

# Code of Ethical Conduct

## Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators

Adopted Spring 2004

**A Joint Position Statement Supplement of  
the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC),  
the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), and  
American Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators (ACCESS)**

*Endorsed by the Southern Early Childhood Association  
Adopted by the National Association for Family Child Care*

Early childhood educators who teach adults to work in early childhood settings are called upon to sustain different relationships and to balance the needs of a wider variety of clients than those who work directly with young children and their families. And as teacher educators fulfill their responsibilities to adult learners, they encounter some unique ethical challenges in the context of a complex network of relationships. The primary challenge is to find a balance between an obligation to support and nurture adult learners and the obligation to provide caring and competent professionals to work with young children and their families. While the existing NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct is a valuable resource that addresses many of the ethical issues encountered by early childhood adult educators, it does not provide all of the guidance they need to address the ethical issues that arise in their work.

Through this Supplement to the Code of Ethical Conduct, NAEYC, NAECTE, and ACCESS hope to identify and explore the recurring ethical dilemmas faced by early childhood adult educators, and to reach some consensus about how they might best be addressed. This Supplement places primary emphasis on the ethical responsibilities and recurring ethical dilemmas that face early childhood teacher educators in two- and four-year degree-granting institutions. However, many of its provisions are also applicable to early childhood educators who provide nondegree training and

mentoring to adults in early childhood care and education settings.

### **Purpose of the Supplement**

Like those who work with young children, early childhood adult educators are regularly called upon to make decisions of a moral and ethical nature. The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct is a foundational document that maps the ethical dimensions of early childhood educators' work in early care and education programs. Adult educators share the ethical obligations assumed by all early childhood educators, reflected in the core values, ideals, and principles set forth in the NAEYC Code. **We embrace the central commitment of the field of early care and education to the healthy development and welfare of young children. Everything we do in our role as educators of adults is intended to further this ultimate commitment.**

Early childhood adult educators have ethical responsibilities beyond those spelled out in the NAEYC Code. They have responsibilities to adult students; institutions of higher learning and agencies that conduct training; the programs in which they place adult students and staff and clientele; professional colleagues; children and their families and community; and society and the field of early childhood care and education at large.

## Core values

In addition to adhering to the core values spelled out in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, early childhood adult educators commit themselves to the following two core values:

- To respect the critical role of a knowledgeable, competent, and diverse early childhood care and education workforce in supporting the development and learning of young children.
- To base practice on current and accurate knowledge of the fields of early childhood education, child development, adult development and learning, as well as other relevant disciplines.

## Conceptual framework

This document sets forth a conception of early childhood teacher educators' professional responsibilities in six sections that address arenas of professional relationships. The sections are (1) adult learners, (2) sites providing practicum experiences, (3) employing institutions of higher learning and agencies that provide training, (4) professional colleagues, (5) children and families, and (6) community, society, and the field of early care and education. The first three sections address those areas of responsibility unique to educators who work primarily with adults. Sections 4-6 spell out additional responsibilities of early childhood adult educators in areas addressed in the NAEYC Code. When there is a direct parallel in the NAEYC Code or a related principle or ideal, the Code is referenced after the Supplement item.

## Ideals and principles

This Supplement to the NAEYC Code identifies additional ideals (aspirations) and principles (guides for conduct: definitions of practices that are required, prohibited, and permitted) that address the unique ethical responsibilities of early childhood adult educators. These ideals and principles were developed by analyzing adult educators' descriptions of recurring ethical dilemmas in their work. The goals and principles included in this Supplement are designed to inspire and guide early childhood adult educators toward actions that reflect the field's current understandings of their ethical responsibilities.

(*Note:* There is **not** a one-to-one correspondence between ideals and principles.)

## 1. Ethical responsibilities to adult learners

Our work is always guided by the core values of the field of early care and education, including our commitment to ensuring the welfare of children. From that perspective we prioritize the unique commitments of early childhood adult educators and acknowledge that our day-to-day responsibilities focus primarily on the professional development of adult learners.

### Definitions

#### *Early Childhood Adult Educator*

A professional who teaches early childhood educators in an institution of higher education (includes adjunct faculty) and those who conduct not-for-credit training for the early care and education workforce.

#### *Adult Learners*

Adult learners, both preservice and inservice, who work in or are preparing to work in settings that provide care and education for young children from birth through 8 years of age.

#### *Student*

An adult learner who is gaining preservice or advanced education in the field of early childhood education and care through an educational institution.

#### *Colleague*

A fellow early childhood educator who teaches, trains, or mentors adult students in an institution of higher learning or who conducts not-for-credit training for the early education workforce. (*Note:* There are specific responsibilities to colleagues employed by one's own institution.)

#### *Mentor*

An experienced early childhood professional who works directly with both young children and practicum students in an early childhood program and who, in collaboration with an early childhood teacher educator, guides and counsels the students.

#### *Ethics Supplement*

Material that has been added to NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct to provide further information and guidance about the ethical responsibilities of early childhood adult educators.

**Ideals**

- I-1.1 To continually update our own knowledge of the field of early care and education so that we are able to present current, well-grounded information to those we teach.
- I-1.2 To provide college students with a foundation in core content areas of early childhood education, including child development and its social contexts; child guidance; the design of safe, healthy learning environments; curriculum and assessment; work with families; work with children and families from diverse cultures; advocacy skills; and professionalism, including ethics.
- I-1.3 To provide adult learners with learning experiences based on principles of adult learning and consistent with the core values of early care and education, current knowledge, and best practices in the field.
- I-1.4 To present controversial material fairly, acknowledging the validity of contrasting perspectives and, when appropriate, identifying our own biases.
- I-1.5 To have high and reasonable expectations of learners.
- I-1.6 To fairly and equitably assess what adult students know and are able to do.
- I-1.7 To ensure that our programs serve diverse adult learners (including diversity in language, culture, race/ethnicity, and social class).
- I-1.8 To ensure that our programs are accessible to those with diverse needs (as to the times, location, format, and language of training).

**Principles**

- P-1.1 We shall provide learning experiences that are consistent with the best practices for adult learners and that match the needs, learning styles, cultures, and stages of development of adult learners.
- P-1.2 We shall inform learners of conduct and work expectations, including institutional standards for writing, performance, and intellectual honesty.
- P-1.3 We shall give learners a fair chance to succeed and diverse ways to demonstrate their competence.
- P-1.4 We shall provide additional support for adult learners who have the potential to work effectively with young children but have difficulty meeting academic standards.
- P-1.5 We shall provide additional support and counsel to those who demonstrate academic excellence while having difficulty in meeting standards for classroom practice.

- P-1.6 We shall inform those seeking training in early childhood education of current economic and social conditions affecting the field so that they may make an educated decision about career choices.
- P-1.7 We shall provide information about disparities between best practice and commonly accepted practice to better prepare students to face ongoing challenges related to their work with children.
- P-1.8 We shall not place students or allow students to continue in placements that, in our best professional judgment, are not beneficial to children.
- P-1.9 When it becomes apparent that a practicum placement is not supporting a student's professional development or is not beneficial to the student or children, every effort shall be made to move the student to a more appropriate placement.
- P-1.10 When it becomes apparent that an adult learner is not able to benefit from our training, class, or program, we shall help her/him identify an alternative educational path or goal.
- P-1.11 We shall honor confidentiality, sharing only necessary information about an adult learner, only to those who need to know, and only through appropriate professional channels.
- P-1.12 We shall make it clear at the outset if training involves the sale of products or services from which we stand to gain financially and will do this only if the products or services are relevant and serve educational goals.

**2. Ethical responsibilities to practicum sites**

Some knowledge and skills needed by early childhood educators can only be acquired through direct experience in early childhood settings. Therefore, early childhood adult educators rely heavily on placements in programs (practicum sites) in which students can apply what they have learned, get feedback from children and adults, and reflect on what they have learned from their experience.

**Ideals**

- I-2.1 To provide practicum experiences that will positively support the professional development of adult students.
- I-2.2 To foster collegial and collaborative working relationships with educators who work in practicum settings.
- I-2.3 To be respectful of the responsibilities, expertise, and perspective of practitioners who work with students in practicum settings.

I-2.4 To recognize the importance and contributions of practicum staff members in the professional development of our students.

### **Principles**

P-2.1 We shall place students in settings where staff are qualified to work with young children, where mentors have experience and training in supporting adult learners, and which to the greatest extent possible reflect the diverse communities in which our students will be working.

P-2.2 We shall clearly state all parties' roles and responsibilities and prepare students, mentors, and administrators for practicum experiences. We shall provide appropriate support for all parties' efforts to fulfill their roles and meet program expectations.

P-2.3 When we have a concern about a program in which we place students, we shall address that concern with the classroom teacher or program administrator. (If the concerns relate to the health or safety of children, see the applicable sections of the NAEYC Code: P-1.11 and P-4.9-12.)

P-2.4 We shall ensure that qualified personnel conduct regular supervision of practicum experiences in order to support professional development of adult students and monitor the welfare of children.

P-2.5 We shall honor confidentiality and guard the privacy of the programs (teachers and clientele) in which we place students.

P-2.6 We shall teach adult students that they have a professional obligation to honor confidentiality and shall make every effort to ensure that they guard the privacy of the program, its teachers, and clientele.

### **3. Ethical obligations to institutions of higher learning and agencies providing training**

Our primary responsibility to our employers is the development of knowledge and skill in adult learners. This work is intended to further our ultimate commitment to the welfare and development of young children. (Section III-B of the NAEYC Code provides the foundation for the additional commitments for adult educators listed below.)

#### **Ideals**

I-3.1 To assist the institutions and agencies for whom we work in providing the highest quality of educational programs for adult learners. (NAEYC Code I-3B.1)

### **Principles**

P-3.1 We shall respect the integrity of courses by following approved course descriptions.

P-3.2 We shall evaluate our adult learners fairly, using those standards that are congruent with the mission of our institution and regarded as accepted practice in the field.

P-3.3 We shall offer training and instruction only in areas in which we have or can obtain appropriate experience and expertise. (NAEYC Code P-4.2)

P-3.4 We shall, when our involvement with a student involves more than one role (e.g., instructor, employer, supervisor), keep these roles separate. We shall make decisions, recommendations, and give feedback appropriate to the different contexts.

### **4. Ethical responsibilities regarding colleagues**

The work of the early childhood adult educator involves interaction and collaboration with colleagues. Our professional responsibility to colleagues is to maintain positive and productive working relationships. (Section III-A of the NAEYC Code provides the foundation for the additional commitments for adult educators listed below.)

#### **Ideals**

I-4.1 To be collegial to and supportive of early childhood coworkers in our own and other institutions. (NAEYC Code I-3A.1-4)

I-4.2 To serve as mentors to junior faculty and novice adult educators.

#### **Principles**

P-4.1 When an adult learner comes to us with concerns about a colleague's competence, fairness, ethics, or accuracy, we will give the learner support in clarifying his or her concerns and in deciding and following through on a course of action to address the problem.

P-4.2 When we have concerns regarding a colleague's competence, fairness, ethics, or accuracy, we will *first* express our concerns to that colleague. (NAEYC Code P-3A.2)

P-4.3 When a colleague appears unwilling or unable to address problems, we will express our opinions about his or her competence through official channels such as performance evaluation.

P-4.4 We shall honor confidentiality and share information about colleagues in appropriate institutional

settings. We shall not share information about colleagues in the community or with students.

## 5. Ethical responsibilities to children and families

Because those we train have a direct impact on children's lives, early childhood adult educators have some additional responsibilities to children and families above and beyond what is set forth in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct.

### *Ideals*

- I-5.1 To support the development of competent and caring professionals to work with young children and their families.
- I-5.2 To provide a diverse workforce that reflects the linguistic, racial/ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds of the children served in early childhood programs and their communities.
- I-5.3 To speak out against practices that are unjust or harmful to young children and their families.

### *Principles*

- P-5.1 We shall make the welfare of children the deciding factor in our decisions regarding our work with adult learners. We shall not participate in or overlook practices (in our students, colleagues, institutions, agencies, or practicum settings) that are harmful to children. **This principle has precedence over all others in this Supplement.** (NAEYC Code P-1.1)
- P-5.2 We shall provide sound educational experiences for those we teach that enable them to understand and provide for the optimal development of children and support for their families.
- P-5.3 We shall not allow a student to complete a program if we have direct evidence that he/she may endanger children's physical or psychological well being.
- P-5.4 We shall not allow a student to pass a course or move to the next level of the profession if he/she has not demonstrated expected levels of knowledge and competence in course content *or* if he/she does not demonstrate the ability to relate positively and effectively with children and families.
- P-5.5 We shall build into all required training minimum required levels of participation and demonstrations of understanding and competence.
- P-5.6 When we have made a concerted effort to work with a student, and the student still does not demon-

strate the intellectual, physical, or social-emotional capacity to work effectively with children and families, we shall make every effort to counsel the student out of the field.

- P-5.7 We shall use the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct to assist adult learners in making sound decisions concerning their work with children and families.

## 6. Ethical responsibilities to community, society, and the field of early childhood education

Early childhood adult educators have extensive knowledge, expertise, and education and often have a profound impact on the field of early childhood education in their communities. Because of this leadership role they have responsibilities to community, society, and the field of early childhood education above and beyond what is expected of those who work in programs serving young children.

### *Ideals*

- I-6.1 To train caring and competent teachers who will provide safe and nurturing care and education for young children and be supportive of their families.
- I-6.2 To prepare students to work successfully in and to respect the culture of the communities in which they are placed.
- I-6.3 To continue to grow and learn and to base practice on the best current knowledge available.
- I-6.4 To encourage the developing professionalism of the adult learners with whom we work.
- I-6.5 To make other professionals, the public, and policy makers aware of the importance of the early years and the positive impact on society of high-quality early childhood programs staffed by well-trained early childhood professionals.
- I-6.6 To strengthen and expand the knowledge base of early childhood education.
- I-6.7 To advocate on behalf of children, families, high-quality programs and services for children, and professional development for the early childhood workforce.
- I-6.8 To conduct research that reflects the experiences of children from diverse language, racial/ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

### *Principles*

- P-6.1 We shall be accurate and truthful when we provide recommendations and serve as references for

individuals seeking admission to programs, applying for certification, or seeking employment.

P-6.2 In our role as early care and education experts, we shall base recommendations on our informed and unbiased professional opinion. We shall exercise caution before recommending commercial products or services.

P-6.3 When asked to provide an informed opinion on issues/practices, we shall make every effort to support children and families by basing our statements on

current child development and early childhood education research.

P-6.4 We shall help adult learners learn to interpret and communicate assessment information in ways that convey the strengths of children and the limitations of the evaluation instruments.

P-6.5 We shall ensure that research we conduct appropriately reflects the diversity of the population upon whom its results may have future impact.