



Day-To-Day the Ethical Way: How The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct Will Help You

How do we translate abstract values, ideals, and principles into practice? How do we decide what's right and what's wrong in situations we deal with? Although the NAEYC Code doesn't cover all situations and decisions that are encountered on a daily basis in early care and education environments, it does cover many of them. Think about these vignettes and then we'll see where the **Code of Ethical Conduct** might apply.

1: The parents of a child in your class are going away for the weekend and say they'll pay you a lot of money if you'll babysit for them. Without thinking, you agree. Then you realize it's not such a good idea, but it's too late for them to get another sitter. What should you do?

2: The director of your center decided to implement continuity of care but didn't include anyone else in the decision-making process. When you and other staff members resist, she gives you less than adequate performance evaluations. What should you do?

3: You have a child with significant physical disabilities in your class. The parent of another child asks you what's wrong with the little girl. What should you say?

4: One of the moms whose son is in your class wants to "friend" you on Facebook. What do you do?

5: You overhear a co-worker making unkind and sarcastic remarks about a family's religion. What should you say?

6: A relatively new child in your class screams for hours after he's dropped off - it's getting on your nerves. One morning you say to your co-worker, "Well, I see Jason's in his usually bad mood again this morning!" Jason is right there at your feet. Is your behavior ethical?

7: A parent brings her 2 year-old child with a medicine pouch on a string around his neck and tells you not to remove it. Once she leaves, you take it off saying, "This is dirty and yucky." You put it back on just before pick up time. Is your behavior ethical?

8: The family of a child in your care is experiencing severe hardship and you feel sorry for them. You notice bruises and other signs indicating that the child might be a victim of abuse. You don't tell anyone or refer them because you feel sorry for them. Is your behavior ethical?

9: A co-worker has started selling handmade jewelry, and is soliciting purchases from families served by the center. What should you say?

10: You're frustrated that the toddlers in your class have so many problems taking turns and sharing. You are constantly using time-outs but this isn't working. Is your behavior ethical?

Let's consider a few of the *core values* and *principles* and translate them into examples of ethical behavior. The ideals, which precede the principles, represent the goals that each professional should implement. The vignette/s that might be addressed are listed at the end of each core value, principle, or ethical behaviors. See if you agree.

CORE VALUES (page 1)

"Base our work on knowledge of how children develop and learn"

We honor this value by:

~ learning about child development and early learning processes through college coursework and other professional development activities;

~using developmentally appropriate practices in our family childcare homes and early learning centers;

~ensuring that our observations and expectations of children are based on strong knowledge of developmental milestones.

Vignettes 6 & 10.

"Appreciate and support the bond between the child and family"

We honor this value by:

~partnering with the family to develop consistency between home and center, particularly regarding use of caregiving routines, guidance (discipline), cultural norms, etc.;

~ensuring that each child's family is welcomed into our setting, and that the child is reminded of his/her family with pictures, stories, and remarks throughout the day.

Vignettes 5 & 7.

"Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, colleague)"

We honor this value by:

~behaving in respectful, responsive ways appropriate to each person;

~refraining from talk or action that could be interpreted as disrespectful, dismissive, or devaluing;

~avoiding body language (looks, posture, facial expression) and tone of voice that indicate disrespect, sarcasm, or negative judgment toward anyone.

Vignettes 2, 5, 6, & 7.

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES RELATED TO CHILDREN

The first and primary principle is this:

"P-1.1—Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This principle has precedence over all others in this Code." (page 3)

We implement this principle in a variety of ways. The following list is not all-inclusive.

We interact with children in ways that are nurturing, responsive, encouraging, and supportive of their emotional development. **Vignettes 5, 6, 7, & 10.**

We use guidance strategies that foster self-esteem. We avoid punitive, harsh, judgmental, sarcastic, and otherwise inappropriate "discipline" strategies. **Vignettes 6 & 10.**

We treat each child fairly. This doesn't mean that each child gets exactly what the others get (a one-size-fits-all program), but rather that each child gets what they need from us. We don't pay more attention to a child we "like more" - we make sure that each child in our care believes s/he is important to us. **Vignettes 6, 7, 8, & 10.**

We individualize to successfully meet each child's needs. This includes environments, activities, curricula, interactions, etc. **Vignettes 6 & 10.**

We refrain from talking about children in their presence. We assume that even very young and/or children with seemingly limited receptive and expressive language, have an inner life and can absorb our messages about them. At the very least, talking about children in their presence is rude. At the worst, it's damaging to their developing sense of self, their belief that we are safe and trustworthy, and that the world is a good place. The only exception is when we make positive remarks about them to, for examples, their parents, or visitors to the class. **Vignettes 3, 5, 6, & 7.**

We safeguard confidential information about individual children and refrain from sharing it inappropriately. This includes accidentally leaving confidential information lying out for anyone to see. This also includes talking about a child or family to another family. **Vignette 3.**

We know and follow state laws regarding abuse and neglect of children. **Vignette 8.**

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES RELATED TO FAMILIES

There isn't one over-riding principle that describes to our ethical responsibilities to families - rather there are many. However, this NAEYC statement provides a benchmark for ethical decision-making in relationship to partnering with families:

"Families* are of primary importance in children's development. Because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child's wellbeing, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the home and early childhood program in ways that enhance the child's development. (page 3) * The term family may include those adults, besides parents, with the responsibility of being involved in educating, nurturing, and advocating for the child."

We implement this in a variety of ways. The following list is not all-inclusive.

We "...respect the dignity and preferences of each family andmake an effort to learn about its structure, culture, language, customs, and beliefs to ensure a culturally consistent environment for all children and families." (Ideal 2.5, page 4) **Vignettes 5 & 7.**

We let families know in advance about our policies, procedures, etc. and any changes to these. **Vignette 2.**

We establish and maintain appropriate boundaries between our personal and professional lives. This means that we're aware of our own values and beliefs; that we refrain from sharing personal information; we're mindful of our desire to be liked by families; etc. **Vignettes 1 & 4.**

We refrain from using our relationship with families to our own advantage. **Vignettes 1 & 9.**

We safeguard confidential information about individual children and families, and refrain from sharing it inappropriately. This includes accidentally leaving confidential information lying out for anyone to see. This also includes talking about a child or family to another family. **Vignette 3.**

We know and follow state laws regarding abuse and neglect of children. **Vignette 8.**

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES RELATED TO COLLEAGUES

There isn't one over-riding principle that describes to our ethical responsibilities to co-workers and employers - rather there are many. This NAEYC statement provides a benchmark for ethical decision-making in this area:

"In a caring, cooperative workplace, human dignity is respected, professional satisfaction is promoted, and positive relationships are developed and sustained. Based upon our core values, our primary responsibility to colleagues is to establish and maintain settings and relationships that support productive work and meet professional needs. The same ideals that apply to children also apply as we interact with adults in the workplace." (page 5)

Much of this is covered in the pop-up PDF about professionalism in early childhood, but here are a few additional examples.

We share resources and ideas that will benefit children and families.

We recognize the professional achievement and contributions of co-workers.

We refrain from chatting and visiting with co-workers about anything unrelated to the task at hand, during class time.

We talk over concerns about a co-worker's behavior with them in a respectful, confidential manner. **Vignettes 5 & 9.**

We help our agency or program provide high quality services at all times.

We talk over our concerns about program policies and services with the appropriate program administrator and work for positive solutions. **Vignette 2.**