

Professionalism In Our Field

There's many ways that we can use the term "professional". We may use it to refer to the fact that we are committed to doing our jobs well, that we are good employees (punctual, respectful to colleagues, dress appropriately), that we provide reliable and competent service, or it may simply mean that we get paid for what we do (Feeney, 2012). We might use the term professional as a compliment, indicating that we see someone as being good at their job.

However we use these terms in our everyday conversation, there's a body of scholarly literature where academics from various disciplines have discussed the meaning of these terms. In this section, we will further define terms that assist in understanding the conversation about ECE becoming a profession.

Field of Practice

You've heard reference to the "field of ECE" multiple times so far. Calling ECE a field allows us to create a boundary around what we mean by ECE; it allows for defining what fits into this category. A "field of practice" refers to a specialization or a defined scope of work undertaken by an identified group of practitioners. It is a term often used in defining specialties in medicine or social work. Stacie Goffin has also applied the term "field of practice" to ECE (Goffin & Washington, 2019; Goffin, 2015). A field of practice, according to Goffin, indicates the roles that directly focus on the learning and development of children. In other words, the ECE field of practice refers to those who do the work of educating and facilitating development. Calling ECE a field of practice allows for defining the focus—the learning and development of young children. In sum, the ECE field of practice is populated by those who do the work of direct service to children, which also assumes a level of competent practice to be successful.

What is a Professional?

The term **profession** is commonly accepted to mean an "occupation that serves the public welfare and that requires specialized educational training in some branch of learning or science" (Feeney, 2012, p. 6). In other words, a profession requires some kind of study and practice that not everyone has, and serves others.

A **professional** then, is a person who has made a commitment to serve the public good related to their field and has also achieved the necessary educational requirement. In the field of ECE, it is common to hear about efforts to professionalize the field. This often refers to efforts to improve the practice of individuals, rather than being about system wide efforts.

A large body of academic literature has identified the defining features of a profession. Although there is not complete agreement on these features, some appear frequently and are accepted as critical markers. Feeney (2012) identifies 8 criteria that are common in the literature about professions. Table 1 describes them.

Table 1: Criteria for Defining a Profession

Criteria	Details of Criteria
Specialized body of knowledge and expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evidence-based knowledge (grounded in research and scholarship) ● Skillful application of knowledge ● Obligation to stay informed about new information
Prolonged training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acquisition of evidence-based knowledge through training/education that occurs over time ● Includes study and practical experience
Rigorous requirements for entry to training and eligibility to practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admission to training programs is competitive ● Graduation from training may be followed by an exam ● Go through background screening required for licensure
Standards of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Follow standards to ensure competent practice ● Make decisions on the basis of standards (practice is not “cookie cutter”)
Commitment to serving a significant social value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dedicated to public interest ● Altruistic and service oriented
Recognition as the only group in the society who can perform a function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No other group can perform this function ● Only those with credentials, training, licensure can play this role
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-governed ● Internal control over quality of services provided—national organization provides
Code of ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Obligations to society spelled out ● Moral behavior for practice codified ● Instills confidence that public good will be prioritized



Reflect

How do you use the terms profession and professional? How do you see yourself as a professional in your work with young children? Reviewing the list of criteria, what criteria does the field of ECE meet? Where can we improve?

ECE as a Profession

In recent years, many have questioned whether ECE meets the definition of a profession (e.g., Feeney, 2012; Goffin, 2013, 2015). There seems to be a consensus that right now, it doesn't. We may have some of the characteristics in Table 1, but not everything. For example, a Code of Ethical Conduct (NAEYC, 2011), has been in existence for several years, though there is no universal requirement that ECE practitioners are aware of or abide by this code. Similarly, in terms of standards of practice, many states have adopted a set of guidelines defining the skills and knowledge necessary to provide quality childcare. However, each state can define these guidelines as they see fit, and a wide variety of licensing requirements can be found across the United States. As guidelines (and not requirements) there's no accountability if the practitioner chooses not to follow them.

Moreover, these competencies are often set by the state legislature and defined by the state agency responsible for child care licensing rather than being defined and agreed to by the profession. This fact points to the absence of autonomy. Having autonomy is another marker of a profession. Licensed child care, a central mode of delivery in ECE, is heavily regulated by the state, rather than by the profession, providing notable evidence for the lack of autonomy in ECE.

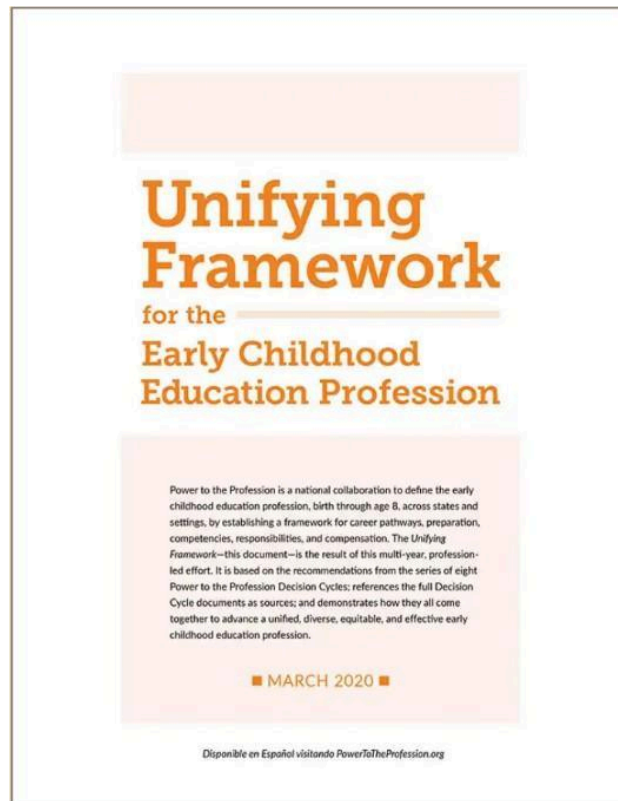
Prolonged training with rigorous entry requirements are not required for entry into ECE with any consistency. Similarly, too many in the general public still view childcare as "glorified babysitting" for us to say that ECE is recognized as being based on specialized knowledge, or that there exists a particular set of practitioners who can do the work of ECE.

It's clear that ECE has work to do before it can claim the title of profession and before we can claim to be professionals. While numerous efforts have aimed to solve the problem, no large-scale success has been achieved. Early childhood educators remain unrecognized for the significance of their work, remain undercompensated, the field of early childhood education remains fragmented and siloed with no clear definition of its boundaries, and little specialized knowledge is required for entry (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015).

Power to the Profession and the Unifying Framework

Beginning in 2017, NAEYC made a significant investment in achieving this goal. This initiative, titled [Power to the Profession](#) and carried out by a task force representing 15 national ECE-related organizations created a **Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession**. According to the Power to the Profession Task Force (n.d.), the framework is designed to "...set a vision for how to

drive the significant and sustained public investment that will allow all children, birth through age 8, to benefit from high-quality early childhood education provided by well-prepared, diverse, supported and compensated professionals” (para. 3). The title of the framework, including the term profession, as well as the focus on preparation and support of the professionals illustrate the focus of moving ECE to this status, while also recognizing the need for public funding to achieve this long-standing goal.



Unifying Framework for ECE Profession (NAEYC, 2020)

A study entitled [Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8](#) explores implications of research-based child development practices that influence those who work with children and NAEYC relied on this book and its findings to inform the Power to the Profession movement. This movement is dedicated to improving the well-being of all children and makes recommendations for a national, unified approach to:

- teacher roles and responsibilities
- preparation and educational pathways
- professional compensation
- infrastructure with shared accountability

Power to the Profession was a multi-year process that involved 8 “decision cycles” in which decisions on the defining issues of the field were presented to stakeholders for feedback. At each cycle, practitioners in the field responded in writing to the proposal, engaged in focus groups, and other means of providing feedback. After this process, each proposal was revised and ultimately finalized. In March of 2020, the results of the 8 decision cycles were presented in the Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession. The recommendations in the framework are summarized in the table found in the

appendix to this chapter. In addition to summarizing the recommendations, the table includes how they address the 8 criteria of a profession identified earlier in this chapter.

Naming and Defining the Profession

The first issue addressed by the Task Force was what to call the profession. This is a long existent problem with ECE (which you will note we have been calling early childhood education all along—but many do not accept this and use other names such as early care and education or early learning, and so on).

The difficulty was not just about agreeing to a single name but determining which practitioners working with young children were part of the profession. A long-held aversion to exclusion has made it difficult to draw a boundary around who is “in” and who is “out” of the profession. But this decision is necessary to define a field as a profession. After much deliberation, the Task Force chose to call the profession Early Childhood Education and the professionals are called Early Childhood Educators. Further, a boundary between the profession and the larger field of early childhood was drawn, delineating the professionals from other allied practitioners who, while still engaged in work that support children and families, are not early childhood educators and not part of the profession.



Unifying Framework

The image above is an illustration from the Unifying Framework (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020) that depicts the relationship between the field of ECE and other professionals serving children and families. The profession as proposed, includes three roles:

- **Early Childhood Educators** who provide direct service to children birth to age 8 and on whom the Unifying Framework is largely focused
- **Professional Preparation Faculty and Trainers** who instruct, observe, and monitor the practice of aspiring ECEs
- **Pedagogical and Instructional Administrators** who guide the practice of ECEs In addition to defining the profession and the professionals, the Framework identifies three designations of early childhood educators (Early Childhood Educator I, II and III) as presented in Table 2. Creating these designations addresses a confusing jumble of titles and roles in the current field, creating a uniform approach to defining responsibilities (scope of practice) and preparation. The Task Force also recognized the current reality that the scope of practice attached to a specific level of professional preparation differs by setting. For example, in Birth to age 5 settings, a practitioner with an associate degree may hold the position of lead teacher in a classroom. That same level of education would commonly be tied to an assistant teacher position in a K- Grade 3 setting.

Table 2 Designations of ECEs proposed in Unifying Framework

Title	Setting	Scope of Practice—Role in Development and Delivery of Educational Programming	Educational Requirement
ECE I	Birth-3 rd grade	Assist	120 clock hours of professional preparation
ECE II	Birth-Age 5 K-Grade 3	Lead Guide ECE I's Assist Guide ECE I's	ECE Associate Degree
ECE III	Birth-Grade 3	Lead Guide ECE I's and II's	ECE Bachelor's Degree OR ECE Master's Degree

Defined Professional Standards and Professional Preparation Delivery

The Unifying Framework (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020) also addressed the need for a unified system of professional preparation for EC Educators. The Framework recognizes the role of higher education in professions, both in informing the content of professional preparation, and delivering high quality preparation that successfully graduates competent professionals. The Task Force selected the updated and revised NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies as the standards for professional preparation. Given that a profession is defined partially by the existence of standards for practice set and defined by the profession, choosing standards developed by NAEYC rather than a state licensing entity is appropriate. These revised standards were released at the same time as the Unifying Framework and include a “leveling” of the standards, further illuminating the distinction between the 3 designations. This “leveling” guides professional preparation programs to pitch the content of coursework appropriately to the different designations and further underscores the differences in scope of practice.

To some extent, this approach was used to address the current reality that many practitioners have worked in the field for many years with no college coursework and are not willing to undertake a college education but wish to remain employed in the newly named profession. These designations recognize the contribution of all professionals regardless of scope of practice. The Framework additionally recommends that all early childhood educators must first complete a general early childhood education program before specializing in, for example, a focus on an age group such as preschool or toddler aged children.

In addition to adopting professional preparation standards, the Framework calls on institutions of higher education to be accountable through accreditation by a governing body to ensure delivery of competently prepared early childhood educators. Moreover, the Framework calls on higher education to work to ensure seamless transition across educational systems, access to higher education by an ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse population and diversity in faculty that prepare early childhood educators.

Finally, the framework recommends that once all the requirements just described are in place (i.e., higher education access to all who seek it, effective higher education that produces competent educators, utilizing a uniform set of standards) then early childhood educators should be licensed upon completion of a program of professional preparation.

Professional compensation

The Framework also addressed the requirement for increased compensation for the current and future ECE professionals. Using public school salary scales as a minimum benchmark for comparable compensation is recommended. That is, assuming comparable qualifications, experience and job responsibilities, the compensation for an Early Childhood Educator should be comparable regardless of setting (i.e. private childcare, state funded preschool, public school kindergarten). The Framework also calls out the importance of a benefits package for all EC educators regardless of setting. The Task Force was clear that without increased compensation as described above, the other requirements outlined for early childhood educators in the Framework could not be instituted. In other words, any increase in education or responsibility resulting from the Unifying Framework would necessitate a matched increase in salary.

The Task Force also recognized that employers that hire Early Childhood Educators should be accountable for providing comparable compensation (salary and benefits). The Task Force indicates that such accountability would be impossible without a financial investment from the federal government, which requires a recognition of ECE as a public good that serves all society.

Purpose of the Unifying Framework

As described here, the point of developing the Unifying Framework was to address the issues that have kept Early Childhood Education from claiming its status as a true profession. By formalizing ECE as a profession, those who do this work will be well-prepared and well-compensated, finally receiving the status and recognition they have long deserved. While this is accurate, it does not explain why doing so is important.

Those who have argued for defining ECE as a profession have claimed effectively that the well-being of children is what is at stake. If ECE remains a fragmented, unrecognized, under-compensated occupation, many children will not have access to the early education that research has consistently shown improves

each child's developmental and learning outcomes. NAEYC, the association that originally called the 15 representative entities that made up the Task Force has a vision. This vision, sometimes called an audacious one, is to unify as a profession to argue for ECE as a public good which should be supported by our tax dollars. The goal of these efforts is to ultimately have ECE be recognized as a profession so that those that do that work are well- prepared, well-compensated and supported so that the children who receive their efforts will be set on a positive trajectory for their futures.



Review the summary of the recommendations made in the Unifying Framework. What seems most beneficial about these recommendations? What will be the most difficult to implement? How would the implementation affect your current work in ECE?

Standards Defining Professional Performance

The work of the Power to the Profession Task Force is impressive and would dramatically change the face of ECE if the Unifying Framework is adopted across the country. This audacious vision would serve to address many, perhaps even all, of the defining issues that the field has grappled with, especially in recent years. However, the aspirational nature of the Framework should not lead you to believe that early childhood education as it we know it today has no established standards which could nudge it in the direction of professionalizing. In this section of the chapter, you will be introduced to systems of standards that define and regulate the work of early childhood educators in the US and specifically in Washington state.

Washington Administrative Code

Early Childhood Education is not made up only of licensed childcare. However, it does represent a large portion of early childhood education programs across the country and in Washington state. The term, "licensed childcare" should hint at the fact that these programs are regulated (licensed to operate) by a state agency. Each state has its own administrative agency that oversees childcare and in Washington state it is the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). After laws are passed by the legislature, they become part of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), a compilation of all permanent laws now in force. But in the case of something as complicated as childcare, the laws cannot be specific enough to guide practice. Thus, an administrative agency, in this case DCYF, writes administrative code or regulations that specify what is allowed in the operation of a licensed childcare program. One chapter of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) addresses the requirements for operation of licensed childcare programs--Title 110, Chapter 300--which was recently renumbered and retitled "Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs" (Washington State Legislature, n.d.). Note that these regulations reflect foundational (or base) quality (sometimes referred to as minimal quality) and that programs being licensed are called Early Learning Programs, not Early Childhood Education as NAEYC recommends.

The sections of the WAC that address Early Learning Programs (minimum licensing standards) have multiple subsections, making for a total of over 100 subsections of regulations, many which are broken down even further into numerous smaller subsections. This is a complicated document!

Given the focus of this chapter on Professionalism in ECE, of special note is the section on Professional Development, Training and Requirements. This section of the Chapter addresses the qualifications of staff in licensed childcare programs, both center based and family home programs. In 2019 the General Staff Requirements for center lead teachers were revised and are listed below:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Have a high school diploma or the equivalent
- Preservice requirements
 - DCYF Portable Background Check
 - Negative TB test
- ECE Initial Certificate within 5 years of hire or promotion (or from time of this section becoming effective)
- ECE Short Certificate within 2 years of receiving ECE Initial Certificate
- Document completion of annual professional development

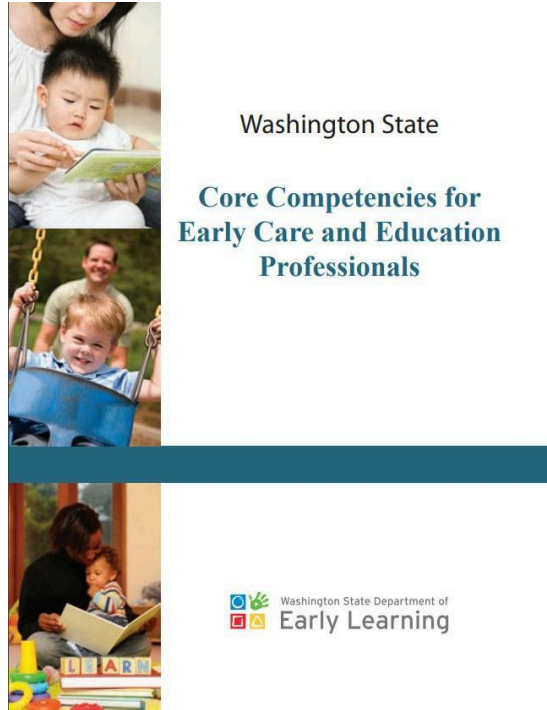
The ECE certificates referenced here are part of the Washington State Stackable Certificates. These are certificates offered by many community and technical colleges in Washington and provide a cumulative pathway with courses building on one another. These stackable certificates are meant to provide a manageable set of steps in moving to the goal of a degree, initially at the associate level, and if a student continues in their education, at the bachelor's level. The three stackable certificates are described below:

Table 3 Washington Stackable Certificates

Initial ECE Certificate 12 quarter credits	Short ECE Certificate of Specialization 8 Credits	ECE State Certificate 27-32 credits	Total Credits--47-52
3 courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intro to ECE ● Health, safety & Nutrition ● Practicum 	Choose one specialization: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ECE-General ● Infant/Toddler Care ● School-age Care ● Family Child to Care ● Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 10 Credits of General Ed (Math and English) ● 17-22 Credits of ECE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Builds foundation for Associate Degree

Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals

In 2009 the former Department of Early Learning, at the direction of the state legislature, published the Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals (DEL, 2009), developed out of a multi-year process that engaged a broad consortium of professionals from across the state. The competencies are meant to provide a framework of knowledge and skills necessary to provide quality care for children.



Cover of Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals

The competencies are viewed as a tool that can be used in a variety of ways including,

- By individual practitioners to assess their own knowledge and skill and to plan for professional development (PD)
- By directors to develop PD plans, or build job descriptions
- By trainers to plan and organize PD
- By higher education faculty and administration, to guide course and program development

The competencies are divided into 8 content areas:

1. Child Growth and Development
2. Curriculum and Learning Environment
3. Ongoing Measurement of Child Progress
4. Families and Community Partnerships
5. Health, Safety, and Nutrition
6. Interactions
7. Program Planning and Development
8. Professional Development and Leadership

Each content area contains statements that present a skill or knowledge. The statements are organized by levels. The levels represent a continuum of skill/knowledge from entry level to an advanced level of preparation. All but the first level is associated with a level of professional development or college certificate or degree.

- Level 1
 - Basic knowledge and skills expected at entry level

- No specialized training or education required
- Level 2
 - Level 1 + knowledge and skills comparable to a CDA
- Level 3
 - Level 1+ Level 2 + knowledge and skills commensurate with an associate degree in ECE/child development
- Level 4
 - Level 1 + Level 2 + Level 3 + knowledge and skills commensurate with a bachelor's degree in ECE/child development
- Level 5
 - Level 1 + Level 2 + Level 3 + Level 4 + knowledge and skills commensurate with an advanced degree in ECE/child development

Each of the 8 content areas have between 2 and 17 skill/knowledge statements representing an individual competency. The total number of competencies identified in this system is over 650.

NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies

As described in the previous section of this chapter on the Unifying Framework, a new set of professional standards (Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators; NAEYC, 2020) have been adopted by NAEYC and are proposed as the unifying standards of practice in the profession of childhood education. This newly adopted position statement represents the core body of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values that early childhood educators must demonstrate to be effective teachers of young children. The previous professional standards set by NAEYC were written as expectations for higher education programs—what they must teach to successfully prepare early childhood educators. The revised Professional Standards and Competencies are written as expectations for the individual professional—what they must know and be able to do as an effective educator.

The standards are organized into 6 core standards:

1. Child Development and Learning in Context
2. Family-Teacher Partnerships and Community Connections
3. Child Observation, Documentation and Assessment
4. Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Practices
5. Knowledge, Application, and Integration of Academic Content in the Early Childhood Curriculum
6. Professionalism

Each standard contains 3 to 5 **key competencies** that clarify the core with a total of 22 key competencies.

Each of the standards has also been “leveled” to correspond with the three ECE designations described in the Unifying Frame (ECE I, II & III). The leveling documentation is presented as a first attempt to identify the differences in the breadth and depth of content in the programs that prepare professionals with differing scopes of practice.

The table below illustrates how this looks for key competency 1a: Understand the developmental period of early childhood from birth through age eight across physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and linguistic domains including bilingual/multilingual development.

Table 4 Leveling of Key Concept 1a

ECE I	ECE II	ECE III
Identify critical aspects of brain development including executive function, learning motivation, and life skills	Describe brain development in young children including executive function, learning motivation, and life skills	Describe brain development in young children including executive function, learning motivation, and life skills
	Describe ways to learn about children (e.g. through observation, play, etc.)	Evaluate, make decisions about, and communicate effective ways to learn about children (e.g. through observation, play, etc.)

Professional Ethics

A commitment to ethical behavior is an essential component of every profession. Each profession (occupation with a commitment to a significant social value) has a unique conception of its ethical obligations based on the nature of its contribution to society, its history, and its values. Codes of ethics are part of the identity of the profession and provide guidelines for the ethical conduct of its practitioners. As an occupation that makes the significant contribution of educating and caring for the young in our society, the early care and education field is striving to become recognized as a profession. Part of this process is attention to professional ethics. Ethics is a particularly significant endeavor for the early care and education field because the children who are served are young and therefore vulnerable. The development of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct was an important step in raising awareness of the moral and ethical dimensions of the early childhood educator's work and has provided a common framework for thinking about ethics and addressing ethical issues that arise in the work of early childhood educators.

Morality and Ethics

Morality refers to beliefs about right and wrong that guide an individual's behavior. Ethics addresses a range of values relating to morality and what is considered to be right and proper. Ethics can be defined as the explicit and critical reflection on moral beliefs. It is the study of right and wrong, duty and obligation. "Doing ethics" means making choices between values and examining the moral dimensions of relationships. Ethics builds on an individual's personal values and morality.

Professional ethics involves reflection on moral beliefs and practices, carried on collectively and systematically by the members of a profession. The goal of a profession is to meet the needs of clients and to use knowledge for the good of society. The responsibilities of a profession are set forth in a code of ethics— one of the hallmarks of a profession. A code assures the society that practitioners who perform a particular role will provide their services in accordance with high standards and acceptable moral conduct.

Code of Ethics

A code of ethics reflects the shared understandings and combined wisdom of a group of professionals. A code acknowledges the obligations that individual practitioners share in meeting the profession's responsibility. A code, which lays out the profession's firmly held beliefs, can be a unifying force in a profession, providing a vision of what good professionals should be like and how they should behave. It also gives a framework for ethical decision making, offering guidance to practitioners in making choices that serve the best interests of their clients. It can also support a person who takes a risky but courageous stand and can provide the justification for a difficult decision.

A code of ethics helps people who work in a field to address issues that cannot be settled by research or by law and it supports them in doing what is right, not what is easiest, most comfortable, or will make them most popular. A code of ethics is not a legal or regulatory document. It differs from laws, policies, and regulations in that the code's focus is on individuals, not agencies, programs, or organizations. It guides but does not mandate professionals' efforts to address the most difficult situations of the workplace. Codes of professional ethics vary. Some are general and inspirational, while others are designed to provide specific guidance to practitioners in addressing ethical dilemmas that they encounter in their work.

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has been involved in work on professional ethics since the 1970s. The first publication that focused on professional ethics, *Ethical Behavior in Early Childhood Education*, was authored by Lilian Katz and Evangeline Ward (1978/1991). In this work the authors describe several aspects of working with young children with significant ethical implications. The first and most compelling reason for early childhood educators to be concerned with ethics is the vulnerability of young children and the resulting power and status of the adults who work with them. Another reason is that early childhood educators serve many client groups (children, families, employing agencies, and the community) and therefore must be able to prioritize the interests, needs, and demands of one group over another. A third reason has to do with the ambiguity of the role of the early childhood educator who, in the course of the day, may assume many different roles, including caregiving functions that are much like those of a parent. It is to be expected that tensions sometimes develop between teachers/caregivers and children's parents when they have different views about how these children should be raised.

The Katz and Ward book, first released in 1978, served to document the field's need for a code of ethics to assist early childhood educators in fulfilling their many responsibilities and creating and maintaining multiple complex relationships while working effectively with young children and their families.

In 1984, NAEYC Governing Board created an Ethics Commission, chaired by Stephanie Feeney, which embarked on the task of exploring and clarifying the profession's understanding of its ethical responsibilities. The first edition of the code now in use was developed through a process led by Feeney and Kenneth Kipnis, a philosopher who served as a consultant during the development of the code. They began by publishing a survey in NAEYC's journal, *Young Children*. Results from that survey demonstrated that members agreed that the development of a code was an important priority. This began a

two-year-long process during which workshops were held to reach consensus on the field's core values; vignettes were published in the journal, asking readers to send responses describing that they believed "the good early childhood educator" should do when faced with a variety of ethical dilemmas.

Working with the information gleaned from the membership through these efforts, Feeney and Kipnis presented the first draft of the code to the NAEYC Board in November 1988. After making the revisions recommended by the Board, the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct was approved in July 1989 and published in *Young Children* that November. The Code has been revised three times since its original adoption, in 1992, 1997, and 2005.

The NAEYC Code includes a Preamble; a list of core values; and sections exploring ethical responsibilities to children, families, community, and society. It also includes a statement of commitment—a personal expression of agreement with the values and responsibilities shared by all early childhood educators.

The core values articulated in the Code are firmly grounded in the history and literature of the field. They reflect members' central beliefs, their commitment to society, and a common purpose embraced by early childhood field. These core values are the foundation that makes it possible for early childhood educators to move from personal values and beliefs to a shared understanding of the professional values held by everyone in the field.

Each of the Code's four sections includes a brief introduction, a list of Ideals and a list of Principles. Ideals point the individual in the direction of desirable and exemplary professional behavior. The Principles identify practices that are required, those that are permitted, and those that are prohibited. Principles are the basis for distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable behavior. Typically the violation of such a rule involves betrayal of some core value of the profession.

In 2004, a Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators was released jointly by NAEYC, the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), and the American Associate Degree Early Childhood Educators (ACCESS). It addresses the unique needs of those who work with adult learners who are either working in, or preparing to work in, early childhood education.

Because NAEYC is a membership organization open to all who are interested in young children and early care and education, its code is not enforced as are those of professional groups like doctors and lawyers who have strong organizations charged with regulating the profession. But the NAEYC ethical guidelines have had a strong impact on practice in early childhood education.

The Code does not provide answers for all the thorny dilemmas of practice. The supporting and interpretive literature mentioned earlier does not play that role either—they offer neither cookbook formulas for finding one best solution, nor an exhaustive list of dilemmas and their "best" solutions. What these resources do offer, however, are tools to help early childhood educators approach difficult situations methodically and systematically, and to reach resolutions that are fair and defensible.

You will use the [NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment](#) (the Code) to complete the assignment at the end of this module. I recommend bookmarking or downloading it. En Español, [Código de Conducta Ética y Declaración de Compromiso](#).

A common characteristic of professions is that they have a document spelling out the moral responsibilities to society and guiding principles for professional behavior. Because a profession is viewed as the group that can uniquely perform an important social need, and because often the service is provided to a vulnerable population, it is critical that there is a clear statement about how ethical behavior is defined. Without that, the power that resides with the professional role has the potential for exploitation of the population being served.

Although the field of early childhood education is still striving to be viewed as a profession, it has had a code of ethics since 1989, but began the work to develop a code at least 10 years prior to that (Feeney & Freeman, 2018).

Beginning in the mid-70's, NAEYC leadership was advancing efforts to develop a code, with a code of ethical conduct adopted in 1989. The code was updated in 2005 and most recently reaffirmed and updated in 2011. The code exists as one of several position statements that NAEYC has adopted as guides to assist early childhood educators in making informed decisions on issues facing the field/profession and promote dialogue on the issues using a common language provided by the statement. All NAEYC position statements, including the Code of Ethical Conduct in its entirety, are available on the association's website, naeyc.org. The code is focused on early childhood educators—those working directly with children and families. Supplements have been written to apply the code to the work of Early Childhood Program Administrators and Early Childhood Adult Educators as well. Multiple articles in NAEYC's publication *Young Children* have addressed the use of the code, providing professionals with numerous opportunities to practice applying the code to real situations faced in the work of early childhood education.

Structure of the Code of Ethical Conduct

The NAEYC Code is organized by different components.

Core Values

- Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable state of the human life cycle
- Base our work on knowledge of how children develop and learn
- Appreciate and support the bond between the child and family
- Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society
- Respect the dignity, worth and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague)
- Respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues
 - Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect

Conceptual Framework

The framework is an organizing structure for the code. It is divided into four sections that address an area of professional relationships: with children, with families, among colleagues, and with the community and society. Each section includes an introduction to the primary responsibilities of the professional in that setting. Each section also lists a set of ideals and principles.

Ideals are aspirational. They represent what we strive for as we do our work with children and families; they are our goals. Principles are more concrete—they could be considered the objectives that allow us to achieve our goals or aspirations (ideals).

Ethical Responsibilities to Children

The first section focuses on the profession's beliefs about the unique and valuable nature of childhood and the vulnerability of this stage of development. Consequently, early childhood educators have responsibility to ensure the safety, health, and emotional well-being of children. Moreover, this section of the code addresses the profession's commitment to respecting individual differences, to helping children learn to cooperate with peers and to the promotion of children's self-awareness, competence, self-worth resiliency and physical well-being.

The first section contains 12 ideals and 11 principles (note there is not a 1 to 1 correspondence of ideals to principles). The first principle is identified as taking precedence over all the others in the Code:

"Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitive, or intimidating to children" (NAEYC, 2011).

Ethical Responsibilities to Families

The second section addresses the responsibility to the families served by early childhood educators. Given the belief that the family is of primary importance, and that the family and the teacher have a common interest in the child's well-being, educators have a responsibility to communicate, cooperate and collaborate with the child's family. The second section contains 9 ideals and 15 principles.

Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues

The third section of the code addresses responsibilities to colleagues. This section is divided into two subsections, one focused on responsibilities to co-workers and one related to responsibilities to employers. The responsibility to colleagues is to establish and maintain relationships that support productive work and professional needs. The focus here is on trust, confidentiality, collaboration, and respect for the dignity of each human. It also includes responsibility for holding co-workers and employers accountable for their own professional ethical conduct. The first subsection contains 3 ideas and 4 principles and the second contains 2 ideals and 5 principles.

Ethical responsibility to Community and Society

The final section of the code recognizes the responsibility of the educator to provide programs that meet the diverse needs of families, to assist families in getting access to needed services, to work together with other agencies and professionals and to help with developing programs needed, but not available. This section contains 7 ideals and 11 principles.

Ethical dilemma

The principles guide conduct and help professionals resolve ethical dilemmas. **Ethical dilemmas** are "moral conflicts that involve determining how to act when an individual faces conflicting professional values and responsibilities" (Feeney & Freeman, 2018, p. 19). An "ethical dilemma" is a situation where

there are two (or more) "right answers", each with their own benefits and costs. In this situation, you can professionally justify and defend more than one course of action.

Defensible course of action

A defensible course of action is a decision that can be supported by (in this case) the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct. In other words, how can you justify your solution beyond your personal opinion?

For your assignment, you'll be required to engage in a process of decision making, then cite related principles from the Code to justify or "defend" your solution.

Using the Code of Ethical Conduct

The Code of Ethical Conduct provides a tool to use in a variety of ways to ensure ethical conduct and to resolve ethical dilemmas that arise as a part of the complexity of early childhood education. While the code of ethics is a guide, it is not a recipe for specific behaviors to be enacted in any particular situation. However, the Code does identify a number of specific responsibilities. These ethical responsibilities are either things we should not do, or things that we are required to do. Some of the responsibilities are presented as ideals, (I) some as principles (P) and include the following:

I 1.1 To be familiar with the knowledge base of early childhood care and education and to keep current through continuing education and in-service training.

P 2.9 [To]...maintain confidentiality and...[to] respect the family's right to privacy...

I 3 A.1 To establish and maintain relationships of respect, trust, and cooperation with co-workers

I 4.1 To provide the community with high-quality (age and individually appropriate, and culturally and socially sensitive) education/care programs

P 4.7 [To]... be familiar with laws and regulations that serve to protect the children in our programs.

P 1.1 [To] not harm children. [To]...not participate in practices that are disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, intimidating, emotionally damaging, or physically harmful to children

P 2.1 [To]...not deny family members access to their child's classroom or program setting.

P 3C.8 In hiring, promotion, and provision of training...[to] not participate in any form of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, national origin, culture, disability, age, or sexual preference....

These ethical responsibilities are clear cut. They communicate what must and must not be done. So, one way the code serves your work is to provide clear cut guidelines for how to behave. In addition, the code is meant to help in navigating ethical dilemmas. In this case, the professional is faced with two equally justifiable actions but often includes a conflict between the interests of two involved parties. For example, it may require placing the needs of the child above that of the parents or of a group over an individual. The code can help sort out the best course of action in a situation, but the process requires thoughtful consideration of the various interests, needs, and priorities of one person or group over the interests, needs and priorities of another.



Read

["Focus on Ethics: Ethical Issues—Responsibilities and Dilemmas"](#)

["Focus on Ethics: Ethical Finesse—A Strategy To Resolve Ethical Issues"](#)

["Focus On Ethics: Gender Expression and Identity"](#)



Reflect

Consider this ethical dilemma (from Feeney & Freeman, 2018, pg. 52). Think about how you might resolve this ethical dilemma, considering your professional obligations and conflicting needs.

Kali, the mother of 4-year-old Chase, has asked his teacher, Sondra, to keep him from napping in the afternoon. She tells Sondra, "Whenever Chase naps during the day, he stays up until past 10:00 at night. I have to get up at 5:00 in the morning to go to work, and I am not getting enough sleep." Along with all the other children, Chase takes a one-hour nap almost every day. Sondra feels that he needs it to engage in activities and stay in good spirits through the afternoon.

The authors of the Code suggest a process for applying the code to ethical issues and dilemmas (Feeney & Freeman, 2018). As you consider the steps, think about the situation described in the reflection above. The steps they suggest are described here:

1. Determine if your issue/problem even involves ethics. Does it involve concerns about right and wrong, rights and responsibilities, human welfare, or an individual's best interests? If so, it is an ethical issue.
2. Determine if your issue involves legal responsibility. If so, you must follow the law. Issues involving child abuse are examples involving legal responsibilities.
3. Next determine if the issue involves an ethical responsibility. Recall that ethical responsibilities are clear cut expectations about how a professional early childhood educator behaves. There is no question about what must be done (or not done).
4. Determine if your issue is a true ethical dilemma requiring hard choices between conflicting moral obligations. Consider the needs of all involved and your professional obligations to each. Are there conflicting obligations requiring you to prioritize one over another? Are core values in conflict? If so, you have an ethical dilemma to resolve. Here are some steps to decision making about an ethical dilemma:
5. Identify the conflicting responsibilities. Consider the people involved and determine their needs and your obligations to them. Then turn to the Code for guidance. Review the Core Values and

Ideals in the related section of the Code. You may need to get more information if you decide you do not have the full picture. It may also be helpful to refer to program policies or community laws.

6. Brainstorm possible resolutions. Now that you fully understand the issue and the conflicting values, needs and obligations you can think about how to solve the problem. Do not yet reject any ideas but generate as many ideas as possible. Then go back and consider the equity and feasibility of your ideas.
7. Consider ethical finesse. In some situations, it may be possible to solve the problem without having to choose between two options. This approach is known as ethical finesse and is characterized by the ability to amicably resolve the situation, delicately maneuvering without anyone feeling like they did not have their needs addressed. For example, in the scenario in the reflection box above, is it possible to resolve the dilemma in a way that both the needs of the child and the parent could be addressed? Could the teacher work with the parent to develop more effective bedtime routines, or could they experiment with having the child go down for nap a little later, sleeping less time in the afternoon to see if this made a difference? Ethical finesse should be used sparingly (Kipnis, 1987). If we rely too often on ethical finesse, it is possible we are avoiding ethical responsibility and not meeting our obligations.
8. Look for guidance in the NAEYC Code. If ethical finesse does not result in a satisfactory resolution, utilize the Code to determine the action you can defend morally and prepare to act. Look to the Core values for guidance. Then review the Ideals and Principles to clarify your responsibilities. Make sure you feel you have all the necessary information. It may also be helpful to review your program's policies or discuss the issue with a trusted colleague.
9. Decide on a justifiable course of action. The next step is to make the choice between the alternatives, basing your decision on the ethics presented in the Code. In the previous nap-time example, if the attempts to help the parent with bedtime routines and/or a shorter nap did not solve the problem (i.e. the child became sleepy at nap time and was grumpy in the afternoon without a full nap) then the decision to reinstitute the nap procedure for this child is necessary. The responsibility to meet the physical needs of the child outweighs the need of the parent to get more sleep. It can be difficult to take such a stand, but having the Code, and your knowledge of child development on your side of the decision can be reassuring and affirming.
10. Implement your resolution and reflect. After making the decision and putting it into play, it is important to reflect on the process to determine what you have learned. Did you learn something about how you communicate with families? Did you learn something about how program policies are set and shared with parents? Or did you mostly learn about your own comfort level with these kinds of decisions?

Clearly, the process of applying the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct is not an easy one. Nonetheless, this important marker of a profession is critical in the work of early childhood education. Given the vulnerability of our "clients" and the inherent power we wield in that relationship, it is incumbent upon us to be aware of our ethical obligations and become proficient in the use of tools to assist with carrying out our ethical responsibility. Numerous resources for practicing the use of the Code are available from NAEYC.

Appendix

Table 5 Recommendations for Defining the Profession: Power to the Profession, Unifying Framework

Issue Addressed	Recommendations	How ECE is moved to become a profession
<p>Lack of agreement about a name (early care and education, early learning, etc.)</p> <p>Difficulty defining who was “in” the field and who was not</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Distinguish between the Early Childhood Education Profession and the Early Childhood Education Field ● Profession is Early Childhood Education ● Professionals are Early Childhood Educators ● Those in the profession include early childhood educators (ECEs), pedagogical and instructional administrators (P&IAs), and professional preparation faculty and trainers (PPF&T) ● ECEs include those who provide direct service to children B-8 and who meet the guidelines for the profession ● P&IAs include those who guide the practice of ECEs and who meet guidelines ● PPF&T are a subset of higher ed faculty and professional development staff that instruct, observe, and monitor the practice of aspiring ECEs and who have met guidelines ● Those in the ECE Field are not in the profession, but are allies of and support to the profession (i.e. home visitors, policy or advocacy specialists, children’s librarians, those who do not meet the professional qualifications) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Created a bounded field of practice that was not all inclusive ● Increased clarity

<p>Program standards and accountability lies with regulatory body—not profession</p> <p>ECE not viewed as a public good requiring public investment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECEs will hold necessary credentials to practice, meet standards and guidelines and work within scope of practice • Professional preparation programs will maintain accreditation by recognition body, provide preparation programs aligned to standards and competencies set by profession • Employers/owners will hire and retain ECEs by providing compensation and working conditions that support well-being, ensure that workplace and employees practice is aligned with standards and competences set by profession • Professional governance body will hold the standards, competencies, and guidelines for the profession. • Federal government and agencies will focus legislation, regulations, and funding on implementing the Framework recommendations, protect and invest in ECE as a public good, engage with and be responsive to members of the profession and the public served by ECE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places authority for professional standards with the profession—autonomy achieved • Recognizes ECE as public good served by a profession
<p>Professional standards and Competencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Professional Standards and Competencies for ECE will serve as the core 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal standards for practice set for full

<p>No agreed upon set of standards that come with authority to remove ECEs who do not practice within standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Standards for the profession (revision of previous NAEYC standards for professional development) ● Standards will be “leveled” for the 3 levels of ECE positions (establish the depth and breadth of the competencies required at these different designations) ● ECEs will be licensed (following completion of approved preparation program, pass national assessment, gain licensure) 	<p>profession (regardless of age or setting)</p>
<p>Professional compensation</p> <p>Practitioners in the ECE field are underpaid, not recognized as doing work that requires professional preparation and commensurate compensation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compensation for ECEs will be at least comparable to public school salaries and comparable across all settings ● Compensation will include adequate benefits package ● Increases in compensation commensurate with increased preparation and competency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compensation recognizes professional status, required preparation and competency

<p>Resources, structures, and supports to advance ECE profession</p> <p>If ECE is viewed only as a service parents pay for, no societal investment—not viewed as a common good—no resources for improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognize 3 primary types of professional preparation (clock hours, associates degrees, bachelor's degrees) ● ECEs must first have a general ECE education before specializing ● Professional preparation programs must be accredited, ensure graduates are proficient in standards and competences and provide seamless pathways through postsecondary education 	<p>Infrastructure will be built to allow movement to and maintenance of a recognized profession</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Employers must provide compensation comparable to public school compensation and provide supportive working conditions● Create a semi-autonomous professional governance body to support implementation of the Framework and advance the long-term sustainability of the profession● PGB will designate profession's guidelines, set parameters for quality assurance of individuals and professional preparation, and serve as liaison and collaborator with state and federal agencies and regulatory bodies● State governments and agencies will adopt the standards and competencies, administer ECE licenses, streamline regulations and increase funding to support ECEs, professional preparation programs and employers	
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