



What Exactly *IS* Professionalism in Early Childhood?

Many attributes of professionalism specific to early childhood are covered in other areas of our website, so here we're going to briefly discuss attitudes and habits required of a professional - in any profession. This topic goes hand-in-hand with ethical conduct so be sure to read and reflect on that information as well.

PROFESSIONALISM IN ATTITUDE AND RELATIONSHIPS

If you were going to hire someone to perform a job for you, any job, what attitudes, character traits, and qualities would you look for? You might like a person who's:

Respectful & courteous: they should treat you nicely, politely, and appropriately (another quality might be *cooperative*).

Trustworthy & honest: you should feel safe with them, and know they'll be truthful and fair (another quality might be *reliable*).

Positive in outlook: they should be friendly and pleasant, and have a can-do approach to the job.

Dependable & accountable: they should show up when they say they will, and do what they promise to do (another quality might be *responsible*).

Considerate: they should respect your feelings, cultural norms, and other diverse personal attributes.

Responsive & calm: they should be able to think and reflect before acting, and control impulsive behavior.

Next, think about the qualities you would look for if the person to be hired was to be a team member or supervisor. You would want them to have all of the above attributes *and* you might like a person who's:

Kind, empathetic, & supportive: they should give positive feedback, show caring for others, and be encouraging.

A team player: they should share in work, credit, and responsibility, and be cooperative.

Sincere: if they are a supervisor or director, they should practice what they preach.

A good leader: if they are a director, they should encourage and lead you and others to develop the professional skills and attributes you need to perform your job well.

Can you imagine what a pleasure it would be to work with or be supervised by someone who had most or all of the characteristics listed? 100% awesome! That's the person *you* want to be.

PROFESSIONAL RESPECT FOR BOUNDARIES

You'll find other, more complicated issues related to boundaries in the discussion of ethics, and it's those issues that are critically important to your work as an early childhood professional. The following is a list of more general behaviors that reflect understanding of and respect for boundaries. A person who understands and respects boundaries:

Leaves personal business and emotional baggage at the door.

Minds his/her own business.

Avoids listening to and engaging in gossip about co-workers, families, children, other community members, or other agencies.

Avoids sharing "too much information" (TMI) at work.

Avoids using work time for personal benefit.

Again, imagine what a pleasure it'd be to work with someone who understood and respected boundaries! We've all felt frustrated, annoyed, and even hurt by co-workers who gossip or who are always talking about their personal lives and problems. When people don't respect boundaries, that might mean they aren't doing the job they're paid to do - and others have to pick up the slack. Be sure **you** are the professional who **respects** boundaries, and are an inspiration to others to do so.

PROFESSIONAL WORK HABITS

Many of these are mentioned above in the first section, but there are a few, more specific habits worth mentioning again. A person who has professional work habits:

Is dependable.

Is on time.

Manages his/her time adequately to get everything done that needs to be done.

Is able to work independently.

Is able to work cooperatively and as part of a team.

Keeps accurate and up-to-date records.

Abides by all the rules and regulations of the workplace.

PROFESSIONAL WORK HYGIENE AND ATTIRE

Most workplaces and professions have standards of hygiene and dress that are appropriate for the duties, responsibilities, and activities typically performed by members of that profession. We don't expect a car mechanic to wear a suit/tie or dress to work, and we don't expect his/her clothes to be grease-free at the end of a day. On the other hand, we expect that many professionals, for example, dentists and health-care providers, look tidy, wear clean clothes, have clean hands and hair, and practice good hygiene.

As an early childhood professional, you should wear clean clothing that's safe for the many physical activities you perform as part of your job. Most facilities prohibit open-toed shoes or flip-flops, but sneakers and athletic shoes are OK. Your clothing should be comfortable but not look like pajamas (unless your facility is having "pajama day"). It should also cover cleavage, and be long enough in back to maintain modesty when you bend over. (You all know **exactly** what we're talking about here!) Remember, you act as a role model to the kids in your care, so clean, combed hair and other aspects of personal hygiene go without mentioning. The kids might not say anything but they will notice - give them something awesome to model!