

Code of Ethics

The Living Document

Guidelines for
professional responsibilities in
early childhood education



AECES

ASSOCIATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATORS (SINGAPORE)

PREAMBLE

The hallmark of any profession is the incorporation of a self-moderated standard by which its members abide. This standard is in the pursuit of credibility, reliability, authenticity and respect from within the profession and from the community at large. Since the 1980s Singapore has seen a phenomenal increase in the amount and range of provision for the care of young children. This has moved from custodial care, which had its beginnings in the early post-war period, to an eclectic mix of 'care and education' models. These have integrated international pedagogies and philosophies with our own cultural and multi-racial community values and requirements. In order to provide guiding principles for early childhood educators, the Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore) – AECES, has established a Code Of Ethics. The profession has ownership of this Code as it developed through dialogue with those in the field.

The Association recognises that in countries where a Code of Ethics is in place it is subscribed to by educators working in a variety of settings, including centre and home based care, tertiary institutions, as well as the governing authorities who regulate and monitor services. Singapore acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995. This impacts on the profession, as it is the most comprehensive statement on children's rights and forms a foundation for developing policies and making decisions about children. Against this backdrop, the code has evolved, as a set of standards for the responsible behaviour of all personnel involved, both directly and indirectly, in the provision of early childhood services for children between birth and eight years of age.

Within this set of principles the need for positive relationships in the ethical practice and professional growth of early educators is acknowledged. This will enable both the individual and community to develop competence, confidence, resources, information, passion and a sense of mission in the field of early childhood education. It marks our respect for young children, families, the community, the profession and ourselves.

1. CORE VALUES

The standards of ethical behaviour in early childhood care and education are based on the commitment to core values that aspire to be in harmony with Singapore's multi racial society and nation building. We¹ commit ourselves to :

- 1.1 The recognition of the early years in the child's life as unique and valuable in its own right².
- 1.2 Respecting the bond between child and family within the context of culture, community and society.
- 1.3 The foundation for excellence in teaching based on sound knowledge of child development theories and practices.
- 1.4 Acknowledging the dignity, worth and value of all individuals within families and our early childhood community.
- 1.5 Building positive relationships based on sincerity, mutual trust and respect regardless of age, socio-economic status, ability, gender, race, language or religion.

2. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES & OBLIGATIONS

Our professional responsibilities and obligations towards:

2.1 Children

- 2.1.1 We value and respect³ each child within the diversity⁴ of their family, culture, community, and society.
- 2.1.2 We support the right for all children to play and learn in an inclusive⁵ early childhood environment.
- 2.1.3 We promote each child's self esteem and encourage the active participation of all children regardless of ability.
- 2.1.4 We recognize that each child is unique and has the right to express his/her ideas, thoughts, and opinions.
- 2.1.5 We ensure the psychological safety, intellectual safety, physical health and safety of each child whilst in our care. If there is reasonable cause to suspect child abuse^{8a}, we are obligated to report to the relevant authority.
- 2.1.6 We promote the opportunity for each child to engage in an intellectually stimulating⁹, and socially satisfying programme¹⁰ for young children.
- 2.1.7 We demonstrate sound knowledge¹¹ of early childhood education within our daily practice, that is in the best interests of all participants.

2.2 Families¹²

- 2.2.1 We recognize that families are situated in a particular culture¹³ with their own unique values and beliefs.

- 2.2.2 We recognize that families are the primary¹⁴ influence in a child's early years, and therefore support¹⁵ each family as a unit.
- 2.2.3 We exchange and share information¹⁶, knowledge and understanding of the child and his/her development to empower all parties in decision making and participation.
- 2.2.4 We respect the family's right to privacy and maintain confidentiality.
- 2.2.5 We work as partners¹⁷ to ensure the well-being and to foster the holistic¹⁸ development of children.

2.3 **Community**¹⁹

- 2.3.1 We recognize, accept and value diversity among members of the community.
- 2.3.2 We contribute towards raising awareness²⁰ of the importance of quality early childhood education and care for children in all settings.
- 2.3.3 We work with related agencies and other professionals to greater societal recognition²¹ of professionals in this field.
- 2.3.4 We support national initiatives and policies²² that promote the well being of young children and their families.
- 2.3.5 We co-operate with management, agencies and other professionals in the best interest of children.
- 2.3.6 We promote professional practices among the community of early childhood practitioners.
- 2.3.7 We support on-going research in the field of early childhood education.

2.4 **Colleagues and Staff**²³

- 2.4.1 We are truthful in presenting professional qualifications²⁴, experience and affiliations²⁵.
- 2.4.2 We support and co-operate with colleagues, staff and other professionals²⁶ in the provision of care and education for the child.
- 2.4.3 We promote a climate of openness and transparency²⁷ in the work place to speak and act in the best interest of all participants.
- 2.4.4 We address concerns about professional integrity, behaviour or conduct to that person in the first instance.
- 2.4.5 We participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of curriculum goals that address stated educational principles of the programme.
- 2.4.6 We share professional knowledge and experience with the early childhood fraternity²⁸ by way of mentoring.
- 2.4.7 We foster positive self-esteem at work and help colleagues and staff to develop professionally.

When one of the important values contradicts another it is our professional responsibility to consult all relevant parties, directly or indirectly involved, in seeking the most ethical course of action to take.

<p>In preparing the Code of Ethics the AECES' Working Committee has made reference to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and acknowledges the valuable contributions of practitioners in the field.</p>

Endnotes

¹**We** - Denotes everyone involved in the care and education of young children, for example: teachers, support staff, supervisors, principals, management, teacher educators.

²**Its own right** (1.1) – To respect each development stage within early childhood as important itself.

³**Respect** (2.1.1) – To take a personal interest in each child and pay due regard to the child's feelings.

⁴**Diversity** (2.1.1) – To be aware of and understand the differences in family backgrounds, values and practices.

⁵**Inclusive** (2.1.2) – To plan and implement programmes that focus on the needs, abilities and interests of children with disabilities, developmental delays and special abilities alongside typically developing peers in regular mainstream classes.

⁶**Emotional safety** (2.1.5) – To be responsive to and cause no emotional harm to any child so that each child feels safe and secure.

⁷**Intellectual safety** (2.1.5) – To be responsive to and cause no intellectual harm to the development of each child's thoughts, ideas and feelings and allow them to express themselves openly in a supportive environment.

⁸**Physical health and safety** (2.1.5) – To cause no physical harm or injury to any child and ensure a safe and healthy environment.

^{8a} All forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse
- *Article 19, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

⁹**Intellectually Stimulating** (2.1.6) – To provide a purposeful environment in which each child is challenged, supported and provided with opportunities to succeed.

¹⁰**Socially satisfying programme** (2.1.6) – To encourage children to develop positive relationships and friendships through work and play.

¹¹**Sound knowledge** (2.1.7) – To engage in informed early childhood practices.

¹² **Families (2.2)** – Singapore does not recognize, legally or socially, family forms that are not based on a legal marriage. Families include dual parent families, single parent families, foster and blended families, extended families and estranged families.

¹³ **Culture (2.2.1)** – Refers to differences within a group like age, beliefs, education and to differences between ethnic groups like religious practices, dress codes, diet. It is the responsibility of educators to develop understanding and knowledge of a family's cultural values and beliefs and not impose their own.

¹⁴ **Primary (2.2.2)** – Of chief importance as well as being the first or earliest, in terms of influence on children.

¹⁵ **Support (2.2.2)** – To provide information and assistance professionally and as necessary, but not to take over the role of parent.

¹⁶ **Exchange and share information (2.2.3)** – Implies trust and that confidentially will not be breached. Information allows each party to have a more complete picture of the child's development so that timely and informed decisions can be made, for example about seeking specialist help, changing diet, accessing early intervention.

¹⁷ **Partners (2.2.4)** – Implies no sense of superiority on the part of early childhood educators but a recognition that both the family and the early childhood educator have a complementary role to play.

¹⁸ **Holistic (2.2.4)** – Refers to the all round development of the child: physical, intellectual, social, emotional, moral and creative development, without undue emphasis or pressure to concentrate on any specific area.

¹⁹ **Community (2.3)** – In the Singapore context, this refers to different ethnic, social and economic groups sharing common core values and aspirations.

²⁰ **Contribute towards raising awareness (2.3.2)** – Through various forms, mediums and appropriate occasions, for example: research, public education, training, continuing education, forums, workshops, seminars and conferences.

²¹ **Related agencies and other professionals to greater societal recognition (2.3.3)** – includes government and non-government organizations whose specialist knowledge will contribute to the well-being of children. At the same time such working relationships are to enhance professional understanding, credibility and the profile of early childhood professionals.

²² **National initiatives and policies** (2.3.4) – For example, the Child Care Act, Good Practices Handbook, licensing assessment and the New Curriculum Framework.

²³ **Colleagues and staff** (2.4) – Refers to all persons working or volunteering within the early childhood setting and includes management responsibilities and obligations towards staff.

²⁴ **Professional qualification** (2.4.1) – Refers to preparation specifically for working with young children and families to meet their developmental and learning needs.

²⁵ **Affiliations** (2.4.1) – Refer to personal relationships and professional membership.

²⁶ **Other professionals** (2.4.2) – Denote anyone whose work is related to the interests and well-being of the child, for example: therapists, counsellors, social workers, medical staff.

²⁷ **Climate of openness and transparency** (2.4.3) – Implies honest and truthful discussion and communication to ensure smooth relationships.

²⁸ **Early childhood fraternity** (2.4.6) – Refers to all who acknowledge and support common values and goals.