Chapter 1: The Successful Caregiver

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Chapter 1
The Successful Caregiver

Good Health Handbook
2015

Code of Ethical Conduct

Why have a code of ethical conduct?
As an early childhood professional a code of ethical conduct will benefit your work with families and your program. A code of conduct should be a guide and reference to look to in day-to-day decision-making.

A code provides visible guidelines for behavior and is a tool to encourage discussions of ethical dilemmas, prejudices, and gray areas that are encountered in everyday work – all beneficial when working with children and families.

Definition of ethics from Dictionary.com:
- rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group, culture, etc.
- moral principles, as of an individual
- that branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions

A code of ethics is a set of principles and rules used by businesses, professional organizations, and individuals to govern their decision making in choosing between right and wrong. A code of ethics defines the core values of the field and provides guidance for what professionals should do when they encounter conflicting obligations or responsibilities in their work.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recognizes that those who work with young children face many decisions that have moral and ethical implications. The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct offers guidelines for responsible behavior and provides a common basis for resolving ethical dilemmas encountered in early care and education programs.

The primary focus of the Code is on daily practice with children and their families in programs for children from birth through 8 years of age, such as infant/toddler programs, preschool and prekindergarten programs, child care centers, hospital and child life settings, family child care homes, kindergartens, and primary classrooms. When the issues involve young children, then these provisions also apply to specialists who do not work directly with children, including program administrators, parent educators, early childhood adult educators, and officials with responsibility for program monitoring and licensing. (Note: See also the “Code of Ethical Conduct: Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators,” online at http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/ethics04.pdf, and the “Code of Ethical Conduct: Supplement for Early Childhood Program Administrators,” online at http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSETH05_s upp.pdf)

The code provides a framework of professional responsibilities in four sections:
- Ethical responsibilities to children
- Ethical responsibilities to families
- Ethical responsibilities to colleagues
- Ethical responsibilities to community and society
NAEYC Statement of Commitment
The Statement of Commitment is not part of the Code but is a personal acknowledgement of an individual’s willingness to embrace the values and moral obligations of the field of early childhood care and education.

As an individual who works with young children, I commit myself to furthering the values of early childhood education as they are reflected in the ideals and principles of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct. To the best of my ability I ____________________ will:

• Never harm children.

• Ensure that programs for young children are based on current knowledge and research of child development and early childhood education.

• Respect and support families in their task of nurturing children.

• Respect colleagues in early childhood care and education and support them in maintaining the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct.

• Serve as an advocate for children, their families, and their teachers in community and society.

• Stay informed of and maintain high standards of professional conduct.

• Engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection, realizing that personal characteristics, biases, and beliefs have an impact on children and families.

• Be open to new ideas and be willing to learn from the suggestions of others.

• Continue to learn, grow, and contribute as a professional.

• Honor the ideals and principles of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct.
Cultural Considerations and Valuing Diversity

Valuing diversity means that we are comfortable with who we are as individuals and are able to accept and appreciate the differences of ourselves and of others. Diversity encompasses all of the differences we possess as humans.

Young children and their families reflect a rapidly increasing diversity of language and culture. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends that early childhood programs create a welcoming environment that respects diversity, supports children’s ties to their families and community, and promotes second language acquisition and preservation of children’s home languages and cultural identity.

Recommendations for working with families:

- Actively involve families in the early learning program.
- Help all families realize the cognitive advantage of a child knowing more than one language, and provide them with support to maintain and preserve their home language.
- Show families that their home’s cultural values and norms are honored.

Recommendations for working with young children:

- Ensure that children remain cognitively, linguistically, and emotionally connected to their home language and culture.
- Encourage home language and literacy development, knowing that this contributes to children’s ability to acquire English language proficiency.
- Help develop essential concepts in the children’s first language and within cultural contexts that they understand.
- Support and preserve home language usage. Whether or not any teachers can speak fluently, programs should make every effort to use children’s home language and create environments that reflect children’s languages and cultures.
- Develop and provide alternative, creative strategies to promote all children’s participation and learning.
- Provide children with many ways of showing what they know and can do.

Recommendations for preparation of early childhood professionals:

- Provide professional preparation and development in the areas of culture, language, and diversity.
- Recruit and support educators who are trained in languages other than English.

What is Cultural Competence?

Cultural competence is a set of matching behaviors, attitudes, policies, structures and practices that come together in an organization to enable that organization to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Hepburn, 2004; Cross, Bazron, Dennis & Isaacs, 1989). Hepburn defines the following four essential elements for a culturally competent system of care:

- Value, accept and respect diversity.
- Have the capacity, commitment and systems in place for cultural self-assessment.
- Be aware of the dynamics that occur when cultures interact.
- Adapt to make room for diversity.
Correct nutrition is how a child’s brain and body grow. Food and mealtime have different meanings in different cultures. In some cultures, certain types of meat are not to be eaten during certain times, or even to be served or offered. Offering a mealtime prayer may be a priority in one family and not considered important in another. One family may feel that continuing to spoon feed a child when they are old enough to do it alone is appropriate and expected. Another family might see that as delaying a child’s independence.

As an early childhood professional, culture and how it impacts the care that you provide should always be an influence in your program. Factors to consider are:

- perceptions of time and punctuality
- acceptable personal space
- eye-to-eye contact
- personal hygiene
- acceptable display of emotion
- giving unsolicited advice
- gender roles
- formality in use of names and titles to show respect
- appropriate physical touch
- holiday celebrations
- nutrition
- personal achievement verses the good of the community

Learning about the child’s family and culture will increase your cultural competence.
Professional Development

Working in an early childhood program is not a babysitting job. It is a professional career. Like any other occupation the rules, ideas, and content of the job changes, as do the situations and issues with the children and families. For this reason child care providers should receive current ongoing professional development (training) in child development and early childhood education, and they should remain aware of current community resources.

Professional development is defined as ongoing self-assessment of knowledge, skills, and abilities; the establishment of goals; plans for improvement and meeting professional goals.

There are many opportunities for professional development in the state of Oklahoma. It’s important to find education that is focused and intentional and one way to do this is by going through The Center for Early Childhood Professional Development (CECPD), a partner agency of the Department of Human Services, Child Care Services. CECPD provides information on training opportunities from basic CPR/First Aid to college courses and the scholarship program REWARD. A Statewide Training Calendar is available along with the Oklahoma Professional Development Registry (OPDR). The Statewide Training Calendar allows a person to look up specific training in Oklahoma that is approved by Child Care Services. The Oklahoma Professional Development Registry allows a person to track that training through an online transcript.

- For more information on professional development go to http://www.cecpd.org or call Toll Free: 888-446-7608 or 405-799-6383.
- To enroll in the professional development registry go to https://okregistry.org/.
- Each regional child care resource and referral agency (R & R) holds training for child care providers on different topics. You can locate your regional R & R through the Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Association website: www.oklahomachildcare.org, or call Toll Free: 888-962-2772 or 405-942-5001.
I AM . . .

- Striving to engage families fully in the process of their child’s development.
- Showing genuine interest and seeking to understand each family’s perspective and history.
- Treating families with dignity by respecting their culture, race and ethnicity.
- Finding innovative ways to include families’ informal supports as well as formal community services.

HONOR CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO SELF-LEARNING

I AM . . .

- Understanding that children are influenced by my attitude and temperament.
- Recognizing that child development is individualized and understanding that children reach developmental milestones on their own timelines.
- Acknowledging that each child has the ability to make his or her own choices.
- Providing children with opportunities to practice making appropriate choices.
- Providing children with a balance between teacher-directed and child-initiated play.

PRACTICE A HIGH LEVEL OF PROFESSIONALISM

I AM . . .

- Passionate about working with children – continually learning, continually improving.
- Honest with myself about my personal and professional development and willing to learn and grow.
- Seeking help if I have a question about a child’s well-being and/or development by consulting available resources, such as the family, my director, the Oklahoma Early Learning Guidelines, Warmline, etc.

ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES, MY COMMUNITY AND CHILD CARE AS A PROFESSION

I AM . . .

- Learning about the internal and external services and supports available to help families.
- Encouraging families to seek and access resources when needed.
- Building trust with families and community partners by working with a high degree of confidentiality and integrity.
- Recognizing the importance of early care and education as a profession and speaking positively about child care’s role in the community.
- Raising awareness and generating support for quality child care services.
- A member of an early care and education professional organization such as NAECY, NAFCC, NEA, NHSA, SECA, ECAO, OCCA, OEA, etc.

Source: Oklahoma’s Communications & Outreach Committee, Early Care and Education Partners, 2014.
Taking Care of Yourself

Spending your days teaching and caring for young children is a privilege as well as a tremendous responsibility. You have the joy of seeing life through the eyes of children, and you will watch them grow from helpless infancy to more self-sufficient preschoolers, or preschoolers on to being ready for Kindergarten and through the school-age years. You will be a part of their memories forever. In fact, it is while with you that many of their early milestones will be reached. Sounds great right? Then why are you feeling so exhausted?

It is extremely important that as an early childhood provider you make caring for yourself your number one job. If you don’t think you have the time, or you aren’t worth the effort, just ask the parents how valuable your health and well-being are to them.

How often do you feel?

- Overwhelmed
- Frustrated
- A lack of pleasure in things that usually bring a smile
- Irritable
- Exhausted or unable to sleep
- Not organized
- Never “caught up”

If you are experiencing any of these feelings on a routine basis, you may have early childhood provider stress. Job related stress affects you and the quality of your work. It’s important to learn to manage your stress and find balance in your life. Left unaddressed, these issues may lead to serious health problems and or complete burnout. Here are some steps to take to begin caring for yourself and finding a balance:

- **Health care.** Make time for your annual physical. Be sure that all physical causes are identified and addressed.
  - Could your lack of energy be due to a thyroid problem?
  - Could you be diabetic?
  - Could you have sleep apnea?
- **Regular exercise.** Regular exercise practiced at least three times per week can relax your body and mind. Try walking, swimming, Yoga, or dance lessons.
- **Good Nutrition.** Eating healthy foods helps your immune system work properly and combats the toll that stress can take on your body.
- **Short breaks.** Periodic breaks where you stretch, breathe, or just get a change of scenery can revive your body and lift your spirits.
- **Organize your time.** Attend workshops to improve your effectiveness at work, and take time to indulge in activities that are enjoyable.
- **Create a positive, supportive climate.**
- **Set realistic expectations** for yourself and ask for help when needed.
- **Enroll in a class or workshop** on a subject NOT related to early childhood – something that interests you.
• **Meditate, pray**, have “Quiet Time” for yourself.
• **Develop a network of friends who do what you do** – they will understand better than anyone else and you can support each other!
• **Make popcorn**, toss M & M’s in the bowl, and **watch a classic movie**.
• **LAUGH EVERY DAY**! It will change your mood. (Notice how often children laugh and smile!)
• **Go for a walk** with a friend.
• **Get a pedicure** and a manicure.
• **Curl up on your sofa** with a blanket and **read** a great book.
• **Plan short “get away” weekends** or vacations to reduce stress.
• **Make time for your hobbies**.
• Perhaps one of the MOST important ways to care for yourself is to **ASK for help** from a co-worker or friend when you need it. Asking is not a sign of weakness, but of strength.
Working with and Including Families

Communicating with families on a regular basis is important. Child care providers will have a better understanding of children's strengths and needs if they develop a good relationship with the families. There are many ways to build good relationships that will ultimately benefit the children, their families and the child care environment.*

Make families feel welcome
- Greet families by name when they arrive and tell them about your plans for the day, skills the children are working on or activities the children are involved in.
- Ask parents to share advice with you about their child.
- Develop good listening skills that show parents that their concerns and ideas are important and valid.
- Create a welcoming entrance that allows parents to help their child get settled.

Get families involved
Parents stay better informed and feel more a part of the child care program when there are opportunities for them to get involved. Their involvement helps providers offer a more varied program and children benefit when key adults in their lives take an interest in their activities.
- Have an open door policy so parents feel comfortable dropping by.
- Ask for their assistance with field trips or at fund-raising events.
- Host parent events such as potlucks and children's programs.
- Offer parent education by you and your staff sharing your knowledge, and also by bringing in a speaker for special events or classes.
- Encourage parents to share their skills such as carpentry work and sewing.
- Request donations of items needed for art and science projects, dramatic play areas, music and movement activities, etc. Post a list and update it as needed.
- Get feedback by sending out parent evaluations and having a suggestion box available.
- Form a parent advisory board and solicit their participation and input.

Parents bring a unique voice to committees and advisory boards
- They can participate in parent committees in your program and provide valuable input from a parent’s point of view.
- They can share their professional and personal knowledge in areas appropriate to your program (business, marketing, legal matters, fundraising).
- They can participate in community initiatives or organizations as a representative of your program.

Communicate with families on a regular basis
Good communication is the foundation of a strong relationship. Everyone benefits when there is regular communication between child care providers and families.
- Daily communication ideas
  - Verbal communication when children are dropped off and picked up
  - Written communication forms or notes
- Ongoing communication ideas
  - Newsletters • Web site • Bulletin boards • Parent mailboxes • Email • Voice mail • Social Media
- Parent conferences

It’s important to schedule conferences at least twice a year to provide parents and early childhood providers the opportunity to discuss development, progress, and goals for the coming year. Develop a formal strategy and share ways to make the child care experience satisfactory.

Adapted from Child Care Aware of North Dakota [http://www.ndchildcare.org](http://www.ndchildcare.org)

**Resources for Families**

You can share information with families about their children, your program, and resources that are available to them. The following are examples of communication with families:

- Day-to-day information on children’s activities and development
- Regular conferences on children’s progress
- Events to showcase children’s work
- Newsletters and websites about activities, goals and fun ideas to try at home
- Family education packets (information about Infant Safe Sleep, communicable diseases, age appropriate activities, why children bite and how to discourage it, etc.)
- Information about parenting classes in the community
- Information about community events
- Information about local resources the families may need:
  - Career opportunities or job training
  - Housing assistance
  - Health care
  - Food and resource centers

If you have a concern you want to discuss with parents think through what you will say and how you will say it.

**Before bringing up the issue:**

- Identify the real problem.
- What are the consequences of not doing anything?
- What are the consequences of talking with the family?
- What resources can you suggest for the family?
  - Make copies of brochures of agencies that might help.
  - Remember informal resources such as relatives, neighbors, and friends.
- Choose an appropriate time to schedule a meeting with the parent, if possible.
  - The least stressful and hurried time of the day is best.
  - Ask if parent or parents can stop by during their lunch hour, during nap time, or if they can stay a few minutes late when picking up their child.
- Present the problem in a factual way:
  - “I noticed…”
  - Avoid being judgmental.
  - Do not shy away from stating the obvious.
After stating what you are concerned about:
- Ask the parent if they have seen a similar behavior or concern.
  - This gives the parent an opportunity to share.
  - This also gives the parent an opportunity to agree or disagree with your concern before you move on to discussing solutions.

Discuss the concern in terms of how it affects the child:
- Remember you and the parents are both working toward a common goal; what is best for the child.
- Listen to what the parents say in response:
  - Try to use the same words the parents use as you reply “I hear you saying…is that correct?”
  - This lets the parents know you heard them and value their response.
- Look for a place to compromise.
  - Ask the parent if he or she has ideas for next steps. What can the two of you agree on? What steps or activities can you both work on with the child?

Remember:
- You cannot fix things for other people. Your role is to educate parents, provide support, and link them to resources that might be helpful.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences.
- Always end your conversations with parents on a positive note.
- Finally, don’t forget to check in. It’s important to check in with parents to see how things are going, how the agreed-upon plan is working, and where you might need to make some adjustments.

Resources to Share with Families
- Oklahoma Breastfeeding Helpline: 24-hour support and information from lactation consultants. 1-877-271-MILK (6455).
- Oklahoma Domestic Violence Hotline: Information, counseling and referrals for shelters and services for survivors of rape or domestic violence. Call 1-800-522-7233.
- Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline: For free help to quit using tobacco call 1-800-QUIT.NOW (1-800-784-8669).
- ParentPRO: For free parenting support call 1-877-271-7611, or visit www.parentpro.org/.
- Postpartum Depression Hotline: For information and referrals to resources and support groups call 1-800-944-4773, or visit www.postpartum.net.
- 211 Helpline: 24-hour information and referrals for help with utilities, food, housing, job training, etc. Call 211 or visit http://www.211oklahomahelpline.org.
- WIC Hotline: call 1-888-655-2942.