful and relevant goals and priorities throughout the intervention process including the full disclosure of the nature, risk, and potential outcomes of any interventions.
6. We shall respect families’ rights to choose or refuse early childhood special education or related services.
7. We shall be responsible for protecting the confidentiality of the children and families we serve by protecting all forms of verbal, written, and electronic communication.

IV. **ETHICAL AND EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES** in the field of early childhood special education relies upon sound research methodologies and research based practices to ensure high quality services for children and families. As professionals researching and practicing within the field, it is our responsibility to maintain ethical conduct in building a cadre of practices based on evidence. Establishing an evidence base not only involves critically examining available research evidence relative to our professional practices, it also involves continually engaging in research to further refine our research-based or recommended practices.

Sound and ethical research strategies always should be used including adherence to institutional review board procedures and guidelines prior to the conduct of research and use of peer-reviewed venues for published dissemination of findings. Honoring and respecting the diversity of children and families should guide all research activities.

Evidence Based Practices

1. We shall rely upon evidence based research and interventions to inform our practice with children and families in our care.



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2. We shall use every resource, including referral when appropriate, to ensure high quality services are accessible and are provided to children and families.
3. We shall include the diverse perspectives and experiences of children and families in the conduct of research and intervention.

Ethical Practice in Research

1. We shall use research designs and analyses in an appropriate manner by providing a clear rationale for each. We shall provide enough information about the methodologies we use so that others can replicate the work.
2. We shall maintain records of research securely; no personal information about research participants should be revealed unless required by law.
3. We shall conduct on-going research and field work that is consistent with and builds upon the available cadre of evidence based practices.
4. We shall utilize collaborative and interdisciplinary research for strengthening linkages between the research and practice communities, as well as for improving the quality of life of children with disabilities and their families.

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