

Ethical Considerations when Working with Families of Young Children

DEC's 25th Annual International Conference on Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families
Albuquerque, New Mexico
October 15-18, 2009



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Definition

- "Ethics are moral principles that govern a person's or group's behavior" (Oxford American College Dictionary, 2002, p. 463)
- Professional ethics are a system of moral principles and values that relate to individual behaviors, a class of human actions, or a group of specialists.
- Educators are influenced by ethical codes that identify and communicate their responsibilities toward and relationships among colleagues, students and parents, employing institutions, and the general public. These codes help to guide our decision-making processes related to predicaments of right and wrong, civil liberties and responsibilities, and human welfare.

Codes of Ethics

- Council for Exceptional Children (2006)
- Division of Early Childhood (2009)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (2005)
- National Education Association (1975)

Division of Early Childhood

- Professional Practice
- Professional Development and Preparation
- Responsive Family Practice
- Ethical and Evidence Based Practices

The purpose is to:

1. Identify the key principles guiding our professional conduct
2. Provide guidance for practice and personal dilemmas in our conduct



Professional Practice: Professional and Interpersonal Behavior

1. We shall demonstrate respect and appreciation for the unique value of each child.
2. We shall demonstrate the highest standards of personal integrity, truthfulness, and honesty in order to inspire the trust and confidence of those with whom we work.
3. We shall strive for the highest level of professional and personal competence.
4. We shall serve as advocates for children with disabilities and their families.
5. We shall use individually appropriate assessment strategies to determine children's learning styles, strengths, and challenges.
6. We shall build relationships with individual children and their families.

Professional Practice: Professional Collaboration

1. We shall honor and respect our responsibilities to colleagues.
2. We shall honor and respect the rights, knowledge, and skills of the multidisciplinary colleagues with whom we work.
3. We shall honor and respect the diverse backgrounds of our colleagues.
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 wellbeing.

Responsive Family Centered Practices: Enhancement of Children's and Families' Quality of Lives

1. We shall demonstrate our respect and concern by honoring the beliefs, values, customs, languages, and cultures of others.
2. We shall recognize our responsibility to improve developmental outcomes and provide services and supports in a fair and equitable manner.
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.

Professional Practice: Responsive Family Centered Practices

1. We shall demonstrate our respect and appreciation for all families beliefs, values, customs, language and culture.
2. We shall provide supports and services to children and families in a fair and equitable manner.
3. We shall respect, value, promote, and encourage the active participation of ALL families.
4. We shall empower families with information and resources so they can be informed consumers.
5. We shall collaborate with families and colleagues in setting meaningful and relevant goals and priorities throughout the intervention process.
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.



Problem Solving Elements (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008)

Individual context and feelings about the dilemma and its relationship to others

1. societal context and interactions among individuals involved in the dilemma
2. precedence in similar situations, fact gathering, and application regarding the moral dilemma
3. *line drawing* and taking a specific course of action in lieu of another
4. self-interest and risk-taking that may hinder a stake holder's ability to engage in professional practice
5. history and traditions that influence individual and organizational actions and deliberations. The elements facilitate discussions of ethical dilemmas.

Four Phase Model for Solving Ethical Dilemmas

(Brophy-Herb, Kostelnik, & Stein, 2001)

- Phase 1 - developing awareness of and learning about various codes of ethical conduct.
- Phase 2 - the ability to differentiate between ethical judgments and other conclusions.
- Phase 3 - using a systematic process to analyze and solve the dilemma.
- Phase 4 - apply ethical codes of conduct to problem.

Seven Step Process for Ethical Decision Making (Sinclair, 1998)

- Step 1 - Identify ethical issues and practices
- Step 2 - Develop an alternate course of action
- Step 3 - Analyze risks and benefits for each course of action
- Step 4 - Choose a course of action after applying existing principles, values, and standards
- Step 5 - Take action and assume the consequences
- Step 6 - Evaluate results of the action
- Step 7 - Assume responsibility for the consequences, correct mistakes and re-engage in decision making process

References

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