

LEADERSHIP AND ADULT SUPERVISION IN ECE



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Leadership and Adult Supervision in ECE

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Leadership and Adult Supervision in Early Childhood Education



Building Roots and Wings

Dr. Laurie A. Daly

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Leadership and Adult Supervision in Early Childhood Education

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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1.1: Chapter Introduction

1



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 1, students will be able to:

- **SLO 1.1:** Examine the history of supervising, mentoring, coaching and leadership.
- **SLO 1.2:** Describe what is meant by the terms: “supervisor,” “mentor,” “coach,” and “leadership.”
- **SLO 1.3:** Define what is meant by the term “mentor/coaching.”
- **SLO 1.4:** Discuss the benefits of the mentor/coach and mentee relationship.
- **SLO 1.5:** Identify stages of teacher development and levels of professionalism.

Chapter 1 Short Overview

Chapter 1 focuses on a historical overview and examines the differences between: supervising, mentoring, coaching, and leadership in Early Childhood Education (ECE). In addition, we shall define the term mentor/coach and gain an overview of the mentor/coach and mentee process. We shall also discuss the benefits of the mentor/coach and mentee relationship, stages of teacher development, and levels of professional development.

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1.2: Clarifying Definitions



Let's Take a Deeper Look

Definitions are a wonderful place to start no matter what the context is. It allows the readers to be aligned and "on the same page." Definitions typically clarify meaning and allow one's understanding to be more specific. Thus, we shall examine the definitions of supervising, mentoring, coaching, and leadership; and then, we shall investigate their similarities and differences. These definitions will help us weave together an understanding of what the term "Mentor/Coach" means. Let's start by looking at the history and the definitions of these four words.

Defining Supervision

The term "**supervision**" came into common usage in the 1600s. It came from the Medieval Latin word, "supervisionem" (nominative supervisio). It was derived from the word "supervidere," which meant to "oversee" or "inspect." There is no agreed upon definition of supervision, but we shall go ahead and attempt to define supervision as "**a process of professional learning and development that enables individuals to reflect on and develop their knowledge, skills, and competence, through agreed and regular support with another professional.**"

The term supervision can have a negative connotation. It is a word that is comprised of two words, "super" and "vision." The word "super" connotes the meaning of being "superior" or "extra." Super is a Latin word that literally means "from the above." The word vision means to have "sight or perspective." Thus, the literal meaning of the term "supervision" is to have someone (or a group) that is "superior" or "above you," to "oversee" or to "inspect" work. Within this mind frame, supervision will ultimately determine whether the employee's job performance or work is adequate or not. In management, supervision means overseeing the subordinates at work with authority and with an aim to guide the employees, if they are doing something wrong. The word implies catching an employee making mistakes, instead of looking for what the employee does well and excels in.



Supervision includes the direction, guidance, and the overseeing of the professional learning and development of a person, typically an employee in a work setting, to strengthen a company or team and facilitate accomplishing assigned work. This often requires planning and keeping a timed schedule. In the ordinary sense of the term, supervision means to oversee the activities of others. Supervision, when done well, is a process of facilitating professional learning and development that enables individuals to reflect on and develop their knowledge, skills, and competence. This is achieved through agreed and regular support and meetings with another professional.

Defining Mentoring

Mentoring theory is a concept that originated in ancient Greek literature where it related to an older, wiser man supporting a less experienced younger one. The word "mentoring" has an origin that comes from the word "Mentor," who was the son of Alcimus, in Homer's *Odyssey*. Since the 1970s, the concept of mentoring has spread in the United States and has an association with advancing workplace equity for women and minorities.

The meaning of the word "**mentor**" has traditionally signified a special person in one's life, who, through actions and words, gives help and advice to a less experienced, and perhaps a younger, person. The mentor helps the mentee, the one being mentored, to

reach their higher potential and influences the mentee's personal and professional growth and development (Noland, 2007). Mentoring is a relationship-based process between colleagues in a similar profession. The mentor should hold adult learning knowledge and skills, which provide guidance or scaffolding to the mentee. This relationship, hopefully, will result in an increase in an individual's personal and professional efficacy (Chu, 2014). In an early childhood environment, the meetings and conversations will usually take place in the classroom, without the children, the boss, or parents present (Gaspar & Walker, 2020).



According to Chu (2014), a mentor is a "respected, experienced person who supports and nurtures the growth of someone who is less experienced" (p. 6).

Most traditional mentorships involve having senior employees mentor more junior employees, but mentors do not necessarily have to be more senior than the people they mentor. What is important is that the mentors have experience that others can learn from.

Defining Coaching

The word "**coaching**" originated in the 16th century and initially referred to a method of transportation, specifically a horse-drawn carriage (AKA- coach). It is derived from the Hungarian word "**kosci**," which meant a carriage from the village of Kocs. This village was known for producing high-quality carriages. Over time, the term "coaching" transitioned from its literal transportation context to metaphorically represent the process of guiding and supporting individuals in their personal and professional development.

The first use of the term "coach" in connection with an instructor or trainer arose around 1830 at Oxford University. "Coach" was slang for a tutor who "carried" a student through an exam. The word "coaching" thus identified **"a process used to transport people from where they are to where they want to be."**



The first use of the term coach in relation to sports came around 1861. Now, in modern times, the concept of coaching is typically connected to sports and teams, who need a person, to support, train, and encourage them in their activity. It is a form of development in which an experienced person supports a learner or client in achieving a specific personal or professional goal by providing training and guidance. The person being coached is sometimes called a "**coachee**."

Coaching can also mean an informal relationship between two people, where one has more experience and expertise than the other and offers advice and guidance as the latter learns; but coaching typically differs from mentoring by focusing on specific tasks or objectives, as opposed to more general goals or overall development.

According to Chu (2014), a coach is "a person with specific expertise or skill who helps identify and develop skill in another" (p. 7). One often has a mental picture of a person with a whistle at a sports event or game. However, the term coach is also used to mean a relationship-based process, led by an expert with specialized adult learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient or coachee (Chu).



Traditionally, coaching examined extrinsic motivators (coming from outside), such as the demands of the workplace and performance rewards. We shall explore the notion that deep motivation and change are intrinsic (coming from within).

Defining Leadership

Leadership theory is based on business and organizational behavior models. In the 1920s, business management was based on management style, personnel production and finance, and the concepts of systemizing work, job roles, and responsibilities with time and motion studies. World War II ushered in an era of assembly lines, mass production, and women in the workforce, which fueled the need for child care centers near or at the work sites.

Leadership today is multifaceted and requires many skills, including managing people, sales, marketing, paying attention to return on investment and profits, measuring results, and attending to financial issues (Noland, 2007). Leadership is a process demonstrated by individuals and groups engaged in guiding the direction of improving teaching and learning. “This process involves strategies to create needed change” (Chu, 2014, p. 166). Leadership is also defined as the ability of an individual or group to influence and guide others towards achieving common goals. It is a process that involves social interaction with individuals working together to produce beneficial and positive results.

What Is the Combination?

We Shall call it- The “Mentor/Coach” or “Leadership” depending on the context in this textbook.

The combination of being a supervisor, mentor, coach, and leader incorporates the best of all four concepts. Here is a summary of the four different definitions:

Supervision is a process of professional learning and development that enables individuals to reflect on and develop their knowledge, skills, and competence, through agreed and regular support with another professional.

Mentoring is a process where someone teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced person, which influences the personal and professional growth of a mentee. A mentor is a special person in one's life, who helps the mentee, reach his or her potential.

Coaching represents the process of guiding and supporting individuals in their personal and professional development. It is a process used to transport people from where they are to where they want to be. Coaching supports a learner or mentee in achieving a specific personal or professional goal by providing training and guidance.

Leadership is a strategic process that engages in guiding needed change, in the direction of improving teaching and learning. It is a process that involves social interaction, influence, and guidance with individuals working together to produce positive results towards achieving common goals.



Combine These Terms...

We shall refer to this combination of the four definitions as the "Mentor/Coach" or “Leadership” throughout this textbook.

Mentor/Coaching or ECE leadership is a strategic process that guides, trains, and supports individuals in personal and professional growth and development. It is a process used to transport a mentee from where they are to where they want to be. It enables an individual to reflect on and develop knowledge, skills, and competence, through regular and agreed upon meetings and conversations with another skilled and more experienced professional. Through social interaction, connection, modeling, advice, posing questions, influence, and guidance, these individuals work together to produce beneficial and positive results towards achieving common goals and reaching higher potential.

The Mentor/Coach can be viewed as:

- Facilitating a structured process, whereby an experienced person introduces, assists, and supports a less experienced person in a personal and professional growth and development process
- Benefiting both people in the relationship from the mentor/coach and mentee experience
- A part of a symbiotic process, an association with mutual advantages
- Mentor/coaching is both an art and a science

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1.3: Mentor/Coach Skills

There are specific mentor/coach skills that can be learned, which support a quality relationship with the mentee. These relationships can occur in many different settings and among a variety of partners. There are numerous possible gender, age, and diverse combinations. Each relationship is unique and has its own dynamics; there is no specific formula for this process (Noland, 2007).

The Mentor/Coach May Take on a Variety of Roles

- **Adviser** who assists and supports the protege in developing new skills
- **Confidant** who maintains discretion for both the mentor and the mentee
- **Facilitator** who assists the mentee in working through challenges
- **Connector/Networker** who introduces the mentee to appropriate people, inside or outside the organization
- **Change Agent** who explains the process to all involved to get them to accept the plans
- **Learner** who is willing to also learn from the mentee (Gaspar & Walker, 2020)

Qualifications and Characteristics of a Mentor/Coach

A Mentor/Coach Needs to:

- Have a good academic background, Master Teacher level permit from the California Child Development Training Consortium (CDTC), and preferably an Associate's or Bachelor's Degree
- Have good interpersonal skills (friendly, patient, compassionate, empathetic, and honest)
- Be self-confident and enjoy spending time with others
- Be a good listener
- Be willing to learn
- Be sensitive to the mentee's preferred learning style
- Be flexible in providing content
- Stay current on educational, legal, and credential practices (Bellm, 1997-a; Bellm, 1997-b)

A Mentor/Coach is a Person Who:

- Gets to know another person easily
- Sets clear expectations about purpose, direction, and needed results
- Understands human behavior and temperament theory
- Understands the roles and responsibilities of his or her own position as well as those of the mentee
- Provides consistent and specific feedback
- Supports concrete commitments to change
- Empowers people to contribute at an increasingly higher level of performance (Noland, 2007; Bellm, Whitebook, & Hnatiuk, 1997)

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1.4: SAGE Model

Bell (2002) provides a model of mentoring that is easy to remember using the mnemonic **SAGE (reflective reach)**:

- **Surrendering**: willing to let go of the process and allow the interactions between mentor and mentee to grow without taking on power and authority in the relationship
- **Accepting**: listening to the mentee's ideas and thoughts and acting on them, and embracing the mentee for who they are
- **Gifting**: offering advice, wisdom, experience, feedback, focus, and direction without expecting anything in return
- **Extending**: pushing oneself beyond what is perceived as the limit, and encouraging the mentee to grow beyond the mentoring relationship

The Experience of Being a Mentee

If mentees want to truly benefit from a relationship with mentors, they need to assess themselves honestly. Do they have the willingness to learn from another person and will they be able to accept advice? Success is influenced by attitude, and that will determine the quality and outcomes of the relationship. When supporting new teachers and adult learners, it is helpful for mentor/coaches to be familiar with some recognized stages of educator's development.

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1.5: Stages of Educator's Development

Teacher growth and support should change as the needs, concerns, experience, and preparation levels of teachers change throughout their career. Two prominent theories are Katz's (1977) 4 Stages of Preschool Teacher Development and Vander Ven's (1988) 5 Levels of Professionalism.

Lillian Katz (1977) described four stages of personal and professional growth of a teacher (Caruso & Fawcett, 1999). These are common and predictable stages that educators, both teachers and administrators, go through during their careers. When mentoring someone and providing support, it can be helpful to identify their needs. This process of identifying an individual's needs can be facilitated by recognizing which stage of teaching they are in according to Katz (1977).

1. **Stage 1- Survival** (Year 1): The new teacher usually feels inadequate, unprepared, out of control, and experiences self-doubt and insecurity. In this stage the teacher is struggling to keep their head above water and often feel like they are drowning or have bit off more than they can chew. They are just trying to survive. This can cause some teachers to feel panicked, overwhelmed, and unhappy. Even the slightest criticism may be seen as an attack by some insecure teachers. Also, some teachers will leave the field and change careers during this stage. The turnaround rate for teachers in the first year or two of their careers is quite high. We often refer to this is the ECE "revolving door^[1]." Katz suggested that teachers need "direct on-site support and technical assistance."

2. **Stage 2- Consolidation** (Year 2 to 3): The teacher with some experience begins to feel some level of mastery. The teacher consolidates the gains made during the first stage and is able to focus on specific tasks and skills. They understand what is expected of them and has some confidence that they can handle their load and even enjoy it. They are able to pull different ideas and theories together and put them into practice in meaningful ways. The teacher in this stage is far more able to receive constructive feedback and put the advice into practice. Katz suggested that teachers need "on-site assistance, access to specialists, and access to advice from consultants and colleagues."



Bunny Trail Footnote 1: Staff turnover in ECE programs is often called a "**revolving door**" because educators frequently leave and are quickly replaced, only for the cycle to repeat. This term captures the **high, continuous rate of staff entering and exiting** these programs, much like people walking through a door that never stops spinning.

3. **Stage 3- Renewal** (Years 3 to 4): The teacher begins to feel stale, repetitive, and needs innovation and inspiration. The teacher begins to tire and needs renewal. By the fourth to sixth year of teaching, the typical teacher knows their job well and is very competent. If they are not using new and interesting challenges, they may start to feel bored. Often teachers will attend conferences, take workshops, or take courses in order to bring in fresh ideas and add knowledge to their teaching practices. Katz suggested having these teachers join professional agencies and analyze their teaching methods.

4. **Stage 4- Maturity** (Years 5 and well beyond): Mature teachers have come to terms with themselves and understand the bigger picture. They feel confident in their ability to teach and are ready to reach out into the community and give from their knowledge. Some teachers enjoy continuing their education, but also giving workshops or teaching ECE information, writing articles. Becoming a mentor/coach is often welcomed at this stage in one's career (Caruso & Fawcett, 1999).



Vander Ven's Five Levels of Professionalism.

Vander Ven's (1988), **Five Levels of Professionalism**, is a developmental model that outlines how professionals evolve over time in terms of competence, identity, and commitment to their field. The model helps to understand how someone grows from a beginner to a highly skilled, reflective practitioner. Notice that she used the term "supervision" in her language.

Level 1– The Apprentice/Novice Stage

- **Characteristics:** New to the field, relies heavily on rules, routines, and supervision
- **Focus:** Learning basic tasks and procedures; emulating role models
- **Support Needs:** Clear guidance, structure, and modeling from more experienced professionals
 - o They can function as nonprofessionals
 - o They often have the lowest levels of education
 - o They typically have the lowest salaries
 - o They usually need the highest level of supervision
 - o They often see issues primarily through personal experiences

Level 2– The Colleague/Initial Stage

- **Characteristics:** Gaining confidence and competence in daily tasks; can function independently within familiar settings
- **Focus:** Applying knowledge and skills in practice; beginning to understand the "why" behind actions
- **Support Needs:** Opportunities to collaborate, receive feedback, and refine practice
 - o They have had some training
 - o They are seriously considering a career in ECE
 - o They need direct supervision
 - o They are usually open to direct feedback

Level 3– The Mentor/Informed Stage

- **Characteristics:** Seen as a leader or guide by peers; demonstrates competence and confidence
- **Focus:** Supporting others' development; reflecting on and refining their own practice
- **Support Needs:** Engagement in ongoing professional development; recognition of expertise
 - o They likely hold a degree in ECE
 - o They are more likely to use developmentally appropriate practices (DAP)
 - o They have broader perspective
 - o They identify with parents and families
 - o They have a strong commitment to the field of ECE
 - o They are becoming more self-reliant

Level 4– The Sponsor/Complex

- **Characteristics:** Takes responsibility for shaping the culture, ethics, and direction of the profession
- **Focus:** Advocating for best practices; mentoring across organizations or sectors
- **Support Needs:** Platforms for leadership, policy input, and collaboration across systems
 - o They are more likely to take on leadership roles and supervise others
 - o They have higher levels of self-direction and autonomy
 - o They are guided by their wisdom, age, and expertise

Level 5– The Professional/Influential Stage

- **Characteristics:** Deeply committed to the profession's values, ongoing learning, and ethical standards
- **Focus:** Self-directed, reflective, innovative; contributes to the profession's evolution
- **Support Needs:** Engagement in research, innovation, and thought leadership
 - o They take on leadership roles and supervise others
 - o They also have higher levels of self-direction and autonomy
 - o They are also guided by their wisdom, age, and expertise
 - o They are likely to have a significant impact on the field of ECE (Caruso & Fawcett, 1999).

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1.6: Summary

Mentor/coaching provides an opportunity for orientation and support for new staff and facilitates all staff becoming more comfortable with one another. It encourages loyalty and identification with the goals and purposes of the organization and increases productivity and builds capacity. Moreover, an effective mentor/coach and mentee relationship develops skills and talents that are underdeveloped or not previously recognized and seeks to aid in the development of a person's self-esteem and personal and professional growth.

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1.7: Vocabulary

- **Moral Dilemma:** A situation where a person must choose between two or more actions, each with ethical implications and possible consequences.
 - **Ethical Responsibility:** Obligations and principles that guide what is right and wrong behavior in a professional setting.
 - **Professional Code:** A formal set of ethical guidelines and standards that govern the behavior and responsibilities of individuals within a specific profession.
 - **Moral Commitment:** A deep personal dedication to act ethically and uphold values, even when it is difficult or inconvenient.
 - **Reflective Practice:** The process of thoughtfully examining one's own teaching or professional actions to learn, grow, and improve future practice.
 - **Advocacy:** The act of speaking up, supporting, or taking action to promote a cause, policy, or group.
-

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1.8: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- **The Center for Early Childhood Leadership/Links to an external site:**

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership is dedicated to enhancing the management skills, professional orientation, and leadership capacity of early childhood administrators.

- **The National Mentoring Institute/Links to an external site:**

The National Mentoring Institute serves as the education, research, and training arm for MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership and offers a wealth of products and services to the entire mentoring field.

- **The Mentor Group/Links to an external site:**

A training and technical assistance organization that works with individuals and organizations igniting leadership through Mentor Coaching.

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Finished Chapter 1

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: The NAEYC as the ECE Foundation and the Code of Ethical Responsibilities to Children

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2.1: Chapter Introduction

2



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 2, students will be able to:

- **SLO 2.1:** Identify characteristics of effective supervision of teachers, mentors, and coaches.
- **SLO 2.2:** Explain the purpose and significance of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct in guiding early childhood professionals' decisions and behavior.
- **SLO 2.3:** Reflect on and discuss personal values, morals, and ethics, and evaluate how they influence decision-making in educational settings.
- **SLO 2.4:** Identify and describe ethical responsibilities of educators toward children, families, colleagues, and the broader community.
- **SLO 2.5:** Discuss the WAGER framework and intentional practices and how to build nurturing, respectful, and equitable classroom environments.

Chapter 2 Short Overview

Chapter 2 explores the foundational role of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in shaping ethical and professional practices in ECE. It emphasizes the importance of personal ethics, morals, and values in guiding educators' daily decisions, especially when navigating complex moral dilemmas. The chapter highlights the NAEYC Code of Ethics as a critical tool for helping educators act intentionally and ethically in relationships with children, families, colleagues, and communities.

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2.2: Who is the NAEYC?



Let's Take a Deeper Look

Before we begin to jump into the mentor/coach and mentee process, we are going to examine personal ethics, morals, and values.

First up, “ethics.” We often think of morals and values from a college philosophy class. Typically, students are given a hypothetical situation and asked to decide how to proceed. For example, one hypothetical situation might be, “You are in a boat, and there are 2 drowning children in the water. One drowning child is your relative, and the other drowning child is his/her friend. You can only save one person. Who do you save, and why?” Yikes! That is an impossibly difficult decision to make. These hypothetical ethical scenarios are meant to be morally difficult, and they are meant to challenge values and cause us to question why and what we do.

When investigating the concept of personal ethics, a good strategy is to examine our current norms. Since there is no such thing as an ethical Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) system, a good tactic is to begin where we want to end up. This is like when we look at a map at the mall that indicates, “You are here,” then we figure out where we want to go, and then we create a track or path for our course.

In ECE, the desired GPS end point, particularly in the United States, is to follow the guidelines of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The NAEYC, and their [Code of Ethics/links to an external source](#) (NAEYC, 2024) (Appendix A), is an excellence source as our “GPS locator.”

Who Is the NAEYC?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research. Their goal is to advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children. The association comprises nearly 60,000 individual members of the early childhood community and 52 Affiliates, all committed to delivering on the promise of high-quality early learning. Their collective vision is “that all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential” (NAEYC, 2024, para. 1).



The NAEYC Code of Ethics is one of the five foundational documents (see links below) that NAEYC developed for Early Childhood Educators as a “GPS reference point.” It defines our professional code, and it specifies what ethical behavior in ECE looks like.

According to the NAEYC (2024), the code of ethics is a statement of standards of behavior agreed upon by the members of a profession, which is a group with special obligations to their society. It establishes the moral obligations that they are expected to honor. It rests on the foundation of the members’ shared values, and it expresses what they believe to be right, good, and fair (para. 3).

A code of ethics provides a vision of what a profession should be and how the members of that profession should behave. It builds members’ ethical awareness and judgment, provides them with guidance in decision making, gives them moral courage, and gives them a shared identity. It sends a message to society at large describing how it can expect members of that professional group to behave (NAEYC, 2024, para. 4).

The code is intended to guide the ethical, and moral decisions or dilemmas that ECE professionals face daily. Unfortunately, moral and ethical decisions are often made in the classroom without the needed supports and resources. Without support, resources, and intentional, well-thought-out responses, our reactions may be faulty. Instead of “responding” to the situation in a thoughtful manner, we might “react” to the situation in an inappropriate way or react with a behavior that is an unhealthy pattern from our past.

Unintentional reacting, instead of intentional responding, may accidentally undermine relationships, thus causing conflict with relationships and conflict internally.

Internal conflict can jeopardize educators' personal ethics, morals, values, and beliefs. If there is an internal conflict, it can even have an impact on health and wellbeing. This is one reason that it is important for us to know what our own personal ethics, morals, values, and beliefs are. It is a good idea for us to regularly examine these notions and try to understand how they came to be. Why do we value what we value? Why do we believe what we believe? How did these notions come to be in our lives? Is the origin from our families, friends, education, teachers, mentors, media, etc.? All of these shape us.

In the classroom, educators face daily decisions that have moral and ethical dimensions or dilemmas; thus, it is important for educators to learn to intentionally respond in ways that are equitable, just, moral, ethical, and line up with our own personal values. The NAEYC Code of Ethics is the golden standard for ECE professionals to set as best practice. The code guides our actions when responding to ethical dilemmas. It brings us shared values and gives us the platinum (Platinum is more valuable than gold) standard to strive for.



The Five Foundational Documents of the NAEYC:

1. [The Code of Ethics](#) (2024),
2. [Developmentally Appropriate Practice](#) (DAP, 2020),
3. [Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#) (2019),
4. [Early Learning Program Standards](#) (2025), and
5. [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) (2019).

Each of these five documents addresses important ECE issues and emphasizes the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and treating every individual with respect, dignity, value, empathy, and worth.

The NAEYC (2024) states that ethics must be grounded in philosophy and must address issues, such as fairness, autonomy, justice, mercy, kindness, generosity, and charity. Behaving in an ethical way is not just instinct, but involves using the knowledge of ethical principles, which influences our professional actions. The NAEYC articulates this professional code of ethics and complements and supports the other four foundational documents.

The NAEYC Position

Early childhood educators must uphold essential professional, ethical responsibilities to ensure that each and every child, from birth through age 8, has equitable learning opportunities regardless of whether the setting is in a center, home, or school. The Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators, together with the other four Foundational Statement documents, articulates these ethical responsibilities, and supports ethical behavior in ECE environments (NAEYC, 2024, p. 4). (Italics for the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct are supplied by the author to help differentiate the textbook from the NAEYC material.)

NAEYC Core Values (NAEYC, 2024)

The following core values are rooted in history, reflective of the present, and responsive to the future. They ground early childhood educators' professional relationships and are organized so that practitioners know which values most closely undergird which responsibility.

The first set of values apply to all **Professional Relationships**:

- Respect and support the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each and every individual
- Respect and support diversity among individuals, as well as within and across groups of individuals, in terms of their backgrounds and lived experiences
- Recognize that all individuals—children and adults—thrive within relationships based on trust and respect

With respect specifically to **Professional Relationships with Children**, early childhood educators' core values include:

- Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable part of the human life cycle
- Base professional practice on current and accurate knowledge of how to understand and support children's development and learning
- Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society

With respect specifically to **Professional Relationships with Families**, early childhood educators' core values include:

- Appreciate, value, and support the bond between the child and their family
- Respect and support families in their task of nurturing children

With respect specifically to **Professional Relationships between and among Colleagues and Staff**, early childhood educators' core values include:

- Be open to ideas and willing to learn
- Recognize the importance of maintaining and contributing to a humane, supportive, and fulfilling work environment
- Commit to the continuous professional learning and growth of self and staff
- Draw upon research and knowledge from relevant disciplines, including adult development and learning

With respect specifically to **Professional Relationships in the context of a broader Community and Society**, early childhood educators' core values include:

- Respect the critical role of a knowledgeable, competent, and diverse early childhood education and care workforce working across all settings
- Serve as an advocate for children, their families, and their teachers in community and society (NAEYC, 2024, p. 4).

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2.3: Professional Relationships

The NAEYC has a Statement of Commitment that educators are encouraged to commit to and sign. Consider making this part of your institution's commitment (NAEYC, 2024):

FIGURE. 2.1

NAEYC Statement of Commitment (2024)

This Statement of Commitment represents a personal acknowledgment of my willingness to embrace the core values and ethical responsibilities distinctive to early childhood educators.

***This commitment includes adherence to the tenet that has had precedence over all others in every iteration of the Code of Ethics: above all, we shall not harm children.** This means that we shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. Further, we recognize that while we have many ethical responsibilities and relationships, the safety and well-being of the children in our care is our primary responsibility, above our obligations to all other constituencies.*

In my capacity as an individual working with young children, families, and/or other educators, I sign this statement to indicate my professional commitment to furthering the core values and ethical responsibilities of early childhood educators as reflected in this Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators, and in alignment with the Professional Standards and Competencies.

PRINTED NAME: _____

SIGNED NAME: _____

NAME OF PROGRAM: _____

LOCATION: _____

DATE: _____

Figure 2.1 (NAEYC, 2024, p. 5).

Ethical Responsibilities

Sections of the Code of Ethics address:

- The **educator's** ethical responsibility to:
 - 1- ethical responsibilities to the children;
 - 2- ethical responsibilities to the families;
 - 3- ethical responsibilities to the colleagues and employers; and
 - 4- ethical responsibilities to the community/society.
- The **administration's** ethical responsibilities to:
 - ADMIN 1- ethical responsibilities to personnel; and
 - ADMIN 2- ethical responsibilities to sponsoring agencies, and governing bodies.
- The ethical responsibilities specific to **adult educators** in professional preparation programs:
 - PREP 1- ethical responsibilities specific to adult learners in training classes and higher education courses;
 - PREP 2- ethical responsibilities to practicum sites;
 - PREP 3- ethical obligations to institutions of higher learning and agencies providing training.

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2.4: The NAEYC Code as Our Foundation

Becoming familiar with the NAEYC code of ethics and the supporting documents gives us clarity and focus for our teaching practices. The ethical responsibilities specific to adult educators in professional preparation programs is particularly meaningful for Mentor/Coaches and their mentees. However, we can examine the entire Code of Ethics, starting with the Educator's ethical responsibility to the children (NAEYC, 2024, pp. 4-9) (See Appendix A). Examining the educator's ethical responsibility to children and the expectations from the NAEYC, is a wonderful beginning reference point for the Mentor/Coach and they should eventually intentionally share this NAEYC information with the Mentee.

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2.5: Professional Relationships with Children



When investigating ethics, it is important to define the educator's ethical and moral obligations to children. Our number one duty as educators, regardless of our role in the classroom, is:

Code 1.1- *"Do no harm to children."*

This means we must provide environments that are safe, healthy (physically and emotionally), respectful, caring, nurturing, relationship building, diverse, equitable, inclusive, and responsive.

Code 2.2- *Care for and educate children in positive emotional, social, cultural, and learning environments that are developmentally appropriate, cognitively stimulating, and that affirm, support, value, and promote all aspects of each child's identities and abilities.*

When we think of positive characteristics of a good educator, these traits come to mind:

- Honesty
- Mutual respect
- Trustworthy
- Responsive to needs
- Reciprocal relationship builder
- Caring
- Encouraging
- Kind
- Empathetic/understanding
- Patient
- Humble
- Knowledgeable
- Open to alternative perspectives
- Well-regulated
- Non-judgmental
- Optimistic
- Perceptive
- Reflective
- Intentional
- Good communicator

- Good listener
- WAGER (Warm, Accepting, Genuine, Empathetic, & Respectful) (See below)
- Which characteristics are we missing?

Intentionality

What type of educator do you want to be? It is imperative that we think about this. Positive traits are more likely to occur when we define them and dwell on them. Intentionality means that we are consciously thinking about something, in advance of acting, and we have awareness and are mindful of our actions. We all have the ability to be intentional about how we treat others. We also have the power and authority to become the type of educator that we admire.

WAGER

The acronym for WAGER stands for: W= Warmth, A= Acceptance, G= Genuineness, E= Empathy, & R= Respect. These are characteristics that build a great foundation when creating a positive social/emotional learning environment (Kostelnik, Soderman, Stein, & Gregory, 2015). Other strategies include:

1. Listen attentively, (maintain eye contact, but don't stare; smile & nod; and give verbal cues to let the person know you are interested)
2. Provide appropriate privacy for corrective feedback or personal help
3. Refrain from fidgeting, messing with your clothing/hair, and responding to other distractions and
4. Be fully present



Being Fully Present

Being fully present is a gift or “present” that we give the children we teach and the coworkers we work with. Someone who truly listens to you is a blessing. We all know what it feels like when we are having a conversation with someone who is honestly not interested. It is painful when we are talking to a person, whose eyes are looking past us, searching the room for something or someone else. Regardless of their words, their actions speak volumes, and we know that we are not being listened to. Most toddler tantrums are in direct relationship to not feeling heard. Eventually, we typically avoid talking to people who don't listen to us because we feel devalued.



Values

Positive characteristics, values, and beliefs, work together. **Values** refer to principles or standards of behavior. Values are those hidden motivators that make us choose a certain set of actions, and they impact our behavior and character, in our day-to-day lives.

Values are closely related to an individual's motivation and will most likely affect decision-making or conflict-resolution skills. Values serve as guidelines for managing the self in light of others' expectations. Values facilitate the social and personal interactions between people and allow them to take positions on social, economic, legal, political, ethical, and aesthetic issues and can be used to persuade, influence, judge, evaluate, praise, or blame others.

Beliefs

A **belief** refers to the conviction or acceptance that something exists or is true. It is a statement in which one has trust and confidence in its accuracy. Beliefs can be positive or negative, true or false, challenged or untested, and/or beliefs may even change when challenged. Clusters of beliefs evolve into a hierarchy of attitudes (Noland, 2009, chapter 7). Beliefs affect morals and values.

The main difference between values and beliefs is that values are principles, ideals or standards of behavior, while beliefs are convictions that we generally accept to be true. It is these ingrained beliefs that influence our attitudes, and behavior. Unfortunately, both values and beliefs can allow individuals to rationalize particular actions that are unacceptable to others. Through rationalizing, people can still feel a sense of morality or competence. Differences in values are at the base of all conflicts, while suspending

personal judgments and understanding another's viewpoint, facilitates true and honest dialogue and the possibility for collaboration (Noland, 2009).

A Glossary of Terms Related Specifically to Ethics

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.

Values: Qualities or principles that individuals believe to be desirable or worthwhile and that they prize for themselves, for others, and for the world in which they live.

Core Values: Commitments held by a profession that are consciously and knowingly embraced by its practitioners because they make a contribution to society. There is a difference between personal values and the core values of a profession.

Morality: Peoples' views of what is good, right, and proper; their beliefs about their obligations; and their ideas about how they should behave.

Ethics: The study of right and wrong, or duty and obligation, that involves critical reflection on morality and the ability to make choices between values and the examination of the moral dimensions of relationships.

Professional Ethics: The moral commitments of a profession that involve moral reflection that extends and enhances the personal morality practitioners bring to their work, that concern actions of right and wrong in the workplace, and that help individuals resolve moral dilemmas they encounter in their work.

Ethical Responsibilities: Behaviors that one must or must not engage in. Ethical responsibilities are clear-cut and are spelled out in the Code of Ethical Conduct (for example, early childhood educators should never share confidential information about a child or family with a person who has no legitimate need for knowing).

Ethical Dilemma: A moral conflict that involves determining appropriate conduct when an individual faces conflicting professional values and responsibilities (Sciarra, Lynch, Adams, & Dorsey, 2016, p. 358).

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2.6: Supporting Children's Well-being



Using the NAEYC's Code of Ethic as our GPS system on how to support children's well-being.

Code 1.3- Support children's well-being by:

- a. encouraging the development of strong bonds and trusting relationships between and among children, families, educators, and communities.*
- b. recognizing the multiple assets all young children bring to the early learning program as unique individuals and as members of families and communities.*
- c. partnering with families and communities to promote those assets through cultural consistency, connections, and stability between the program and home.*

Spending energy on building strong, healthy, trusting relationships is an important strategy for educators. Children feel more comfortable in the classroom when they feel like they belong and when they believe that their teacher/caregiver and their parent/s have a friendly, and warm relationship (Berns, 2013).

Code 1.3- a. Spending time building relationships and connecting with each child and their families will help in classroom management. As educators, it is important to spend time each day greeting the children and parents when possible. The children are less likely to behave inappropriately if they:

1. Have a connection with the teacher/leader and
2. Believe that they are genuinely cared about

Code 1.3- b. It is important to look for the strengths of each child. This is called “strengths-based education” and is a desired practice. When we find out what a child naturally does well, we can let them lead with and practice this skill. This is contrasted with weakness led education, where educators find out what the child does NOT do well and then requires that the child practice it over and over. The latter can be deflating to their self-esteem and can cause children to dislike these activities.



Code 1.3- c. Building community must be a priority for educators. According to an educational theorist named Margaret Brenfield, to build community, every member must feel valued or that they bring value to the group. In addition, every member needs to have a connection with one or more members of the community. She presented this theory much like a mathematical equation.

Value (Everyone is seen as a valuable member) + Connection = Community (Healthy relationships and a thriving group)

This formula is applicable in many situations, and it completely supports the notion that we must promote community through cultural consistency, connections, and stability between the program and home.

Code 1.4- *Be aware of and apply all program policies regarding our obligations to children consistently, fairly, and without bias.*

We must recognize that it is our responsibility to ensure that our profession and our classrooms are effectively supporting diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices. It is also our responsibility to become familiar with any administrative goals put forth in our places of employment. Be sure to ask administration if there are written policies or an employee handbook. Also, carefully read any state or federal guidelines at the school (For example: mandated reporter instruction, Title 22 regulations, Title 5 regulations, etc.).

Code 1.5- *Use appropriate, and, to the extent possible, valid, unbiased, and reliable assessment systems, which include multiple sources of information, to understand and assess children's learning, development, and program experiences.*

For an assessment to be authentic, it is important to assess children from multiple methods, various sources, and over multiple points in time (Jablon, Dombro, & Dichtelmiller, 2007).

Code 1.6- *Treat child assessment information confidentially and share this information only when there is a legitimate need for it.*

Keep all files, records, assessments, etc. in a locked file cabinet, where the information can be kept confidential. Speak about children's developmental assessments with only with qualified personnel, in a confidential environment.



Code 1.7- *Be familiar with the risk factors for, and signs of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse and physical, emotional, educational, and medical neglect.*

- a. Be familiar with the ways in which reporting suspected abuse and neglect may be unjustly influenced by biases and stereotypes having a disproportionate impact on under-resourced communities, communities of color, and persons with disabilities.*
- b. Follow state laws and community procedures (including reporting, informing, resource connections, community supports, and follow-up) that protect children against abuse and neglect when we have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or serious neglect.*
- c. Assist in taking appropriate action or informing a parent and/or others who can act when another person shares a suspicion that a child is being abused or neglected*

Code 1.8- *Strive to prevent, limit, and eliminate suspensions and expulsion of children in early childhood settings.*

- a. Strive to build individual relationships with each child; make individualized adaptations and transition plans in teaching strategies, learning environments, and curricula; and consult with the family so that each child benefits from the program.*
- b. Collaborate with the child's family and appropriate specialists to determine the additional services needed and/or the placement option(s) most likely to ensure the child's success if after such efforts have been exhausted, the current placement does not meet a child's needs, or the child is seriously jeopardizing the ability of other children to benefit from the program (Aspects of this principle may not apply in programs that have a lawful mandate to provide services to a particular population of children).*

We must make every attempt prevent suspensions and expulsions of children. Policies for discipline and guidance must be written and posted in the Parent Handbook and the Employee Handbook. Developmentally appropriate support must be given for challenging behaviors and Behavior Support Plans should be written for individual children, when needed for particular behavior issues. We should attempt to resolve behavior issues with current teaching strategies, in consultation with the families. When additional support is needed, we should consult with appropriate specialists. If efforts have been exhausted and the current placement does not meet a child's needs, or the child is seriously jeopardizing the ability of other children to benefit from the program, we may have to ask a child to leave the program. It is always disappointing when this must occur.

Code 1.9- *Only utilize and integrate technology, interactive media, and artificial intelligence when it is done intentionally, responsibly, and within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, and particularly to support learning goals established for individual children, strengthen family relationships, and provide equitable access for children with special needs.*

Intentionality is once again an important word. When implementing technology in the classroom, media must be well thought out and connected to the curriculum. It should always be developmentally appropriate. In addition, safety restrictions should be in place to prevent children from seeing inappropriate internet content. Moreover, not all children have access to technology in their homes and giving children opportunity to use technology may provide electronic access equity. Children in poverty often do not have access to technology; and thus, may be at an academic disadvantage when entering elementary school with technologically advantaged peers.



Code 1.10- *involve all those with relevant knowledge (including family members and staff) in decisions concerning a child, making every effort to use families' preferred language while ensuring confidentiality of sensitive information.*

Parents and guardians must have the opportunity to have influence over the decisions in their child's education.

Code 1.11- *Do not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children.*

This also refers to Code 1.1. Do no harm to children.

Code 1.12- *Do not base high-stakes decisions, such as those related to enrollment, retention, or assignment to special education services, on a single assessment, such as a test score or a single observation.*

This refers back to Code 1.5. Remember for an assessment to be authentic, it must be completed from multiple methods, various sources, and over multiple points in time, by qualified professionals (Jablon, Dombro, & Dichtelmiller, 2007).

Code 1.13- *Do not permit or participate in research that could hinder the education, development, or well-being of children.*

Many higher education institutions have Human Subjects Review Committees in place. These committees are involved with overseeing educational research to ensure that the studies are safe. The Human Subject's Review Committee attempts to eliminate, or at least reduce, the possibility that participants will experience harm during the study. In laboratory schools on college campuses, it is common for research projects to be completed. It is imperative that if research is being done, the participants' well-beings must be considered foremost.

Code 1.14- *Do not participate in practices that discriminate against children by denying benefits, giving special advantages, or excluding them from programs or activities based on their abilities and identities (aspects of this principle do not apply in*

programs that have a lawful mandate to provide services to a particular population of children).

Educators must work hard to help all children feel that they are valuable members, with meaningful relationships, in the learning community. The NAEYC Code of Ethics (2024) provides educators with a clear guide on appropriate treatment of children. The next chapter will investigate the NAEYC's guidelines for professional relationships with families.

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2.7: Summary

Educators make daily decisions that reflect their values, beliefs, and commitments. Understanding what drives these decisions begins with examining personal ethics and how they align with professional expectations. In early childhood education, ethical behavior isn't just about knowing right from wrong, it's about intentionally responding to situations in ways that uphold fairness, safety, and respect for all children.

To help guide ethical decision-making, educators look to professional codes that articulate shared values and moral commitments. These standards emphasize the importance of protecting children's well-being, building relationships rooted in trust, honoring family partnerships, and fostering inclusive, nurturing learning environments. When educators are clear about their core values and act with intention, they are better equipped to make decisions that benefit children, families, and communities.

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2.8: Vocabulary

- **Developmentally Appropriate Practice:** *An educational approach that tailors teaching methods and learning experiences to match the age, individual needs, and developmental stage of each child.*
 - **Confidentiality:** The ethical and legal obligation to protect personal or sensitive information from being shared without permission.
 - **Advocacy:** *The act of supporting, defending, or speaking out on behalf of individuals, groups, or causes to promote their rights and well-being.*
 - **Equity:** *The fair and just treatment of individuals by recognizing and addressing their unique needs and circumstances to ensure equal opportunities.*
-

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2.9: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC):

The [NAEYC/Links to an external source](#) serves as the education, research, and training agency for early childhood educators.

- [The Code of Ethical Conduct \(2024\)/Links to an external source:](#)

The NAEYC (2024) Code of Ethical Conduct guides early childhood educators in acting with integrity, respect, and responsibility toward children, families, colleagues, and communities.

- [Developmentally Appropriate Practice \(2020\)/Links to an external source:](#)

The Developmentally Appropriate Practice (2020) position statement promotes teaching that supports each child's growth by being responsive to their age, individuality, and cultural context.

- [Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators \(2019\)/Links to an external source:](#)

The Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (2019) outline the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions educators need to support high-quality early learning and development.

- [Early Learning Program Standards \(2025\)/Links to an external source:](#)

The Early Learning Program Standards (2025) define high-quality early childhood programs that promote safe, nurturing, and engaging learning environments to support children's development and school readiness.

- [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education \(2019\)/Links to an external source:](#)

The NAEYC's *Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education* (2019) calls on educators to recognize and address biases, embrace diversity, and create inclusive, equitable learning environments for all children and families.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: The Code of Ethical Responsibilities to Families

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3.1: Chapter Introduction

3



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 3, students will be able to:

- **SLO 3.1: Identify** the ethical responsibilities early childhood educators have toward families, referencing key elements from the NAEYC Code of Ethics.
- **SLO 3.2: Discuss** strategies for building respectful, reciprocal, and responsive relationships with diverse family structures and cultures.
- **SLO 3.3:** Identify common biases and how they may affect communication and partnerships with families.
- **SLO 3.4: Describe** best practices for communicating assessment data and school policies to families in clear, unbiased, and culturally sensitive ways.

Chapter 3 Short Overview

Chapter 3 investigates how early childhood educators have a profound ethical responsibility to support and collaborate with families, recognizing them as central to children's development and well-being. This includes fostering respectful, reciprocal, and responsive relationships while embracing the diversity in family structures, cultures, and languages. Professionals must commit to clear, two-way communication, uphold confidentiality, and ensure equitable treatment without bias. By honoring the NAEYC Code of Ethics and integrating standards of good practice, educators can build inclusive environments that empower families and protect children. Strategies such as family engagement, transparent policies, use of translators or technology, and proactive conflict resolution contribute to these ethical goals.

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3.2: Ethical Responsibilities to Families



Let's Take a Deeper Look

We recognize that families have the most significant impact on the socialization of young children (Berns, 2013). When “children come to the program environment, they bring their families, cultures, and backgrounds” (Humphries, Rains, Nelson, & Nelson, 2025, p. 253). Although there are rare occurrences of feral children being raised in the wild, young children need some type of adult support to survive. Thus, children often arrive with an entourage of different adult relationships, such as biological parent/s, stepparents, adopted parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, guardians, etc. Today’s typical family comes in many different shapes and sizes, and we must be respectful to all the companions, including pets, in every child’s life.

2. Ethical Responsibilities to Families

Families are the foundation of children’s development. As families and early childhood practitioners typically share a common interest in a child’s well-being, early childhood educators must recognize a primary responsibility to communicate, cooperate, and collaborate with each child’s home, family, and community in ways that enhance that child’s development and well-being.

We shall:

Code 2.1- *Partner with families to ensure that each family is involved in significant decisions affecting their child, and that family input contributes to the planning and implementation of the program and policies.*

It is essential that we make space for parents to participate in our classrooms. This can be challenging because we are often naturally connected to or drawn to some parents or guardians, more than others. It is human nature to not get along with everyone, and it is easy to dislike working with some personality types that rub us the wrong way. Regardless of our feelings, we need to spend time trying to connect with every family member with an open heart and an open mind. Some great strategies for building relationships with families is: inviting them to the classroom; being available to warmly greet them when they visit the classroom; engaging in purposeful communications, such as: emails, newsletters, conferences, social media, & bulletin boards; and hosting family events, such as: potlucks, bingo, parenting classes, game nights, cooking events, raffles, guest speakers, crafts nights, etc.

Code 2.2- *Work to create a respectful environment for and a working relationship with all families.*

An atmosphere of respect is imperative. In early education, we operate with what is called the 3Rs of ECE. These are:

1. Respect
2. Responsiveness and
3. Reciprocal Relationships. (That is technically 4Rs if we count the word “reciprocal,” but actually, reciprocity is embedded in all 3 of the Rs.)



We respect everyone and hopefully they will respect us back. We attempt to understand and respond to the needs of others, while we also want to have our needs understood and responded to. We attempt to build mutual relationships that are caring, bidirectional, and reciprocal. We want to create intimate settings for relationships to develop and using the 3Rs builds healthy attachments as our foundation.

In addition, when creating a responsive relationship, we must also apply the platinum rule. According to Colclough (2024), the Platinum Rule supersedes the Golden Rule. The common Golden Rule is to “do unto others as you would have them to do unto you,” but the Platinum rule is to “do unto others as they **need** you to do unto them.” This is a more sensitive caregiving practice because it requires knowing how someone needs to be treated. By recognizing and honoring each person’s distinct preferences in a variety of settings, the platinum standard promotes improved communication and teamwork.

The Platinum Rule

Do unto others as
they **need** you
to do unto them.”

Code 2.3- *Make every effort to use two-way communication to effectively communicate with all families in their preferred language, calling upon external resources for translation and interpretation, which may include responsible use of artificial intelligence and interactive technology, when programs do not have sufficient internal resources.*

Be sure to communicate with children and their families in common, understandable language. Be sensitive when using difficult vocabulary or educational terms that may not be easily understood. Take the time to explain what the term means and avoid using acronyms that families may not be familiar with. The best practice is to spell out all the initials and make sure that everyone understands what is being discussed. It is easy to use a string of letters that are useful to seasoned educators but might be meaningless to other parties. For example, many schools use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)s as the developmental assessment tool. Instead of saying, “we assess children with the DRDPs,” we could say that “we use an assessment tool to track all the children’s development. This tool is required in the State of California, conducted 2 to 3 times a year, and it is called the Desired Results Developmental Profile. Often educators refer to this as the DRDPs” for short. It is best to explain this information up front because some parents and new teachers may be afraid to ask what something means or they may not feel comfortable stating that they don’t know what something means. A list of common acronyms used might be helpful.

In addition to being aware of and sensitive to our words, we must be ready to use the family’s home language. Translators need to be available whenever possible; however, it is also possible to use AI generated translators. There are devices that can be dictated into, and in real time, the translation is both spoken and written on a screen. Cell phones now have applications that can be

downloaded to translate in many different languages. Regardless of the preferred translation method, all attempts should be made to speak to families in their home language.



Code 2.4- Apply all policies regarding obligations to families consistently, fairly, and without bias.

Bias

We all have biases because we are human. Having bias is just part of who we are. This Lisa Delpit (1995) quote, sums this up beautifully. “We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment” (p. 89).

Our beliefs are a part of who we are as humans. Regardless, we must learn to be fair and operate without prejudice or bias. If we are willing to face our biases, we can change them. If we have denial about having bias, it leaves us stuck and can make our bias more problematic. We cannot work on something if we do not acknowledge its existence. According to Saderman Hall (1999), there are 10 types of common biases, or areas where one can unfairly judge others.

Areas of Bias

1. **Ability:** refers to one's physical, mental, or emotional capabilities.
2. **Age:** relates to the chronological state of being young or old.
3. **Appearance:** describes one's height, frame size (tall, thin, etc.), and any disfiguring conditions, such as: birthmarks, scars, or distinctive markings.
4. **Belief:** constitutes an acceptance or a strongly held conviction. Beliefs can include those in institutionalized religions, animism, spiritualism, and atheism, as well as political convictions. (Animism: the belief that things in nature, for example: trees, mountains, and the sky, have souls or consciousness)
5. **Class:** (socioeconomic status) refers to distinctions based on social and economic values. Among the more common elements that determine a person's class are occupation, educational background, type of housing, clothing, and transportation directing one's lifestyle.
6. **Culture:** is a way of life shared by members of the same group; individuals can belong to different cultures within the family, ethnic group, and society. Culture generally includes language, religious beliefs, celebrations, customs, and ways of thinking that reflect how one acts toward others. Group members feel a sense of security because of the many things they hold in common.
7. **Family composition:** refers to family structure, including the number and relations of its members and their assigned roles.
8. **Gender:** male, female, intersex, transgendered, or non-binary identification. In most societies, there is a basic division between gender attributes assigned to males and females. However, some individuals do not identify with some (or all) of the aspects of gender that are assigned to their biological sex (Paris, Ricardo, & Rymond, 2019). Gender can be seen as fluid and/or on a spectrum.
9. **Race:** identifies groups of people who share a common origin and/or physical characteristics, such as: skin color, hair, facial appearance, and body structure. Many different ethnic groups are included in each race.

10. **Sexuality:** indicates one's sexual preference and orientation. Sexuality can refer to family composition (gay or lesbian couples) and issues with homophobia (Sadlerman Hall, 1999).

Code 2.5- *Provide families with complete, honest, and non-biased information concerning the program's enrollment practices, philosophy, policies, curriculum, assessment system, cultural practices, and personnel qualifications.*

Having a well thought out Parent Handbook that clearly states all administration policies, and being familiar with all policies, is a great strategy for Code 2.4 and Code 2.5.

Code 2.6- *Positively respond to families' requests to the extent that the requests are congruent with program philosophy, standards of good practice, and the resources of the program.*

Whenever possible, it is best practice to respond to families' requests. Know the administration policies where you work and become familiar with the NAEYC Standards of Good Practice. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/professional-standards-competencies> A summary of the NAEYC 6 Standards is in the following section.

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3.3: NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies



Use the following standards to frame what we teach and why. Think of them as competencies that help to inform what early educators need to know to become professionals. They include:

- **Standard 1:** Child Development and Learning in Context- Having knowledge of how children grow and develop and using that to create respectful learning environments.
- **Standard 2:** Family-Teacher Partnerships and Community Connections- Engaging with families to respect their diversity and involve them in their children's school life promotes more satisfactory school experiences for both the child and the family.
- **Standard 3:** Child Observation, Documentation, and Assessment- Using observation and assessment to guide classroom practice is critical in supporting young children and their families.
- **Standard 4:** Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Teaching Practices- The use of positive relationships coupled with strategies that are geared toward the development of the child, allows connection with children and families.
- **Standard 5:** Knowledge, Application, and Integration of Academic Content in the Early Childhood Curriculum- Understanding how to build meaningful curriculum comes from an understanding of how children grow and develop, what is meaningful to them, and what is appropriate for them to explore. Increasing skills of inquiry, specifically, acknowledgment of children's curiosity, guides the planning and implementation of curriculum and environment.
- **Standard 6:** Professionalism as an Early Childhood Educator- Engaging in continuous learning, reflective practice, advocacy for children and their families, upholding ethical and professional standards is the professional responsibility (NAEYC, 2019). Engaging in field experience enhances our connection with high quality programs that follow the previous standards, applying the knowledge learned in your course of study, affords you opportunities to develop your beliefs (philosophy) of how children grow and develop and your role as a future teacher (Stephens, Peterson, & Eyrich, 2020).

Code 2.7- Interpret and communicate assessment information and results fairly, accurately, and in ways that convey the strengths of children as well as acknowledge the limitations of the evaluation instruments. Guarantee that assessment results are accessible to families.

Code 2.8- Explain to families how data about their child will be used, maintain confidentiality, and respect the family's right to privacy, except in the case where a child's welfare is at risk, when it becomes permissible to share confidential information with agencies, organizations and/or individuals who have legal responsibilities to intervene in the child's interest.

Code 2.9- Ensure that parents and legal guardians have access to their child's records and classroom or program setting, except in the case where access is denied by court order or other legal restriction.

Code 2.10- Inform the family of injuries and incidents involving their child, of risks such as exposures to communicable diseases that might result in infection, and of occurrences that might result in emotional stress.

Preparing well thought out administrative policies will make Codes 2.4- through Codes 2.10- much easier to follow and respond to. Using the NAEYC codes as a guideline when creating school policies is recommended.



Code 2.11- *Strive to be familiar with community resources and support services; appropriately refer families as needed; and follow up to ensure that services have been provided appropriately and received.*

Many communities create a family resource list, which provides information on resources, such as: utility assistance, food pantries, housing aide, parenting classes, WIC, Government assistance, family advocacy agencies, children's events, trauma help, hotlines, counseling, etc. Reach out and find what lists are currently available in your community. Keep this list up to date, since resources can change rapidly, depending on funding sources. It is wise to create your own community resource list and be sure to share it widely.

Code 2.12- *Work proactively in cases where family members and/ or staff are in conflict with one another and to help all parties involved express their particular needs and perspectives to make informed decisions and to support family members in doing the same.*

Working proactively with family members and staff during conflict is a delicate issue. It is best to have clear policies about who deals with conflicts and misunderstandings, and how the process is implemented. Having the right person to sit down with the family and staff is essential. The mediation person (mediator) should have knowledge in appropriate conflict resolution techniques, bring a calming presence to the situation, and needs to be trusted and respected by all parties involved. It is always best to follow the administration's chain of command before dealing with disputes and conflict because situations can be made worse if the wrong tactic is used or the wrong person is involved. It is best to be prepared in advance of meeting, make sure that it happens at a time that mutually works for all parties, and the meeting should occur in a confidential and neutral environment. A poorly timed, or last-minute meeting, can feel like an attack, especially after a hard workday.



Communication Styles

It is also helpful to be aware of different types of communication styles because effective communication with teachers, families, and community representatives is at the heart of leadership in ECE. Being attuned to the nuances of people's communication styles, the ways messages are delivered and received, enhances our ability to communicate clearly and interpret others accurately. There are four communication styles (Russo, 1995, as cited in Bloom, 2005):

- **Direct:** Individuals with this style tell it like it is. They are decisive, take-charge, and in control, often demonstrating prominent leadership skills. However, they may also be perceived as strong-willed, overbearing, or lacking empathy.

- **Spirited:** These communicators are enthusiastic, friendly, and optimistic. They enjoy being around others and often gravitate toward the spotlight. They are skilled at building alliances, motivating people, and generating excitement. They prefer a fast pace and tend to be decisive, though they may not always be the best listeners.
- **Considerate:** Considerate communicators value warm, personal relationships. They are supportive and good listeners. They may be reluctant to embrace change, preferring the comfort of familiar routines. In an effort to avoid conflict, they may keep their opinions to themselves or give in too easily.
- **Systematic:** This style values accuracy and objectivity. Systematic communicators are analytical, persistent, orderly, and highly organized. However, they may sometimes be viewed as impersonal or emotionally detached.

Code 2.13- *Not involve children in research projects without fully informing parents or legal guardians, and providing them with the opportunity to give or withhold consent without penalty.*

Parents must give written consent for all research and/or assessments, and families have the right to withdraw from participating in the research at any time, without any reason, and with no penalty. “Research should, as much as possible, be based on participants’ freely volunteered informed consent. For minors, this also requires consent from their legal guardians. This implies a responsibility to explain fully and meaningfully to both the child and their guardians what the research is about and how it will be disseminated. Participants and their legal guardians should be aware of the research purpose and procedures, their right to refuse to participate; the extent to which confidentiality will be maintained; the potential uses to which the data might be put; the foreseeable risks and expected benefits; and that participants have the right to discontinue at any time” (Paris, Ricardo, Rymond, 2019, p. 33).

Code 2.14- *Not use our relationship with a family for private advantage or personal gain or enter into relationships with family members that might impair our judgement or have a negative impact on children.*

Often families will choose a center because of the friendship/s that they have with staff. This can be beneficial; however, it can also be problematic if parents enter a program with pre-existing relationships and have expectations of special favors. It is important that our policy is clear that although we enjoy our personal friendships, in the professional setting, we do not give anyone any private advantages.

Code 2.15- *Not honor any request from a family that puts a child in a situation that, in the context of professional expertise, knowledge, and judgement, would create physical or emotional harm. In such instances, we shall communicate with the family the reason(s) why the request was not honored and work toward an alternative solution.*

This code can be tricky to navigate. To know if a family’s request might create harm, requires knowledge and understanding in ECE. According to WestEd (Mangione, 1990), building a strong foundation in ECE requires these 4 things:

1. To study and know child development and be familiar with developmental stages, so that we can readily identify typical and atypical development.
2. To become sensitive and responsive to each individual child’s needs. Every child has unique temperamental traits, developmental growth, and individual characteristics. What is appropriate for one child, may not be developmentally appropriate for another child. Getting to know the unique characteristics of every child is at the heart of sensitive and responsive care.
3. To know the families of the children in our care and talk with them about their child rearing practices, culture, and the community that the family lives in. Misunderstanding a cultural practice can cause distress for everyone and this can be avoided by building relationships and becoming familiar with their family’s practices.
4. To develop self-awareness and become reflective educators, We need to know our emotional hot spots and blind spots. We need to know what makes us “tick” and know what “ticks us off.” This can be accomplished by paying attention to how we are feeling and then stepping back from the situation and thinking about our words and actions. We want to try to view our actions from a 3rd party perspective. It helps to maintain our professional attitudes if we practice self-reflection and know our tendencies and limitations.

With these 4 practices in place, it is easier to recognize what appropriate practice versus inappropriate practice looks like. Disagreeing with a family and not being able to “honor their request,” can bring conflict, but it can also be a powerful teachable moment, if we are able to explain our pedagogical practices, without judgement, and work toward an alternative solution.

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3.4: Summary

Strong relationships with families are central to high-quality early childhood education. Educators are expected to engage with families in ways that are respectful, responsive, and rooted in trust. Communication must be clear, honest, and culturally sensitive, with an emphasis on mutual understanding and shared decision-making. Family partnerships thrive when educators embrace diverse cultures, family structures, and caregiving practices.

Awareness of personal bias, inclusive language, and nonjudgmental communication helps educators navigate differences and avoid misunderstandings. Ethical practices include protecting family privacy, ensuring access to relevant program information, and using assessment data in ways that reflect children's strengths. By working collaboratively and honoring each family's role in a child's development, educators help build safe, equitable, and supportive environments for all children to grow and thrive.

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3.5: Vocabulary

- **Pedagogy:** *The art and science of teaching, including the methods and strategies used to facilitate learning.*
 - **Cultural Competence:** *The ability to understand, respect, and effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and interact effectively with people of different cultures.*
 - **Reciprocal Relationships:** *Mutually beneficial interactions where all parties actively give and receive support, fostering trust and collaboration.*
 - **Family Engagement:** *The active collaboration between families and educators to support and enhance children's learning and development. partnership with families in the educational process.*
-

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3.6: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- The [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)/Links to an external site:](#)

Since 1926, NAEYC has led the way toward a vision of excellence in early childhood education. This association is committed to bringing high-quality early education and care to all young children.

- [Zero to Three/Links to an external site:](#)

Zero to Three promotes the healthy development of our nation's infants and toddlers by supporting and strengthening families, communities, and those who work on their behalf.

- [Center for Children and Families \(CC&F\)-Educational Development Center, Inc./Links to an external site:](#)

The CC&F is a research and training and technical assistance center. CC&F has worked closely with child care agencies, Head Start programs, schools, state agencies, and national organizations to produce innovative programs and materials.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues and Employers

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4.1: Chapter Introduction

4



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 4, students will be able to:

- **SLO 4.1: Discuss** ethical responsibilities early childhood educators have toward colleagues and employers, including confidentiality, fairness, and respect for diversity.
- **SLO 4.2: Identify the elements of** appreciative inquiry and how it supports a strengths-based, respectful work environment.
- **SLO 4.3: Identify** strategies for professional conflict resolution.
- **SLO 4.4: Discuss** the ethical implications of workplace gossip and discrimination, and then formulate appropriate professional responses.

Chapter 4 Short Overview

Chapter 4 explores the ethical responsibilities to colleagues and employers, which are essential for maintaining a supportive, professional, and inclusive work environment in early childhood education. Educators are expected to model respect, confidentiality, cultural competence, and non-discriminatory behavior while fostering collegial relationships built on mutual trust. Concepts such as strengths-based approaches like appreciative inquiry and respectful conflict resolution contribute to positive staff dynamics and classroom climate (Jones, 1993). Educators must also understand and adhere to program policies, laws, and safety regulations while addressing concerns constructively and through appropriate channels. These responsibilities promote both professional integrity and the well-being of children and families.

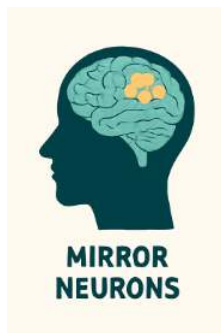
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4.2: Ethical Responsibilities to Responsibilities to Colleagues



Let's Take a Deeper Look

It is important for educators to model kind, caring, respectful behaviors with other staff members and employees. Children carefully watch how the adults interact with each other and the mood of the classroom is directly affected by our attitudes, either positive or negative. The new concept of mirror neurons is interesting. These are neurons (brain cells) that fire both when a person does an action, and also when a person observes an action. “Picking up on vibes” was once thought to be a silly notion; however, there is controversial, but interesting research that investigates this. How we treat people, has a big impact on the classroom attitudes and environment.



3. Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues and Employers

A caring, cooperative workplace respects human dignity, promotes professional satisfaction, and supports and sustains positive relationships. Based upon our core values, our primary responsibilities to colleagues, including staff and volunteers, and employers are to establish and maintain inclusive environments and respectful relationships that support meaningful work as well as each individual's physical and mental well-being.

A- RESPONSIBILITIES TO COLLEAGUES

We shall:

Code 3A.1- *Recognize and honor the perspectives, strengths, and contributions of our colleagues to the program.*

A “strengths-based approach” works well with children, but also a strengths-based approach works well with adults. When used with adults, it is often called “appreciative inquiry,” which is a recent approach to change the focus of supervision and employee management. This approach omits the focus on a person's weaknesses or negative traits and instead focuses on a person's positive attributes (Nolan, 2007). It is a radically affirmative approach, intended to change judgmental methods of supervision and management. It completely disregards the problem-based focus on production, or the lack of accomplishment or achievement, and instead leads with a person strengths. Appreciative inquiry involves the cooperative search for what is best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It is both “...the art and science of asking questions to strengthen a system's capacity to improve positive potential... intervention gives way to imagination and innovation, instead of negativism, criticism, and circular thinking” (Nolan, pp. 83-84). When allowed to practice our strengths, we tend to enjoy what we are doing, and thus we are more likely to excel at our tasks.

Code 3A.2- *Honor confidentiality related to job performance, and respect a right to privacy regarding personal and personnel issues.*

Confidentiality Defined (WestEd, n.d., p. II-53)

Confidentiality means keeping privacy or confidence. It involves respecting the privacy of information and keeping secret information that is not meant for public disclosure. This often entails an obligation to protect sensitive or private information from unauthorized disclosure, ensuring it is only shared with individuals who have the right to access it. Keeping information under confidence implies:

- A faith or belief that one will act in a right, proper or effective way
- There is a relationship of trust or intimacy
- There is a reliance on another's discretion
- There is both an ethical obligation and a legal obligation



Confidentiality Policy Guidelines (WestEd, n.d., p. II-55)

When reinforcing confidential information practices, teach all employees confidentiality policies, especially new employees.

- Have a confidentiality policy
- Discuss the policy at the top and end of every staff meeting.
- Revisit the policy regularly.
- Create a signed agreement of confidentiality for all employees.
- Keep all confidential information in a locked file cabinet (Don't leave files on the desk).
- Files stay in the office and don't go home.

Code 3A.3- *Exercise care by acknowledging and addressing personal biases in expressing views regarding personal attributes or professional conduct.*

As discussed earlier, we all have biases, but we can learn “cultural competency,” which is the ability to be aware of cultural sensitivity, know how to avoid being culturally repressive, and put this knowledge into practice. We can practice culturally responsive behavior, which acknowledges differences with respect, and where there is a desire to gain understanding. We can maintain cultural understanding and be culturally relevant, which means our educational routines, teaching strategies, and curriculum match (or relate to) the families’ home culture. This is the foundation of high-quality early education. We do not want to be culturally repressive, which is behavior that shows no recognition of the validity of a different belief or practice, and where there is no desire to discuss the difference.

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4.3: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion- Emerging Topics in Education

Diversity

We want to encourage **diversity**, which means we have an understanding that each individual is unique, and recognize our individual differences (Esquivel, Elam, Paris, & Tafoya, 2020). These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious and spiritual beliefs, political beliefs, class, color, disability, immigrant status, national origin, or other ideologies. Diversity “is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual” (Esquivel et al., p. 14).

Equity

Equity refers to the principle of *fairness*. While it is often used interchangeably with the related principle of *equality*, equity encompasses a wide variety of educational models, programs, and strategies that may be considered fair, but not necessarily equal. In other words, equity means making sure every student has the support they need to be successful (Esquivel et al., 2020, p. 16). Equity ensures parity in measures of success, access, retention, transfer, degree and certificate completion for all.

This image in figure 3.1 was created to show that equity isn’t the same as equality. In reality, this isn’t quite that simple. Typically what is creates inequity is systemic.

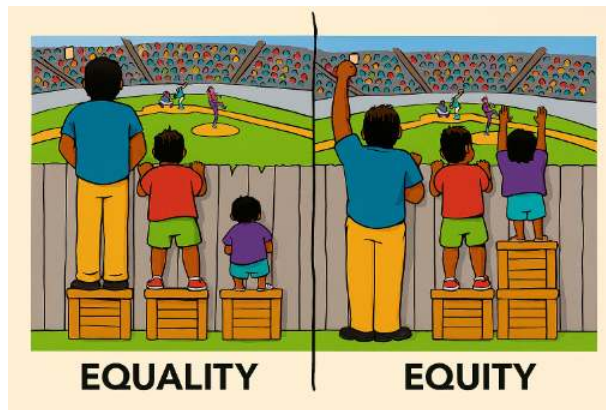


Figure 3.1: The equality versus equity image was created by AI through ChatGPT.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children has a 24-page position statement on advancing equity in early childhood education. Here are some excerpts and summaries of their recommendations (NAEYC, 2019).

It is important for all those in early childhood education to:

1. Build their awareness and understanding of their own culture, personal beliefs, values, and biases.
2. Recognize the power and benefits of diversity and inclusivity.
3. Take responsibility for biased actions, even those that are unintentional, and actively work to repair the harm done.
4. Acknowledge and seek to understand structural inequities and their impact.
5. View a commitment to cultural responsiveness as an ongoing process.
6. Recognize that much of the theory and research in ECE is largely based on the normative perspective of White, middle-class children with disabilities in English- language schools (Esquivel et al., 2020, p. 12).

Inclusion

Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every person and their family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for people with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership,

positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality programs and services are:

- Access: providing access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments
- Participation: even if environments and programs are designed to facilitate access, some will need additional individualized accommodations and supports to participate fully
- Supports: an infrastructure of systems- level supports must be afforded to those providing inclusive services to children and families (Esquivel et al., 2020, pp. 18-19).

Code 3A.4- *Express concerns regarding colleagues' behavior, competence, fairness, ethics, or accuracy in a way that shows respect for personal dignity and diversity.*

- a. As long as children's well-being is not at risk, we shall attempt to resolve the matter collegially and in a confidential manner.*
- b. If children are at risk or the situation does not improve after it has been brought to the colleague's attention, we shall report the colleague's unethical or incompetent behavior through official channels and/or to an appropriate authority.*

When We Have Concerns

People in education, often feel that they must always be “nice,” and have only positive feelings towards others, especially the families we serve. We may feel guilty about any negative feelings we may have toward parents. We may form strong attachments with the children in our care and have difficulty or feel concerns when parents are not handling situations the way we think it should be handle. It can be difficult to be supportive of parents when we have feelings of frustration, anger, or worry about the child's well-being. These feelings need to be acknowledged and dealt with.



When we have concerns about parents' behaviors, it is helpful to follow the PITC “Talking Points for Essential Connections: Acknowledge, Ask, & Adapt” (Mangione, 1995).

1. Acknowledge: Reflect and listen

- How do you recognize the need for communication with the other person? How does your attitude convey sincere interest and response? What can you say to the other person to communicate an awareness that there is a problem you need to jointly solve?
- Think about how you feel about this issue and get clarity on the reasons behind your feelings.
- Communicate awareness of the issue with the family.
- Convey sincere interest and responsiveness.
- Listen carefully to the other person's concern.
- If you bring up the concern, do it respectfully with an attitude of wanting to understand the issue.
- Seek the other's point of view without being critical, arguing, disagreeing or trying to solve the problem.
- Involve the family in seeking a joint solution

2. Ask:

- How can you get information that will help you understand more precisely the other person's point of view?
- Learn About the Parent's Point of View.
- Gather data and clarify.
- Try to get to the real sources for conflict or misunderstanding for the other person or for you.
- There is more than one way to ask something.
- It may be appropriate to ask directly and then follow with more questions to clarify. There may be other ways you can find out through observations or other means rather than asking direct questions, which sometimes are culturally

inappropriate.

- Pay attention to verbal and non-verbal responses
- Restate what you think the parent is saying (active listening)

3. Adapt:

- How do you work with others to define the issues and boundaries of the problem? Do you seek “common ground” as the basis for negotiation? Do you open up a negotiation with the other person about what to do?
- Once the issues have been defined, seek out the common ground by stating your areas of greatest importance to each other.
- Listen carefully for areas of common agreement.
- Negotiate around areas of important agreements and boundaries.
- Come to a resolution that addresses the real/major issues. Sometimes we have to agree to disagree.
- Seek win-win solutions (Mangione, 1995, pp. 42-44).

Too often we can get stuck in our professional stance and hide behind our clipboard, our policies, or our regulations. We need to stop this practice of hiding and become more adaptive and responsive and willing to make compromises.

When dealing with conflict, sometimes things can get heated and one’s ability to tolerate anger is challenged. How do you tolerate anger?

- Do you freeze and shut down?
- Does it trigger old responses like when you were a child growing up?
- Do you revert back to old patterns of behavior without much thought?
- Do you become aggressive like the other person?
- Do you tend to become teary?
- Do you use humor to diffuse the situation?

As the professional you become the holder of the emotions. It is important for you to remain calm and become reflective instead of reactive. So, it is important to know how you react to anger. Again, it is good to know what makes you tick and what ticks you off. By understanding your own tendencies, you will be able to make a better plan of action in advance. If you tend to get angry, you can practice self-regulation coping skills such as: breathing techniques, counting to 10, internal self-talk. If you tend to freeze, you can practice what you are going to say in advance or make notes. Typically, coping techniques will help you control your emotions during a confrontation situation. Figure out which techniques work best for you.

Code 3A.5- *Not participate in practices that discriminate against a colleague.*

Our goal is not to discriminate against anyone, ever.

Code 3A.6- *Not participate in practices that diminish our colleagues’ reputations or impair their effectiveness in working with children and families.*

Gossip

Gossip is hurtful and unprofessional and can be seen as an act of aggression. We must not speak ill of our colleagues or employers. We recognize that it can feel satisfying in the moment to “speak our truth” about someone and let our tongue wag, but it will most likely backfire in the long run. Bad news and gossip can travel quickly. We must avoid speaking in ways that diminish our colleagues, and we must avoid listening to gossip. If no one listens, gossip cannot spread. We can politely remind the person to go directly and speak to the person they are having a conflict with, or we can even offer to accompany them for this conversation. It is important to never speak behind a person’s back, but to go directly to a person, if you feel there has



been some offense. There are three phases or levels of attempt for resolution: one-on-one, with a mediator, and involving the governing body.

1. First, try to handle conflict **directly** (one-on-one), in private, and at a mutually convenient time. Sometimes we can clear up a situation just by asking for clarification, cleaning up a miscommunication, or sharing our feelings. It is wonderful when we can resolve an issue quickly and directly, but if this one-on-one approach does not work, use a mediator to help with the conflict.
2. Attempt to resolve the dispute with a **mediator** with conflict resolution techniques (See description below). Use a mediator that both party's respect. Often a good leader can help come up with solutions that will work for both parties and/or can cause both parties to see each other's point of view. Always follow administrative policies and any established chain of command. Work for a win-win solution. If the mediator approach with is not successful, go to the governing body.
3. Go to the Board of Directors, the owner, or the **governing group** (Board of Directors, School board, Human Resources, the owners, overseeing government agencies licensing or Child Welfare Services, etc.) that oversees the school policies and ask for a meeting in the rare instance a mediator cannot resolve the conflict. If there is potential for any legal issues, you may need to seek legal counsel.



A Note about Conflict Resolution

When using conflict mediation, choose one or two agreed upon people, who can be impartial, has a calming presence, knows the school's administrative policies, communicates clearly, is able to compromise, has the ability to see how different aspects of a dispute are related, and has the ability to consider their own perspective as well as that of another person (can see multiple points of view). It is also helpful to use someone who has authority and access to resources to help with any needed compromises or solutions. At first, we may feel uncomfortable with the process of conflict mediation and need support to proceed all the way to a negotiated settlement, but with practice, we become increasingly capable of and more comfortable with solving conflict problems.

Mediation Process and Conflict Resolution

Studies show that people who participate in conflict mediation on a regular basis improve in their ability to engage in that process and become better able to resolve conflicts on their own. The following is a 7-step process (Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, Rupiper, & Gregory, 2015. pp. 381-382).

7-Step Mediation Process

- Step 1: Initiate Mediation
- Step 2: Clarify
- Step 3: Sum up
- Step 4: Generate Solutions.
- Step 5: Agree on a solution.
- Step 6: Set Action Items
- Step 7: Follow through

Step 1. Initiate Mediation: Once a conflict arises, connect with both parties and schedule a mutually agreed on time to meet. Use a mediator that is an impartial observer who is respected by everyone. (Keep in mind that it's not the mediator's job to come in and automatically solve the problem. It is best if the solutions come directly from the involved parties.

Step 2. Clarify: Clarify perspectives by asking, "What happened?" Give both sides a chance to tell their version of the events/issue. It is best to start with the party that is most upset or feels they have been wronged the most.

Step 3. Sum Up: Reflectively listen, which means to summarize and repeat back what was said to make sure everyone was understood. Avoid using language with personal attacks and encourage the use of "I statements." I feel _____ (fill in the blank), when this happens _____ (fill in the blank), because _____ (fill in the blank).

Sometimes a labeled feeling is all we need to be heard and let something go.

Step 4. Generate Solutions: This is good time to give guidance and remind the parties of any policies that might apply and ask for solutions and write them down. Hopefully they will come up with solutions that work for both parties, if not, well-timed suggestions from the mediator can facilitate this.

Step 5. Agree: Agreeing on a solution is sometimes easier said than done, but remember that the solution can also be established as a trial run. Some solutions can be outright rejected, but sometimes simply repeating a potential solution for the second time, can make it more agreeable. Think about the intended outcomes for all potential solutions, then write things down, cross things off when rejected, and reiterate what people have agreed upon. The possibilities need to be narrowed down to a workable solution. Once there is an agreed-on solution, write it out and make sure that have both parties are amenable. This can be verbally agreed upon or signatures might be required, including the mediator. The latter is a more formal process.

Step 6. Set Action Items: Reinforce the problem-solving process by listing action items. List the specific actions or items that needs to occur and set them in the order of priority. Revisions can be made to fine tune the solution at any point. Make sure everyone understands how to proceed going forward.

Step 7. Follow Through: Set a date and time to meet again and reflect on how the solution is working for everyone. An established timeline helps to keep the process moving forward. Follow-through at this point is crucial or the whole process can fall apart and conflict will return.



When Parents and Staff Disagree

According to Brault and Gonzalez-Mena (2007), parents and staff sometimes hold very strong views about how children are supposed to be cared for. These deep-seated ideas are entrenched in each of us and remain mostly subconscious until challenged by a conflicting view. There are four outcomes to cultural and individual conflicts.

1. Resolution through mutual understanding & negotiation
 - Both parties see the other's perspective and give a little or a lot
 - These conflicts result in a "win-win" negotiation with movement from both sides
2. Resolution through teacher education

- Educator sees the family's perspective
 - Educator changes
3. Resolution through family education
- Family sees the educator's perspective
 - Family changes
4. No resolution
- Agree to disagree and learn to cope respectfully
 - Neither party changes and the conflict continues

B- RESPONSIBILITIES TO EMPLOYERS

We shall:

Code 3B.1- *Follow all program policies. When we do not agree with program policies, we shall attempt to effect change through constructive action.*

Disagreements can happen at anytime, but if there is a problem with program policies, this fundamental issue needs to be addressed. The steps put forth above for conflict resolution and mediation can be practiced here too. However, if an agreement is not reached, this may result in the termination of the employee or a resignation and job change. Sometimes parties disagree on how to operate, and it can be best to part ways. Hopefully, if this occurs, this can happen without hard feelings and backlash.

Code 3B.2- *Inform the program's administration or, when necessary, other appropriate authorities, when we have a concern about circumstances or conditions that impact the quality of education and care within the program.*

With time, education, and experience we may have concerns about the educational environment or conditions. Following the previously discussed steps for what to do when we have concerns will be helpful when addressing concerns with your employer. If an agreement is not reached, this may result in the termination of the employee or a job change. When there are concerns about the safety and well-being of the children, there may also be a need to notify appropriate authorities, such as licensing, Child Welfare Services, law enforcement agencies, etc.

Code 3B.3- *Speak or act on behalf of an organization only when authorized by that organization; and take care to acknowledge when we are speaking for the organization and when we are expressing a personal judgement.*

It is important to follow the agency's chain of command. Be sure to know who is authorized to speak on behalf of the agency or employer. We must also be aware that our personal beliefs can have an impact on the agency and/or our coworkers. Although we have freedom of speech, it is wise to be sensitive when expressing (stating, writing, texting, or posting) controversial opinions. It is best to be kind and think about the intended reactions to our opinions. People have been fired for expressing hurtful comments on social media, it is best to avoid this dilemma and choose our words carefully.

Code 3B.4- *Be familiar with laws and regulations that serve to protect the health and safety of children in our programs and be vigilant in ensuring that these laws and regulations are followed.*

Keep up to date on licensing regulations, health regulations, safety regulations, and current laws for mandated reporters. (A mandated reporter is a person who is legally required to report suspected or known abuse or neglect. This obligation applies to professionals who work with and have regular contact with children. Typically, mandated reports include teachers, healthcare workers, counselors, social workers, and clergy.)

Code 3B.5- *Not participate in practices that are in violation of laws and regulations designed to protect the health and safety of children in our programs, and in the case that we become aware of such violations, we shall take appropriate action consistent with this Code.*

We must NEVER participate in practices that break the law and/or regulations. If we become aware of violations, and there are concerns about the safety and well-being of the children, we must notify appropriate authorities, such as: State Licensing, Child Protection Services, or local law enforcement agencies.

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4.4: Summary

Positive workplace culture in early childhood education depends on trust, respect, and intentional communication. Educators are expected to contribute to professional environments where diversity is honored, confidentiality is upheld, and colleagues are treated with fairness and dignity. Interactions with coworkers and supervisors shape the tone and integrity of a program's daily operations.

Appreciative inquiry and strengths-based approaches promote collaboration and professional growth, especially when navigating challenges. Strategies for conflict resolution and responses to gossip or discrimination help educators maintain ethical boundaries and foster accountability. With awareness and reflection, professionals create workplaces where all voices are respected and shared responsibility is valued.

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4.5: Vocabulary

- **Constructive feedback:** *Thoughtful, helpful, and specific information given to guide improvement and encourage positive growth.*
 - **Collaboration:** *The process of working together with others to achieve a common goal or complete a shared task.*
 - **Conflict Resolution:** *The process of finding peaceful solutions to disagreements or disputes through communication and negotiation.*
 - **Integrity:** *The quality of being honest and consistently adhering to strong moral and ethical principles.*
-

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4.6: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- [The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment \(CSCCE\)/Links to an external source:](#)

Offers research and policy resources on improving ECE workplace conditions, equity, professional development, and leadership. Especially useful for topics like respectful supervision, employer responsibilities, and strengthening the profession.

- [NAEYC – Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement/Links to an external source:](#)

Addresses bias, inclusion, and diversity among colleagues and reflects on equity and cultural competence in the workplace.

- [Early Childhood Investigations Webinars/Links to an external source:](#)

Features free webinars by ECE leaders on staff development, conflict resolution, workplace culture, and more. Excellent supplemental material for real-world guidance.

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Finished Chapter 4

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Ethical Responsibilities to Community, Society, Personnel, and Regulatory Agencies

- 5.1: Chapter Introduction
- 5.2: Ethical Responsibilities to Community and Society
- 5.3: Ethical Responsibilities to Personnel
- 5.4: Ethical Responsibilities to Sponsoring Agencies and Governing Bodies
- 5.5: Summary
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5.1: Chapter Introduction

5



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 5, students will be able to:

- **SLO 5.1:** Identify the ethical responsibilities early childhood educators have to their communities and society, including the importance of advocacy and honest communication.
- **SLO 5.2:** Discuss the role of administrators in creating equitable and supportive work environments, including practices that promote confidentiality, fair evaluation, and ongoing professional development.
- **SLO 5.3:** Identify strategies for addressing and resolving interpersonal and professional conflict within an early childhood program.
- **SLO 5.4:** **Identify** effective communication techniques to support mutual understanding.

Chapter 5 Short Overview

Chapter 5 highlights the ethical responsibilities that early childhood educators and administrators have toward their communities, society, and professional colleagues. It emphasizes that educators play a critical role in fostering justice, equity, and compassion both within early learning environments and in the broader social context. The chapter also outlines the administrator's role in maintaining ethical standards in employment practices, personnel development, and program accountability. By upholding these responsibilities, educators contribute to safe, inclusive, and high-quality educational environments for young children.

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5.2: Ethical Responsibilities to Community and Society



Let's Take a Deeper Look

We recognize the importance of our ethical responsibilities to our communities and society which are grounded in the belief that educators play a vital role not only in shaping individual children but also in building a more just, equitable, and compassionate society (Child Care Information Exchange, 2008).



4. Ethical Responsibilities to Community and Society

Early childhood education programs operate within the context of their immediate community made up of families and other institutions concerned with children's well-being. Our responsibilities to the community are to provide programs that meet the diverse needs of families, to cooperate with agencies and professions that share the responsibility for children, to assist families in gaining access to those agencies and allied professionals, and to assist in the development and resourcing of community programs that are needed but not currently available.

As individuals, we acknowledge our responsibility to provide the best possible programs of education and care for children and to conduct ourselves with honesty and integrity.

Because of our specialized expertise in early childhood development and education and because the larger society shares responsibility for the welfare and protection of young children, we acknowledge a collective obligation to advocate for children within early childhood programs and in the larger community and to serve as a voice alongside young children and families.

We shall:

Code 4.1- *Communicate openly and truthfully about the nature and extent of services that we provide and be objective and accurate in reporting the knowledge upon which we base our program practices to those served, the public, and with relevant oversight bodies.*

In every agency's Parent Handbook, there should be clear statements with details of the services provided: hours, days of the week, holidays, late policy, medical policies, emergency care policies, food policies, cubby space policies, napping gear policies, diaper and wipes policies, toilet training policies, extra clothes policies, etc. In addition, the handbook should have a page on the staff and their experience, education, and any special trainings for reassuring parents that their child/children are with well qualified staff. Some of this information should be posted on a wall in the office as a potential way to inform potential applicants. Also, any flyers or advertisement available to the public should accurately portray the services provided.



Code 4.2- *Rely on our professional perspectives, relevant experience, knowledge of child development, and standards of practice to provide informed opinions on issues, practices, products, or programs.*

In WestEd's Program for Infant Toddler Care (PITC), four things are needed to build a strong foundation in ECE, previously discussed in chapter 3 (Mangione, 1990).

1. Study/know child development
2. Become sensitive and responsive to children's needs
3. Get to know the families and the culture of the community
4. Be a reflective educator (develop self-awareness)

Code 4.3- *Ensure that any research we conduct appropriately reflects the diversity of the population upon whom its results may have future impact.*

Research participants should be representative of the population and/or community. Without this balanced ratio, research can be come biased and is not an accurate reflection of the community.

Code 4.4- *Exercise caution particularly when recommending commercial products or services.*

Many families trust and look up to educators; thus, their opinions matter. What is said by educators, what is done by educators, and who is endorsed by educators, can be highly influential. Recommendations can sway opinions. What if someone or a service is recommended and then a family has a problem with the services? We should be thoughtful and cautious when making recommendations and/or endorsements.

Code 4.5- *Inform ourselves about the systems, policies, and practices that contribute to inequitable and unethical outcomes for children, and work to change them.*

It is our responsibility to be aware of issues that are inequitable and unethical. As educators, we are child advocates, and it is our responsibility to advocate for the rights of the children. Advocacy in early childhood education is something that is practiced in everyday work, whether it's supporting children, communicating with families, or championing resources within the community. Child advocates help to create a stronger, more supportive environment for young learners (NAEYC, 2025).

Code 4.6- *Hire or recommend for employment persons whose competence, qualifications, and character make them well-suited for the position.*

We must hire the candidate who is most qualified and best suited for the position and that we do not give anyone private hiring advantages.

Code 4.7- *Make a case-by-case determination of whether to report problems and disclose program identities to appropriate authorities or the public. These determinations must be based on a fair assessment of the evidence which concludes that a program or agency that enacts policies or provides services intended to protect children's health and safety or ensure children's well-being, is requiring employees to violate this Code or failing to meet its obligations. If a fair assessment determines that a public report is not necessary, this decision should not put children at risk.*

One of the most difficult parts of being an educator is reporting suspected abuse, neglect, or inappropriate treatment to appropriate authorities or public agencies. We may feel nervous and question whether the situation is reportable or not and second guess

ourselves. This can cause serious internal conflict because confrontation can be extremely uncomfortable. However, we are not required to “prove” anything; we are only required to report our suspicions. An example of this is when reporting to Child Welfare Services (CWS), previously called Child Protective Services (CPS), we are only required to supply facts, as we understand them, and then let CWS/CPS do the investigation. We are not investigators, but if a school has policies or provides services that is requiring employees to violate the law and/or fails to meet the health, safety, and well-being obligations for children, we must report our concerns to local law authorities, Child Welfare Services, State Licensing, etc.

Code 4.8- *Not mislead families or the public by offering services that we do not have the competence, qualifications, or resources to provide.* In education, it is great to lead with strengths, but we must be honest about what we can and cannot do. It is better to be clear that you don’t know something or that you are unable to provide services, than it is to promise services that we are not capable of providing. Be clear and honest about what services are provided and never promise parents and/or staff services that cannot be performed.

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5.3: Ethical Responsibilities to Personnel

ADMIN 1: ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO PERSONNEL

Ethical responsibilities to personnel are an essential part of professional ECE practice. These responsibilities ensure a respectful, supportive, and fair working environment that promotes the well-being of both educators and children.

We shall:

Code Admin 1.1- *Provide staff members with safe and supportive working conditions, environments, and facilities that respect human dignity and diversity, honor confidences, value well-being, encourage professional growth, and facilitate ethical decision-making.*

Professional growth for ECE professionals is a powerful tool to facilitate positive change in the learning environment. Administration should provide regular opportunities for education through workshops, classes, reading material, podcasts, webinars, access to college courses, etc. This contributes to the quality of performance by presenting more challenges and responsibilities, which produces a sense of achievement and satisfaction (Sciarra et al., 2016; Child Care Information Exchange, 2003).

In addition, providing employee confidentiality is the law. Correction or critical feedback must be done confidentially. It is best to do this with sensitivity and in an enclosed office space.

Code Admin 1.2- *Make every effort to seek out and provide resources that ensure that all children, including those with special needs, can benefit from the program.*

It is imperative that administration provide adequate resources for children with different abilities, disabilities, and/or special needs. A big part of being child advocates is providing appropriate resources and when those resources are not met, we must know who to communicate with to get the child's needs met. It is a good idea to ask administration for written policies and to know the chain of command in advance. When addressing concerns with administration, directly state the issue, be careful not to blame anyone, identify several potential solutions in advance, keep the tone positive, and seek to actively resolve the issue. What is routinely called a problem, may actually reflect an unmet need.

Code Admin 1.3- *Support and encourage personnel in their efforts to implement strengths-based programming that enhances children's positive and joyful learning and development.*

Try to help educators find their "niche." Make space for faculty, staff, and students to enjoy what they are doing, because, as previously stated, when people are allowed to practice their strengths, they are more likely to enjoy what they are doing and excel at their work.



Bunny Trail Footnote 2: Increasingly the term "special needs" is being removed from the language of Early Childhood Education. Originally, ECE theorists discussed that all young children have special needs and so this term applies to every child. More precise language can describe the child rather than emphasize the disability. Moreover, the term "disability" implies that an individual is unable to do something, "dis-abled", and might be offensive. The term "differently abled" is a possible replacement term and is in keeping with the spirit of the ECE practice of People First Language. People First Language puts the person before the disability, and describes what a person has, not who a person is. People First Language uses phrases such as "person with a disability," "individuals with disabilities," and "children with disabilities," as opposed to phrases that mention the disability before

the person. Instead of saying, “Autistic child,” use terms such as “child with Autism” or “child who has been diagnosed with Autism” (Snow, 2016).

Code Admin 1.4- *Work to achieve shared understandings between families and staff members. In the case of disagreements, we shall help all parties express their particular needs and perspectives.*

Dealing with Differences

Resolving disagreements requires openness on the part of the educator. Be flexible and accommodating whenever possible so that families will see that you take their wishes seriously. Get to know the families well and become aware of the lifestyle preferences that represent their core values. Discuss with families why they want you to do certain things and gather information to help you decide the best way to meet each family’s needs, as well as your own (California Department of Education and WestEd, 2010). Sometimes, the most difficult people for educators to accept are those who greatly struggle in caring for their families. At times you may feel puzzled or uncomfortable with a family’s way of doing things. Although it is usually easier to relate to a person whose lifestyle is similar to one’s own, teachers need to develop and maintain cordial relationships with all the families in their programs. When you view diverse values and behaviors as sources of interest and variety rather than as problems, you can create opportunities to enhance your relationships with families whose lifestyles differ from yours (California Department of Education, and WestEd).

When educators have feelings and protective urges, disagreements can occur. A “protective urge” refers to the strong emotional and instinctive feelings educators and caregivers have to protect young children emotionally and physically. These deep, often instinctive feelings, urges, and responses arise because young children are vulnerable and adults naturally feel a responsibility to keep them safe, protected, secure, and nurtured.

To enhance your relationship with parents whose opinions or attitudes differ from yours:

1. Ask the families to tell you more about their way of doing things.
2. Share positive experiences that you have had with their child.
3. Seek subjects of common interest to talk about.

To give more comfortable feedback about their child’s challenging behavior:

1. Take time to explore your own feelings. Remember that just because you do not agree about something, does not make the other person wrong. Your judgement is influenced by your past experiences, values, and beliefs, just as the family’s is.
2. Discuss your feelings and concerns with the appropriate co-worker or a trusted confidant.
3. Create an opportunity to sit down and talk with the parents when you will not be interrupted and where you can set a relaxed tone to the conversation.
4. Ask the family for their perspectives on the child’s behavior.
5. If your concerns have to do with development rather than a simple preference on your part, be ready to explain how the child is affected. There is an opportunity to build an alliance with the parents or family in the interest of the child.
6. Be tactful but direct when discussing a family’s way of doing things that is different from your own.
7. Be aware of your tone of voice as well as your choice of words. Carefully chosen words expressed in a disapproving tone could offend the parents or family and not produce beneficial outcomes.
8. State your perception of the parent’s goal as well as your own concerns in simple, non-accusatory language. Ask the parents to brainstorm alternatives for achieving the goals. Try to negotiate a potential solution (WestEd: Program for Infant Toddler Caregiving [PITC], n.d., Handout #14).

Figure 5.1

Bombeck Family Learning Center of the University of Dayton (Sciarra, Lynch, Adams, & Dorsey, 2016, p. 160).

A Sample Conflict Resolution Policy

We provide a safe, secure environment where children learn to respectfully resolve conflicts that naturally occur in a child care setting:

- Adults help children develop vocabulary that expresses not only their wants and needs but also other's feelings as well as their own.
- Adults model respectful interactions with others, using their own words and actions to develop an understanding of how to deal with conflict.
- Adults affirm everyone's right to be safe emotionally as well as physically by setting standards for behavior and implementing caring, consistent consequences aligned with developmentally appropriate expectations according to the children's ages.
- Adults facilitate resolution between children by asking guided questions, but resist solving the children's problems for them, thus providing children the opportunity to make decisions and practice self-regulation of socially responsible behavior.

Conflict between Adults

While every effort is made to meet the needs of children, parents, and staff, we realize that from time to time a conflict may occur between parents, staff, and administrators. The following process is followed should a conflict occur:



- Step One: A respectful discussion is held between the people directly involved at a time and place that assures privacy and sufficient time for a thorough resolution to take place.
- Step Two: If resolution is not found at the first meeting, a second meeting is held with the director for the purpose of creating a plan for resolution and a timeline for expected success.
- Step Three: If the conflict is not resolved according to the timeline, adjustments may be made to the plan, and an additional timeline may be established, or:
- Step Four: If at any time the directors determine that resolution is not possible they will consider one of the following for immediate action:
 - o Removal of the adult's child from the program or classroom
 - o Withdrawal of services from the center
 - o Suspension of the staff member until disciplinary steps can be taken
 - o Involvement of the Assistant Dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions

Grounds for determining that a resolution is not possible include but are not exclusive of the following:

1. Any person involved displays inappropriate behavior such as shouting, accusing, name-calling, swearing, or physical assault
2. Any person involved refuses to follow the prescribed process
3. Any person involved jeopardizes the process by spreading information concerning the conflict to those outside the immediate conflict or those involved in the resolution of the process.

Disagreements can be difficult, but research indicates that parents feel reassured when educators exhibit three critical qualities: understanding, competence, and honesty (Mangione, Lally, & Signer, 1996).

1. **Understanding:** An understanding educator takes the time to respond to every concern, no matter how small it may seem. Families want to be heard and understood and know that educators appreciate what they are going through. An understanding educator lets families know that they are seen, heard, and felt.

2. **Competence:** A competent educator provides for the well-being, safety, health, and developmental needs of the children (California Department of Education and WestEd, 2010). Families feel more comfortable having their child in care if they believe the educator is competent. The best way to deal with family members' worries or concerns is to help them see your competence. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as displaying certificates and degrees, having written material on child development,

such as books and articles for families, answering curriculum questions, giving a tour of the facility, having families observe the classroom, being able to articulate the program philosophy, etc. Be sure to:

- Provide family members the written statements of your philosophy of care, and give them specific information about your program.
- Highlight your health and safety practices.
- Reassure them that you have thoughtfully and effectively addressed their concerns.
- Communicate your desire to learn from them about their child.

3. **Honesty:** There is a high priority placed on having honest and trustworthy educators. Honesty is needed to build healthy relationship. Honesty means letting family members know about events, accidents, exposures, and incidents that happen during the day, even if they are hard to talk about. “Straightforward communication helps family members form an accurate picture of you and other staff members in action” (California Department of Education and WestEd, 2010, Appendix E). Educators care can facilitate this by openly sharing information, welcoming families into the program, and by being careful to “let your yes mean yes; and your no mean no.” People will trust you more if they count on your words to match your actions. Actions speak louder than words.

Dealing with a conflict can feel like a confrontation and make us nervous. Using door openers can help when it is time to talk about conflict. Statements such as,

- “I would like to know how you feel about this....”
- “Have you noticed recently that _____ is happening ?”
- “I have recently noticed that...”
- “Would you like to talk about....?”
- “Where would you like to begin?”
- “Interesting. Tell me more.”
- “What would you like me to know?”
- “What do you think about...?”
- “It sounds like you have really thought this through.”
- “Can you tell me how you are feeling about....?”
- “What is this like for you?”
- “What do you want to do next?”

Code Admin 1.5- *Seek out, value, and draw upon different kinds of education, training, professional experience, lived experience, and expertise held by personnel, when making decisions concerning children and programs.*

When faced with making difficult decisions, it is wise to seek out feedback, advice, and wise counsel from appropriate, educated, qualified, well-respected educators with years of professional experiences. A good piece of timely advice can be better than gold or silver, but be sure to follow protocols, confidentiality policies, and the chain of command.

An old proverb states, “In the multitude of counsel there is safety” (Thompson Chain-Reference Bible, 1988, Proverbs 11:14). And in the words of the late ECE theorist, bev bos, “Together we are better” (1990).



Code Admin 1.6- *Provide access to continuing professional development and advancement, and work to ensure that it reflects current research and is relevant to staff members' responsibilities.*

We are never finished studying child development and must make a strong effort to read current literature and be aware new empirical data and research trends. As reflective educators, our classroom practices must reflect developmentally appropriate practice.

Code Admin 1.7- *Provide training for and hold program staff accountable for knowing and following all relevant standards and regulations.*

Educators are responsible for understanding licensing, certification, and other regulations pertaining to providing services for young children. Each type of regulation is developed by a governmental body and has specific purposes. Educators must understand which regulations apply to their programs and ensure that all requirements are fulfilled in a timely manner (Sciarra, Lynch, Adams, & Dorsey, 2016, p. 35). As stated in Code Admin 1.1, the information that educators are held accountable for must be made available through professional development opportunities. Also, be sure to post all relevant standards and regulations in the office or staff space.

Code Admin 1.8- *Develop and maintain written policies for the protection of confidentiality and the disclosure of children's records, which shall be made available to all program personnel and families.*

a. *Disclosure of children's records beyond parents or legal guardians, program personnel, and consultants having an obligation of confidentiality shall require familial consent (except in cases of suspected abuse or neglect).*

The US Government Title 20- Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) outlines the Federal law on rights and requirements related to accessing, sharing, and amending student records. <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-2010-title20-section1232g&num=0&edition=2010/links to an external source>

The California Department of Education's website has information and many resources on privacy laws, policies, best practices. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ed/dataprivacy.asp#PRE/links to an external source>

Code Admin 1.9- *Develop and maintain comprehensive and clearly stated, written personnel policies that define program standards and expectations, are given to all new staff members, and are easily accessible and available for review by all staff members.*

Jobs are easier if we know what is expected from us up front. All employees should have a copy of any written personnel policies. Clear expectations with a detailed written summary of job duties, clarifies what obligations need to be performed. Daily schedules with the anticipated time of day are also helpful in understanding the pace and timing of the expectations. Also, setting clear expectations can also build relationship through interactions over clearly shared meaning (Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, Rupiper, & Gregory, 2015).

An example of a detailed job description for a cook at a center might look like this.

Sample: Cook Job Description

Schedule: Monday through Friday—7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Reports to the Head Start director.

Responsible for the following:



1. Safely preparing all food (breakfast, lunch, and snacks)
2. Requisitioning appropriate amounts of foodstuffs based on designated menus
3. Checking food deliveries against orders
4. Storing foods appropriately, before preparation, in refrigerator, freezer, bins, cupboards, and the like preparing all foods using methods that maintain food value and freshness
5. Preparing all foods using methods that maintain food value and freshness
6. Following menus, recipes, or other directives furnished by Head Start nutrition consultant
7. Recording amounts of food used daily and maintaining an inventory of staples on hand
8. Washing and sterilizing dishes and all utensils according to sanitarian's directions
9. Cleaning appliances and storage areas according to a designated schedule
10. Supervising assistant cook (Sciarra, Lynch, Adams, & Dorsey, 2016, p. 191).

Code Admin 1.10- *Apply all policies regarding work with personnel consistently, fairly, and without bias.*

Anti-discrimination policies ensure that all employees are consistently treated fairly, and without bias regardless of their background or characteristics. These policies must be thoughtfully written, because they can stop discrimination and help to facilitate an inclusive and equitable work environment.

Code Admin 1.11- *Appropriately address incidents that are not consistent with our policies.*

Consistency is key. When we make policies, we do so thoughtfully, knowing that it is our responsibility to follow through and address all incidents that are contrary to the policies. Sensitive follow through and consistency in acting on policies brings an element of safety.



Code Admin 1.12- *Be familiar with and observe laws and regulations that pertain to employment discrimination, and make hiring, retention, termination, and promotion decisions based solely on a person's competence, professional preparation, record of accomplishment, and ability to carry out the responsibilities of the position.*

The California Department of Education's (CDE) website has great information and many resources on Equal Opportunity and Access: It discloses the practices of the CDE to ensure equal, fair, and meaningful access to its employment and program services. The California Department of Education, Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) is charged with ensuring compliance with State and Federal civil rights laws, and regulations in CDE employment.

[https://www.cde.ca.gov/RE/di/eo/links to an external source](https://www.cde.ca.gov/RE/di/eo/links%20to%20an%20external%20source)

Code Admin 1.13- *Be familiar with and abide by the rules and regulations developed by unions or other groups representing the interests or rights of personnel.*

If the agency has a union or other group representing the interests and rights of employees, for a cohesive understanding of work-related policies, it is wise to become familiar with the group leaders and abide by the rules and/or regulations.

Code Admin 1.14- *Evaluate the performance of all staff.*

- a. Inform staff whose performance does not meet program expectations about areas of concern and, when possible, assist them in improving their performance by providing additional supports and coaching.*
- b. Inform staff about grievance procedures if they do not agree with their performance evaluation.*

Staff Evaluation and Grievance Procedures

Employees are entitled to know the evaluation procedures as well as any evaluation criteria. Therefore, performance evaluations for all staff positions should be part of employment policies and/or the orientation materials and discussed during employee orientation. Performance evaluations should be scheduled on a regular basis. Evaluation and grievance procedures must be included in the employment policies or employee handbook (Talan & Bloom, 2004). These procedures should be made available to all center personnel and ideally, they will include details about the following:

- Who evaluates whom
- When the evaluation will take place
- What techniques or instruments will be used in the evaluation
- Who makes the decision on whether or not the criteria are met
- What the consequences are of not meeting the stated criteria (Sciarra, Lynch, Adams, & Dorsey, 2016).

Evaluation and Grievance Procedures Example (Sciarra et al., 2016)

1. Frequency of Evaluation:

Performance evaluations will take place twice during the 6-month probationary period for every new employee- at the midpoint and at the end of the probationary period- and then annually thereafter. It is the responsibility of the Personnel Committee to evaluate the work of the director and the responsibility of the director to evaluate all members of the staff. All evaluations will be shared with the employee and then become part of the employee's file.

2. Purpose of Evaluation:

The primary purpose of the annual evaluation is to create a mutual understanding between the evaluator and the one being evaluated of what is being expected and how they both view the best way to move toward fulfilling those expectations. Annual evaluations will be used as a basis for continued employment, horizontal or vertical movement on the career lattice, salary increments in cases where the job description allows for merit raises, and demotion or dismissal.

3. Basis of the Evaluation:

Staff member will be evaluated on knowledge of the job as described in the job description, quality of skill demonstrated in fulfilling the job, interest and initiative, dependability, personal and professional growth, attendance and punctuality, and ability to work effectively in cooperation with other staff members. Evaluation forms should be included in personnel policies.

4. Evaluation Procedure:

Each employee will be notified as to when his/her evaluation will take place. The evaluation will be discussed with the employee, at which time they will be given the opportunity to express his/her agreement or disagreement with the evaluation. The outcome of this discussion will become part of the staff member's personnel record.

5. Review of Grievances:

The employee who wishes to present a grievance must present it first to the director. If a failure to reach settlement with the director occurs, the employee may submit the grievance to the chairperson of the Personnel Committee, in a written statement, describing the situation, and requesting that the grievance be reviewed by the Personnel Committee. The

Personnel Committee will review the grievance and report with recommendations to the Board of directors for action (Sciarra et al., 2026).

Performance evaluations are usually based on job descriptions. Moreover, knowledge of evaluation criteria helps build a sense of trust and partnership between the staff to be evaluated and the evaluator. An organizational chart is sometimes part of the employment policies and can clarify lines of communication and responsibility for everyone in the center. Complete job descriptions, performance evaluation procedures and forms, and open staff communication, leaves little doubt about expectations, areas of responsibility, and who will be the evaluator for each position (Sciarra et al., 2016, pp. 167-168).

Code Admin 1.15- *Conduct personnel dismissals, when necessary, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. a. Inform staff who are dismissed of the reasons for termination. b. When dismissal is for cause, ensure there is evidence of inadequate or inappropriate behavior that is current, accurately documented, and available for review.*

When an employee needs to be terminated, we must follow laws and regulations and clearly explain to the employee why, and supply documentation for dismissal. For example, in the Employee Handbook it clearly states that any form of corporal punishment is cause for immediate dismissal. So, if any educator is observed practicing corporal punishment, we show them the written policy in the Employee Handbook, terminate them and hand them their final paycheck.

Code Admin 1.16- *Be accurate and truthful in making personnel evaluations, judgements, and references.*

We must be honest and accurate when making evaluations, judgements, or references. These actions must be taken seriously because they can make a big difference in a person's career. A comprehensive evaluation should be based on the job description. For example, an evaluation might assess their ability to create engaging lesson plans, manage classroom behavior, and foster social-emotional development, as outlined in their job description. The employer should make it clear to all employees, from the beginning, that they will be evaluated. In addition, support must be provided to assist new staff members as they become acclimated to a new role and grow professionally (Sciarra & Dorsey, 2002).

Code Admin 1.17- *Not make hiring, retention, termination, and promotion decisions based on an individual's identities.*

When selecting new employees, use material such as the employment policies and the job description, combined with all the information from the interview and observations, to reach a final decision. Data from the interview process should be weighed and balanced until the best match among job description, current staff composition, and candidate qualifications is obtained. Also, it is important to review the nondiscrimination prohibitions in this decision-making process, especially there is an applicant who is disabled.

An employer is not required to give preference to a qualified applicant with a disability over other applicants; however, the employer may not consider the candidate with disabilities unqualified if that person can perform the essential functions of the job. It may be helpful to have a second interview with selected candidates from the pool who seem best qualified for the position to further narrow down the choice. The procedure for making a decision should be clear to all interviewers (Sciarra et al., 2016, p. 182).

When hiring, terminating, or promoting employees, all decisions must be made without bias and should be based on the employee's job qualifications and skill sets.

Code Admin 1.18- *Not allow staff to implement activities or practices that put any child in a situation that creates physical or emotional harm.*

Recall that Code 1.1 states, "We shall do no harm." If we believe a child is being harmed, it is a mandated reporter's duty to report the harm to the proper authorities. We can do this anonymously and be protected by law.

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5.4: Ethical Responsibilities to Sponsoring Agencies and Governing Bodies



ADMIN 2: ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO SPONSORING AGENCIES AND GOVERNING BODIES

We shall:

Admin 2.1- Review all program policies set forth by sponsoring agencies and governing bodies to ensure that they are in the best interest of the children.

Admin 2.2- Comply with all relevant regulations and standards that support quality care and education for young children and families.

Admin 2.3- Do our jobs conscientiously, attending to all areas that fall within the scope of our responsibilities.

Admin 2.4- Manage resources responsibly and accurately account for their use.

Admin 2.5- Evaluate our programs using agreed-upon standards and report our findings to the appropriate authority.

Admin 2.6- Thoroughly and honestly communicate necessary information, while making every effort to preserve confidentiality in the absence of a compelling reason.

Admin 2.7- Express our professional concerns about directives from the sponsoring agency or governing body when we believe that a mandated practice is not in the best interest of children

Administrators have an ethical responsibility to children, families, employees, coworkers, and the community to regularly review and be educated on current licensing regulations, and laws from government agencies and governing authorities; and must comply with these regulations (Please see Codes: Admin 1.7, Admin 1.8, Admin 1.9, & Admin 1.18).

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5.5: Summary

Creating a healthy early childhood program requires clear communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to fairness. Educators and administrators work together to build environments where advocacy, transparency, and accountability guide daily interactions. Professional responsibilities extend beyond individual classrooms and into the larger community, where ethical conduct supports the well-being of children and families.

Strong leadership plays a central role in shaping workplace culture. Equitable policies, honest feedback, and opportunities for growth help foster trust and staff engagement. By identifying sources of conflict, practicing active listening, and using clear communication strategies, educators are better equipped to resolve challenges and build collaborative, inclusive programs.

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5.6: Vocabulary

- **Civic Engagement:** *Actively participating in community and public affairs to help improve society and promote the common good.*
 - **Public Policy:** *A set of laws, regulations, and actions created by governments to address societal issues and guide decision-making.*
 - **Social Justice:** *The fair and equal distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights to ensure all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.*
 - **Transparency:** *The practice of being open, honest, and clear about actions, decisions, and information.*
 - **Accountability:** *The responsibility to answer for one's actions and decisions and to accept the consequences.*
-

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5.7: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- [Children's Defense Fund/Links to an external source:](#)

The mission of the Children's Defense Fund is to leave no child behind and to ensure every child a healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start, and a moral start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

- [Early Childhood Research and Practice \(ECRP\)/Links to an external site:](#)

Early Childhood Research and Practice provides a repository of articles and research on the field of early childhood.

- [Center for Child Care Workforce/Links to an external site:](#)

This Website provides information on education for our children, advocacy for quality childcare, and compensation for early care and education professionals.

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Finished Chapter 5

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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6.1: Chapter Introduction

6



Learning Objectives

- **By the end of Chapter 6, students will be able to:**
 - **SLO 6.2:** Discuss how to create inclusive and supportive learning experiences that promote professional competence, encourage equity, and honor the cultural and linguistic diversity of adult learners.
 - **SLO 6.3:** **Discuss** the role of executive functioning in adult learning and possible techniques that support time management, task completion, and goal setting for diverse learners.
 - **SLO 6.4:** Identify the conditions necessary for adult learners to experience “flow” and **propose** ways to design learning environments that balance challenge and skill level for optimal performance for adult learners.

Chapter 6 Short Overview



Chapter 6 explores the ethical responsibilities of adult educators who prepare future ECE professionals. These educators play a critical role in shaping competent, caring teachers through instruction aligned with adult learning theories, professional standards, and equitable practices. The chapter emphasizes the importance of tailoring learning experiences to diverse adult learners’ needs, acknowledging learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and motivational factors. Ethical guidance is also provided regarding confidentiality, competence, practicum access, the responsible use of AI, and the necessity of honest evaluation and feedback, especially when learners struggle to meet professional expectations.

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6.2: Ethical Responsibilities Specific to Adult Educators in Professional Preparation Programs



Let's Take a Deeper Look

Adult educators working in professional preparation and training programs maintain a primary responsibility to the development of knowledge, skill, and dispositions in adult learners. This will further one's ultimate commitment to the well-being, learning, and development of young children. This ECE work includes related and intertwined obligations to support and nurture adult learners and to provide caring and competent professionals to work with young children and their families.

As to the obligation to help develop caring and competent professionals, those facilitating educator preparation and professional development must look to the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators, which presents the essential body of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices required of all early childhood educators working with children from birth through age 8, across all early learning settings. Likewise, the Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education position statement lays out eight key recommendations focused on preparing current and prospective early childhood educators to provide equitable learning opportunities for all children (NAEYC, 2024, p. 12).

With these supports, and as they fulfill their day-to-day responsibilities focused primarily on the professional preparation and development of adult learners, teacher educators and professional development specialists encounter some unique ethical challenges in the context of a complex network of relationships, including those with sites providing practicum experiences, employing institutions of higher education, and agencies that provide professional development. These entities, agencies, and institutions also have ethical obligations to early childhood education students, teachers, and faculty members, but again, those obligations are beyond the scope of this Code of Ethics.

Therefore, this section is designed specifically to set forth a conception of early childhood teacher educators' professional, ethical responsibilities in the context of three relationships with:

- a. adult learners;*
- b. sites providing practicum experiences, and*
- c. institutions of higher learning, and agencies that provide professional learning opportunities.*

Although this section is rooted in the ethical responsibilities and recurring ethical dilemmas that early childhood teacher educators face in associate and baccalaureate and graduate degree-granting institutions, many of its provisions are equally applicable to early childhood educators who provide access to credentials, nondegree professional learning opportunities, and mentoring to adults in early childhood education and care settings.



PREP 1: ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO ADULT LEARNERS IN TRAINING CLASSES AND HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES

We shall:

Code Prep 1.1- *Provide learning experiences that are consistent with the best practices for adult learners and that are responsive to the strengths, needs, learning styles, cultures, languages, practice settings, and stages of development of adult learners at all points in their educational journey.*

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6.3: Learning Styles

Understanding learning styles is important when working with children and with adult learners. We all learn differently, and we all have preferred learning styles. Understanding and teaching to a person's learning style can facilitate successful learning. There are many schools of thought explaining "learning styles;" the two most common are the Preferred Learning Style approaches and McCarthy's, 4MAT Models.

The Preferred Learning Style Approach

The three learning styles are visual, auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic (Pues and Associates, 2003).

Visual learners remember what they see and read and are good at retrieving information by visualization techniques. Visual learners typically enjoy working with pictures, maps, diagrams, graphics, charts. They are often independent learners, who prefer to read the information, rather than listening to it. Visual learners can be sub-divided into two categories.



1. The **observer** who remembers through observations, pictures, places, objects, and can usually recall in great visual detail.
2. The **reader** who enjoys reading and is good at jobs requiring a lot of reading and writing.

Auditory learners tend to learn best with information in the oral mode by listening. Auditory learners recall spoken information by concentrating on previous conversations, discussions, lectures, or audio tracks and do well with oral instructions. The auditory learners can be subdivided into two categories.



1. The **listener** who prefers listening to information through lectures, spoken reports, or audio recordings.
2. The **talker**, or interactive learner, needs to ask questions, to discuss the information, and/or to restate information, in order to retain information.

Tactile/kinesthetic learners are touchers and movers/doers and can be sub-divided into two categories.



1. The **tactile** learners prefer touching, handling, or manipulating objects during the inputting of new information. They might do this as they are reading, listening, or carrying on a conversation. They tend to remember better when they underline, write, hi-light, doodle, draw designs or pictures (Kazoun, 2024).
2. The **kinesthetic** learners need to move large muscles and often enjoy getting their whole body into the learning activity. They tend to fidget, wiggle, shift their weight, and/or get up and move around.



Here are some practical suggestions pertaining to each learning style.

Auditory Learners

- Encourage discussions
- Encourage oral presentations and speeches
- Encourage tape recording spoken words
- Encourage them to read the text aloud or get written material on audio recordings
- Encourage the use of songs or mnemonics to aid in memorization
- Make time for them to discuss their ideas verbally
- Encourage them to dictate their ideas before writing
- Use verbal analogies and storytelling to demonstrate concepts and ideas

Visual Learners

- Use visual materials (pictures, maps, graphs, handouts, etc.)
- Make sure they have a clear view of the speaker so they can see body language and facial expressions
- Use color to highlight important parts of the written material and encourage them to do so also

- Encourage them to take notes and look at handouts
- Use multi-media to impart information (PowerPoint, Internet, DVDs, etc.)
- Encourage the use of mnemonic “Memory pegs” for memorization (visualizing information as a picture)
- Use illustrated materials
- Encourage time in a quiet space to avoid verbal disturbances
- Encourage illustrating ideas and use of webs for conceptual frameworks

Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners

- Allow for frequent study breaks
- Allow for physical movement
- Use hands-on experiences
- Have an area where they can work standing up
- Allow gum chewing (Make sure disposal is in garbage can)
- Encourage the use of highlighters
- Encourage them to keep their hands busy during meetings with doodling, crocheting, squeeze balls, rubber bands, or clay
- Use background music during meetings
- Have a walking while talking meeting

4MAT- 4 Types of Learners Model

Developed by McCarthy, the 4MAT Model looks at how adults learn, perceive new information, and process it to make it our own (About Learning, 2025). There are four types of learners: imaginative, analytic, common sense, and dynamic (Bloom, 2005).

Type 1- Imaginative Learners:

- Seeks meaning, involvement, and clarity
- Learn by listening, watching, sharing ideas and personalizing information
- Work for harmony, need to be personally involved, and seek commitment
- Seek personal associations and connections
- Tackle problems by reflecting alone and then brainstorming with others.

Type 2- Analytic Learners:

- Seeks facts
- Listens to and thinks about information
- Thinks through ideas in a thorough and industrious fashion
- Forms ideas, theories, and concepts by integrating their observations into what is known by experts
- Eager learners
- Excel in traditional learning environments
- Attentive to details
- Thinks sequentially
- Thrives on assimilating disparate facts into coherent theories
- Tackles problems with rationality and logic and are uncomfortable with subjective judgments.

Type 3- Common Sense Learners:

- Seeks utility and results
- Learns by thinking and doing
- Experiments
- Applies ideas
- Learns by testing theories and experimenting
- They are pragmatists: they believe *"if it works, use it."*
- Needs to know how things work
- Cuts to important information and often acts without consulting others
- Thrives on plans and timelines.

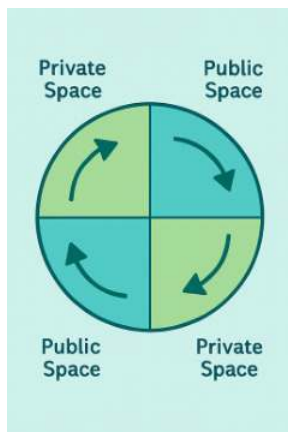
Type 4- Dynamic Learners:

- Seeks to influence others
- Learns by doing and feeling
- Learns by trial and error (self-discovery)
- Seeks hidden possibilities
- Explores new ideas
- Excels at managing change by being flexible and adaptable
- Comfortable taking risks
- Comfortable working with all types of people
- May reach conclusions in the absence of logical justification and tackle problems by intuiting possibilities
- Open to new ideas
- Thrives on challenge and crisis.

Most of us learn through a combination of styles and it can change depending on what we are learning. It is always good to remember that the way we learn tends to be the way we teach, so teaching to another's preferred learning style also requires some self-reflection.

Conflicting Data

There are conflicting or contradictory theories to learning styles; and according to the Association of Psychological Science (APS) (2009), learners have preferences for how they learn, but these preferences make very little difference in what is actually learned. So, some argue that the widespread use of learning style tests and teaching tools is a wasteful use of limited educational resources. Further research is needed.



Semiotic Mediation

The social constructivist theorist, Lev Vygotsky, believed that language and culture is an important part of learning for everyone, irrespective of learning styles. His theory of semiotic mediation, also known as quadrant theory or theory of space, discussed how during the learning process, we naturally move in and out of a combination of externalized (public experience or interactions) and internalized (private thought) processes (Raphael, Brock & Wallace, 1997). In other words, we have an experience with the external social environment (we get ideas from people, books, media, computers, etc.), then we think about what we have absorbed privately (we have internal private thinking.), next we publicly express our thinking and talk to someone or write about what we have been thinking about), and then we receive feedback from the public (we listen to feedback or watch the responses from people about our thoughts, and privately and internally, we revise our thoughts.). Vygotsky (1978) thought that this cycle was constantly occurring as we learn, and that it is through talk and interaction with others that we make sense of the world and construct meaning. Thus, we must make a space for social interactions and internal thought to occur for meaningful learning. We must make room for learners to be social and talk about what they are learning, as well as solitary time to contemplate.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs

Maslow's motivational theory in psychology, the hierarchy of needs, is completely applicable to adult learning. The theory is typically depicted as five-tier and up to an eight-tier pyramid, with hierarchical levels of human basic needs. The original five-tier hierarchy included: **Physiological** needs (breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep, bathroom, etc.); **Safety and security** needs (secure, safe, danger free environment, health, provision, housing, family, and social ability); **Love/belonging** needs (friendship, family, intimacy, sense of connection, to affiliate with others, to be accepted and belong); **Self-esteem** needs (confidence, achievement, freedom, respect of others, to gain approval, to be competent, and to be a unique individual); and **Self-actualization** (morality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, valued, experience purpose, meaning, and inner potential).

Later the theory expanded, it added: **Cognitive** needs (to know, to understand, and to explore); **Aesthetic** needs (symmetry, order, beauty, and balance); and **Transcendence** spiritual needs (find self-fulfillment, to realize one's potential, and to help others to self-actualize). Each level builds on the other and the needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up on the pyramid (See Figure 6.1). For example, if the environment is uncomfortably cold and we are hungry, we can predict that we may not be at our peak cognitive performance, which is higher up in the hierarchy.

Figure 6.1

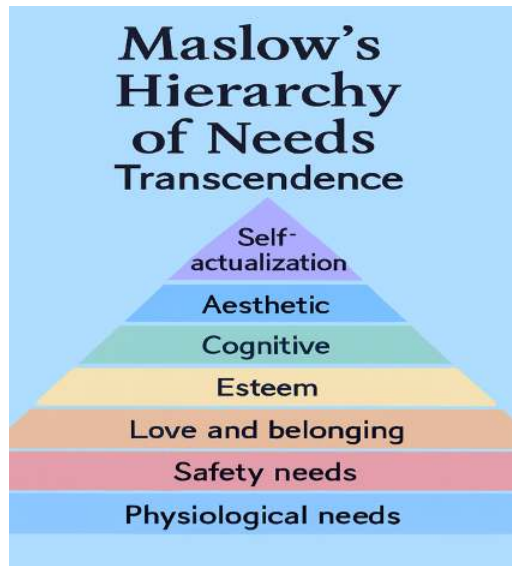


Figure 6.1 The image of Maslow's Hierarchy was generated from AI through ChatGPT

Code Prep 1.2- Provide sound educational experiences for adult learners that enable them to understand and nurture the optimal development of children, communicate with and provide support for families, and attend to their own health and well-being.

Bloom's Taxonomy

While Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs addresses essential **needs that can motivate** learners, Bloom's Taxonomy helps us understand *how* learners think, grow, and build knowledge. Bloom's pyramid depicts how learning unfolds cognitively. By pairing these two frameworks, mentor/coaches can design learning environments that not only motivate, but also intellectually challenge and engage adult learners at every level of development.

Bloom's Taxonomy, first developed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 and later revised by Anderson & Krathwohl (2001), organizes learning into six hierarchical levels of cognitive complexity. It provides educators with a framework for supporting critical thinking, problem solving, and reflection. Each level builds on the one before, encouraging learners to move from basic recall toward higher-order thinking, innovation, and professional insight (See Figure 6.2).

The six levels of Bloom's (2001) revised taxonomy include:

1. **Remember (Knowledge):** Recalling facts, terms, and basic concepts
2. **Understand:** Explaining ideas or interpreting meaning
3. **Apply:** Using knowledge in new but familiar situations
4. **Analyze:** Breaking information into parts to explore relationships
5. **Evaluate:** Making judgments based on criteria and evidence
6. **Create:** Putting ideas together to form a new whole or propose alternatives

Figure 6.2

Bloom's Taxonomy

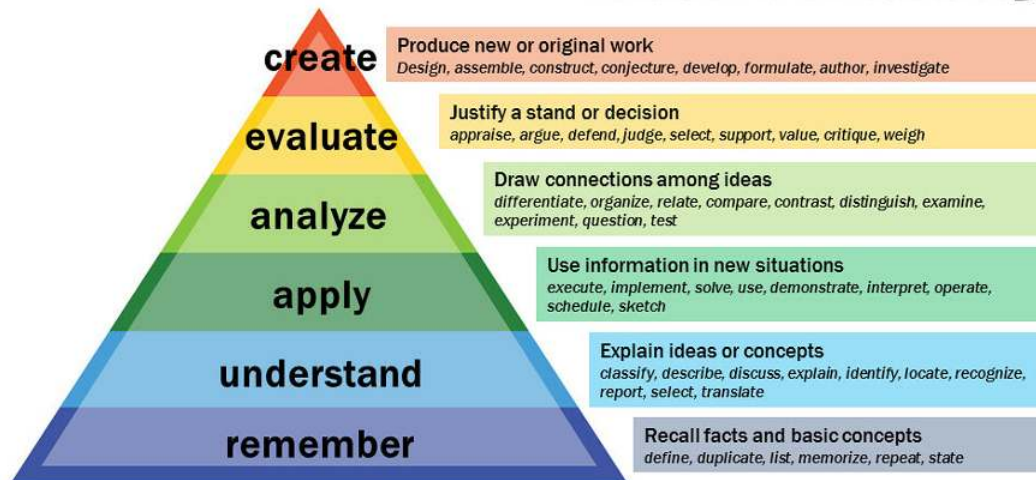


Figure 6.2 image is from Wikimedia Commons, "Bloom's Revised Taxonomy"

When mentoring or supervising adult learners in early childhood education settings, we often ask: *How do we help this person grow? What types of questions can deepen their understanding?* Bloom's Taxonomy helps us answer these questions.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Flow

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi created a theory (1990) called, "flow." In order to have "flow" or an optimal experience, where we perform at our best, there needs to be a balance between the challenge of an activity presented and the skill level of the participant. Authentic flow creates deep emersion in an activity and enjoyment, which allows for peak performance. If the challenge is far greater than the skill level, we become anxious or stressed and do not perform at optimal levels. To the contrary, if the skill level is far greater than the challenge of an activity, we become bored and lose interest in the activity (See figure 6.3).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described eight characteristics of flow:

1. Complete concentration on the task
2. Clarity of goals and reward in mind and immediate feedback
3. Transformation of time (speeding up/slowing down)
4. The experience is intrinsically rewarding
5. Effortlessness and ease
6. There is a balance between challenge and skills
7. Actions and awareness are merged, losing self-conscious rumination
8. There is a feeling of control over the task

Achieving flow for adult learners is ideal; thus, we must modify activities so that they are challenging, yet achievable within that person's skill level.

Figure 6.3

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Flow and Optimal Experience

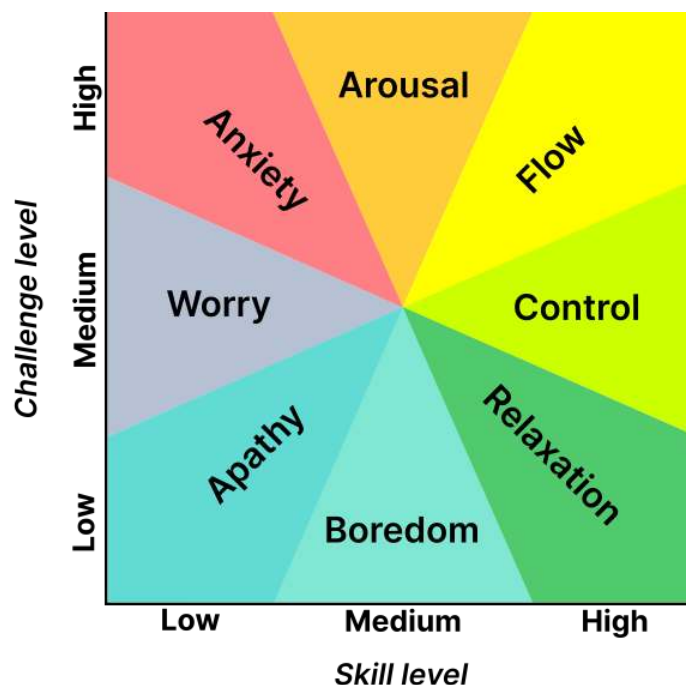


Figure 6.3 image is from Wikimedia Commons, “Challenge vs skill” or “Flow psychology.”

Code Prep 1.3- Inform learners of conduct and work expectations, including institutional standards for writing, performance, and academic integrity, including the responsible use and integration of artificial intelligence.

Educators need to be given clear written expectations for their efforts, responsibilities, and engagement. Supervisors also are responsible for regularly reviewing and being up to date on school policies, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and potential plagiarism issues. AI can be useful in automating lesson plans and assessments by freeing up teachers to focus more on direct interaction with children but it must be used responsibly by: ensuring privacy and data security of children; avoiding over-reliance on AI tools in place of human interaction; and being transparent with parents and educators about how AI is used.

Code Prep 1.4- Honor confidentiality, sharing only necessary information about an adult learner, only to those who need to know, and only through appropriate professional channels.

See Code Admin 1.8. We must develop and follow written policies on confidentiality.

Code Prep 1.5- Build into all required training minimum required levels of demonstration of understanding and competence, and give all learners equitable pathways to succeed, demonstrate competence, and perform at high levels.

We must attempt to help all others succeed and perform at their best, and examining the process of executive functioning skills can facilitate this. Executive function skills help people manage everyday tasks and refers to “self-regulatory processes, such as the ability to inhibit a behavior or cognitive flexibility, that enable adaptive responses to new situations or to reach a specific goal. It is the mental processes that help us set and carry out goals” (Paris, Ricardo, & Rymond, 2019, p. 205). We use these skills to solve problems, make plans, adapt to new situations, and manage emotions. Poor executive functioning skills can hinder our ability to perform, complete tasks, or have strong social connections. These skills develop over one’s lifetime, but there are ways to improve and support executive functioning:

- Break down tasks, jobs, or learning material into smaller steps or chunks
- Use organizational tools (e.g., checklists, planners, sticky notes, text reminders, or apps) to track tasks and stay on schedule
- Set clear, prioritized goals daily (e.g., identify top 3 tasks or focus on one key task).
- Establish and document daily schedules and routines.
- Set time estimates for tasks

- Do tasks immediately if they only take 5-minutes or less
- Exercise regularly (good for overall physical and mental health)
- Reward and/or acknowledge accomplishments
- Don't overdo the list

Code Prep 1.6- *As applicable, ensure adult learners have in-person and, where necessary, virtual access to practicum settings, including centers, schools, and family child care homes, where staff are qualified to work with young children, where mentors can successfully support adult learners, and which to the greatest extent possible reflect the diverse communities in which adult learners will be working.*

Successfully supporting adult ECE learners requires access to quality practicum sites. Following the NAEYC's (2024) Code of Ethics will facilitate this. In addition, supervisors or mentors must remember that everyone "has their own unique configuration of intelligences" (MI Oasis, n.d., para. 6) and educators should take this into account, as much as possible, and teach individuals in ways that they can best learn (MI Oasis).

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner expands on the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles and has identified eight different types of intelligences that can be helpful to educators when determining the best method of presenting learning materials (MI Oasis, n.d.).



1. Spatial
2. Bodily-Kinesthetic
3. Musical
4. Linguistic
5. Logical-Mathematical
6. Interpersonal (knowledge of others)
7. Intrapersonal (self-knowledge)
8. Naturalist

1. **Spatial:** The ability to conceptualize and manipulate large-scale spatial arrays (e.g. airplane pilot, sailor), or more local forms of space (e.g. classroom arrangement, architect, chess player).

2. **Bodily-Kinesthetic:** The ability to use one's whole body, or parts of the body (like the hands or the mouth), to solve problems or create products (e.g. dance, skater).

3. **Musical:** Sensitivity to rhythm, pitch, meter, tone, melody and timbre. May entail the ability to sing, play musical instruments, and/or compose music (e.g. musical conductor or musician)

4. **Linguistic:** Sensitivity to the meaning of words, the order among words, and the sound, rhythms, inflections, and meter of words (e.g. poet or writer). (Sometimes called language intelligence.)

5. **Logical-Mathematical:** The capacity to conceptualize the logical relations among actions or symbols (e.g. mathematicians, scientists).

6. **Interpersonal:** The ability to interact effectively with others. Sensitivity to others' moods, feelings, temperaments and motivations (e.g. negotiator or empath). (Sometimes called social intelligence.)

7. **Intrapersonal:** Sensitivity to one's own feelings, goals, and anxieties, and the capacity to plan and act in light of one's own traits. Intrapersonal intelligence is not particular to specific careers; rather, it is a goal for every individual. (Sometimes called self-intelligence.)

8. **Naturalist:** The ability to make consequential distinctions in the world of nature as, for example, between one plant and another, or one cloud formation and another (e.g. taxonomist or farmer). (Sometimes called nature intelligence.)

Code Prep 1.7- *Provide and recommend the use of institutional and additional support for adult learners, including but not limited to dual language learners and multilingual adult learners, who have the potential to work effectively with young children but have difficulty meeting academic standards, as well as those who demonstrate academic excellence but experience difficulty working with young children in practice.*

Whenever possible, we should make every attempt to communicate and make written materials available in a person's home language. Use of AI for translating is becoming a reliable method.



Code Prep 1.8- *Help adult learners identify alternative educational paths and goals when after we have made concerted efforts to work with the adult learners, it becomes apparent that they are not able to benefit from our training, class, or program.*

Helping an educator learn to work together as a team, is often more productive than terminating someone and bringing in a new person (Sciarra et al.). Another alternative is to suggest that the adult learner stay in a lower-level job position, perhaps even temporarily. This is a good way to encourage an educator, who is not ready for promotion, to stay in the field of ECE and strive for betterment. For example, being a teacher's aide is a perfectly respectable job, and the teacher's aide is not left alone with children, but they still can positively interact with children and complete classroom tasks, under direct supervision.

Sometimes the role of a good leader is to help someone find their niche, even when it is not in education. If it is at all possible to counsel someone and help them identify their strengths, we might be able to them identify potential alternative career paths and goals.

Sometimes termination is necessary. "Not meeting stated criteria could mean no recommendation for a raise, no opportunity for advancing to a higher-level position, or termination. When there are other actions that could cause dismissal, such as use of corporal punishment, these should be in writing" (Sciarra, Lynch, Adams & Dorsey, 2016, p. 167). The decision to terminate should only be made when the employers are convinced that termination is in the best interest of the children and staff.

Code Prep 1.9- *Support adult learners who come to us with concerns about a colleague's competence, fairness, ethics, or accuracy by helping them clarify their concerns, and deciding and following through on a course of action to address the problem.*

Please see Code 3A.4- Under the section "When We Have Concerns." Concerns should be addressed through the proper chain of command, never ignored, and we must make sure that concerns are brought to the proper person in a timely manner. When uncertain, ask the direct supervisor for the correct chain of command.

Code Prep 1.10- *Not sell products and/or services from which we stand to gain financially in professional development unless they are relevant, serve educational goals, and we have explicitly stated this connection at the outset of the training.*

Selling products or endorsing products must be done with thoughtfulness and caution. It can be problematic. Endorsements are discussed under Code 4.4. Many schools need to supplement income and do fundraisers, such as raffles, bake sales, silent auctions, spaghetti feeds, carnivals, etc. However, these are typically only held for brief periods of time and tend to only bring in small amounts of money. If there are products regularly being sold at the center, they should be relevant to education and have explicitly stated and directly connected, educational goals. It is worth noting that maintaining a balanced budget for an early childhood education program can be very difficult and centers not connected with large institutions or programs, usually need additional sources of income beyond tuition.

Code Prep 1.11- *Not allow adult learners to pass a course or move to the next level of professional credentialing if they have not demonstrated expected levels of knowledge and competence in course or training content or if they do not demonstrate the ability to relate positively and effectively with children and families.*

We must be honest about adult learners observed abilities. If an educator has not successfully demonstrated expected levels of knowledge and competence, they must not be given a passing grade or promoted beyond their demonstrated abilities and

competencies.

Code Prep 1.12- *Not allow adult learners to complete a program if we have direct evidence that they may cause harm by endangering children's physical, emotional, or psychological well-being.*

Unfortunately, sometimes when an educator has not successfully demonstrated expected levels of knowledge and competence and we have evidence that they may cause harm, termination must be immediate.

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6.4: Summary

Supporting adult learners requires educators to design inclusive, equitable learning experiences that meet the diverse needs of adult education. Supporting professional growth means acknowledging differences in learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and motivational factors while also promoting clarity, fairness, and respect. Adult educators must provide opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and skill development while aligning instruction with professional standards and competencies.

Reflection, flow, and executive functioning play an important role in how adult learners absorb and apply new information. By creating learning environments that are goal-oriented, inclusive, and emotionally supportive, educators empower adult learners to grow with purpose and confidence. Respect for autonomy, clear communication, and intentional mentorship help future educators develop the skills and mindset needed for success in the field.

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6.5: Vocabulary

- **Adult Learning Theory:** *A framework that explains how adults acquire knowledge differently than children, emphasizing self-direction, experience, and practical application.*
 - **Learning Styles:** *The preferred ways individuals absorb, process, and retain information.*
 - **Executive Functioning:** *A set of mental skills that help individuals plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and manage multiple tasks.*
 - **Flow State:** *A mental condition of complete focus and immersion in an activity, often leading to high productivity and enjoyment. The Optimal performance zone where skill meets challenge.*
-

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6.6: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



[Child Care Exchange Everyday/Links to an external site:](#)

Exchange magazine has promoted the exchange of ideas among leaders in early childhood programs worldwide through its magazine, books, training products, training seminars, and international conferences.

[WestEd/Links to an external site:](#)

WestEd helps schools, districts, & states improve education through innovative research, evaluation, and consulting.

[The Reflective Educator: Conceptual Framework/Links to an external site:](#)

This Washburn university website focuses on providing insight for developing teachers and administrators who are Reflective Educators and wish to extend this practice.

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Finished Chapter 6

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Ethical Responsibilities to Practicum Sites

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7.1: Chapter Introduction

7



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 7, students will be able to:

- **SLO 7.1:** Identify the ethical responsibilities of adult educators to practicum sites, including preparation, role clarification, and confidentiality.
- **SLO 7.2: Identify** strategies for ethically resolving mismatches between adult learners and practicum placements to ensure the best outcomes for children, students, and programs.
- **SLO 7.3:** Design a mentoring action plan that includes relationship-building, goal-setting, feedback, and reflection based on best practices in adult education.

Chapter 7 Short Overview

Chapter 7 explores the ethical responsibilities of adult educators in supporting practicum sites, higher education institutions, and training agencies. It emphasizes the importance of clearly defined roles, preparation, and mutual respect in mentoring relationships. Educators are guided to foster growth through supportive relationships, regular supervision, confidentiality, and culturally responsive mentorship. Additionally, the chapter outlines best practices for aligning course content with professional standards, conducting fair evaluations, and maintaining ethical boundaries when navigating multiple roles.

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7.2: Some Common Types of Mentor/Coaching Programs



Let's Take a Deeper Look

Practicum placements are where theory meets practice, and adult learners apply what they have learned. These placements, however, are not just learning opportunities for the mentee; they are collaborative partnerships that require thoughtful planning, clear expectations, and ethical responsibility.

PREP 2: ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO PRACTICUM SITES

We shall:

Code Prep 2.1- *Clearly state all parties' roles and responsibilities and prepare adult learners, mentors, and administrators for practicum experiences.*

This is addressed in Code Admin 1.9. *All employees should have a copy of any written personnel policies. Clear expectations with a detailed written summary of job duties, clarifies what obligations need to be performed. In addition, the mentor/coach must have clear expectations about the mentor process for the adult learner or mentee.*

A process of placing who will mentor whom should be established in the agency. Optimally, the mentor/coach and mentee will agree upon the placement, because without a good fit of personalities, the process might fail. The mentee must feel comfortable working with the assigned mentor/coach. There are mentor/coach models that are structured, unstructured, and/or formal programs.

Structured Mentor/Coach and Mentee Program: Staff are assigned full time as mentor/coaches and are matched to 10-12 mentees.

Unstructured Mentor/Coach and Mentee Program: A list of mentors is published, and mentees select who they would like to work (usually 1-3 mentees per mentor/coach). The mentor/coach goes to the mentee's site, observes, and provides feedback. An action plan is developed that usually has a duration of 3 to 6 months.

Formal Leadership Mentor/Coach and Mentee Program: For transitioning existing staff into more responsible leadership positions, based on the traditional, individualized, and more intense relationship.

Once the mentor/coach and mentee placement is decided, mentor/coaching may begin. The following are common types of mentor/coaching programs.



The 7-Step Method of Mentor/ Coaching

The 7-Step Method

This mentor/coach process is broken down into 7 steps:

1. Building Relationship
2. Orientation
3. Goal Setting
4. Action
5. Reflection and Feedback
6. Winding Down

7. Moving On

Step 1: Building Relationship

The mentor/coach should reach out to the adult learner and introduce themselves and find a mutual time and place that will work for both parties for a first meeting. During this initial meeting, the most important part is to build rapport and trust, without this, mentoring will not be as effective. Rapport or relationship building requires “active listening, showing genuine interest in the mentee’s concerns, and demonstrating empathy. Sharing personal experience and being available also strengthens the bond. The mentor’s empathetic approach fosters a sense of psychological safety, which is crucial for open communication. It’s about showing up, and not just as a guide, but as a reliable confidant” (Peterka, 2024, para. 13). Once a relationship is established, orientation can begin.

Step 2: Orientation

During the orientation phase, setting direction and ground rules is important. The mentor/coach should state the goal of the relationship and mentor process, discuss and agree upon objectives, and discuss important questions such as:

- What is the mentee’s responsibilities and what is the mentor/coach’s role?
- When and where will the mentor/coach and mentee meet? How often will they meet?
- How long will the mentoring last?
- How and who will decide what goals will be worked on?
- How and who will evaluate these goals?
- How will attaining the goals be supported?
- Will materials be purchased, and by whom?
- Who decides who will mentor which mentee?

There should be written records from the meeting, with copies given to both parties. Orientation is also a good time for the mentor/coach to provide the mentee with clear expectations in the form of written information, such as:

- The employee handbook (Employment policies)
- The parent handbook (Policies and procedures for the children’s program)
- Philosophy of the center
- Bylaws of the board (if applicable)
- Copies of forms used by the center
- Information about the community the center serves
- Information about the staff (job titles, home addresses, telephone numbers, etc.)
- NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (2024) (Appendix A).

Clarity prevents confusion and keeps the focus on the mentee’s growth. According to the California Early Childhood Mentor Program (2022), the goal of mentorship is to build workforce capacity through reflective, interactive, and in-depth study, while providing relevant, inclusive, culturally responsive, and equity driven professional development.

Step 3: Goal Setting

Identify the mentee’s goals, what they wish to achieve, and how they would like to receive the mentor/coach’s support. Most mentees are not sure how to set achievable goals, and an important part of the mentor/coach is to help the mentee define goals and break them into small action steps with realistic milestone markers.

Step 4: Action

The action phase is where the mentee strives towards reaching their goals by trying out different methods of instruction. Hopefully, the mentee will make progress towards achieving their goals. This growth can be demonstrated through changes of old patterns and

starting new, healthy habits as mentees move through challenges. The mentor/coach can help the mentee by providing resource, sharing insights and offering encouragement to persist through difficulties. This stage is also about deepening the role model influence and providing counseling to the mentee. “Mentors support mentees in navigating professional challenges and personal doubts, enhancing their resilience and self-confidence” (Peterka, 2024, para. 17).

Step 5: Reflection and Feedback

Encouraging the mentee to reflect, and providing the mentee with constructive feedback, is an important role of the mentor/coach. This can be challenging because it is easy to hurt someone’s feeling when providing feedback. This is an ideal time for mentors to provide encouragement and help mentees explore their barriers. It is important for mentor/coaches to be thoughtful about navigating the emotions of others and to be sensitive and emotionally available for the emotional needs of the mentee (Peterka, 2024). Acknowledging progress and celebrating achievements reinforces what has been learned by the mentee. Reflection on the achieved goals, reflection on what worked and what did not, helps in this step.

Step 6: Winding Down

There is no set rule about how long a mentor relationship should last, but it is good practice to have an end point in mind when you start. The process can continue as long as both parties agree, new goals are set, or the needs and/or the circumstances of the mentee have changed. As goals are met, the mentoring relationship naturally begins to wind down. This stage is about preparing both the mentor/coach and the mentee for the eventual closure of the formal mentor relationship. The mentor can help the success of the mentee by establishing a network and pathway for continued growth. Of course, continuing to acknowledge the mentee’s progress, and reflecting and celebrating the goals and achievements, is encouraged, during the winding down stage too (Peterka, 2014).

Step 7: Moving On

It is important to understand when it is time to move on. This final step is a transition from structured mentoring to a more autonomous phase for the mentee, with the mentor moving into a less active role, where the mentor/coach only occasionally provides support and guidance. This does not mean the end of a friendship, and many mentors choose to stay in touch and may even have a lifelong friendship. (Peterka, 2024). Mentoring is a transformative process that benefits both parties, and many mentors find that it is important to express gratitude to the mentee for the learning process.



Transformative Coaching Model

Another common module used in mentoring adult learners is the Transformative Coaching Model, which is broken up into 3 phases.

- **Phase 1: Foundational**

The relationship is established. It is important for the mentor/coach and the mentee to meet often, establish rapport and expectations for both parties, and develop an action plan with timelines.

- **Phase 2: Transformative Learning**

While the mentee has been listening, observing, reading, and accepting of learning and when the content and process become internalized, the mentee has reached a higher level of performance and understanding.

- **Phase 3: Reflective Dialogue**

Reflective dialogue takes place and the commitment to integrate and act on the new learning becomes apparent.

Code Prep 2.2- *Recognize and respect the reciprocal relationship between the early childhood program and the institution of higher education, and work to be a partner in addressing needs and providing appropriate support for all parties’ efforts to fulfill their roles and meet program expectations.*



The role of the mentor/coach is to provide guidance, support, and encouragement to the less experienced mentee. They help the mentee to grow personally and professionally. Good mentors act as a sounding board, shares their experiences, and offer advice, all while fostering a relationship of trust and mutual respect. They help mentees clarify goals, develop skills, expand their network, and navigate challenges (California Early Childhood Mentor Program, 2022).

Code Prep 2.3- *Ensure that qualified personnel conduct regular supervision of practicum experiences in order to support professional development of adult learners and monitor the welfare of children.*

Adult learners in practicum placements must be supervised. Participating in a formal mentor program can help ensure quality supervision. Several states have Early Childhood Mentor programs. Agencies such as the California Early Childhood Mentor Association (CECMA) are wonderful organizations to support the mentor process. CECMA partners with community colleges to provide mentorship to students and current professionals. New York also has the New York State Mentoring Program. Additionally, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Colorado, Iowa, and Michigan have mentoring programs.

Code Prep 2.4- *Honor confidentiality, guard the privacy of the programs, its teachers, families, and children—including on all social media platforms—and instill in adult learners a professional obligation to do the same.*

See Code Admin 1.8. All educators, staff, and administration must develop and follow written policies on confidentiality.

Code Prep 2.5- *Make every effort to move adult learners to more appropriate placements in the event that a practicum placement is not supporting adult learners' professional development or is not beneficial to the student or children.*

See Prep 1.8. If possible, mentors help mentees find their niche and an environment where they can shine. Sometimes a change in the practicum site is needed. A switch from one school to another, where the program's philosophies are more closely aligned to the educator's philosophies, can create a better goodness of fit.

PREP 3: ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING AND AGENCIES PROVIDING TRAINING

We shall:

Code Prep 3.1- *Offer professional learning and instruction only in areas in which we have or can obtain appropriate experience and expertise.*

We must reflect on both our strengths and our areas that need to be strengthened (*Note We are avoiding the word “weaknesses” and using strengths-based approach language.) The mentor/coach should only approach this role if they have appropriate knowledge, training, and/or education.



Bunny Trail Footnote 3: Early childhood educators emphasize individualized, relationship-based and strengths-based approaches, reflective practices and constructive communication skills. Thus, this textbook is intentionally avoiding the word “weaknesses” and using strengths-based approach language.

Code Prep 3.2- *Ensure that relevant course and training content is aligned to the Professional Standards and Competencies.*

Mentors should use this entire NAEYC Code of Ethics (2024) as a GPS navigation system for professional standards and competencies and all training materials should reflect this alignment.



Code Prep 3.3- *Respect the integrity of courses by following approved course descriptions and updating content based on up-to-date research.*

Course descriptions are vital documents that must be carefully worded and clarify the content covered in a course. It is important for articulation agreements, education transfer agreements, employers hiring criteria, and accreditation mandates to know what material was covered in a course. To ignore or not follow the course description when teaching material, would be highly unethical. In addition, curriculum must be updated regularly, to incorporate current research data and trends.

Code Prep 3.4- *Evaluate adult learners fairly and without bias, using those standards that are congruent with the mission of our institution and regarded as accepted practice in the field.*

Evaluation should be a regular part of every educator's experience. There are many different employee appraisal methods available, but not every method is appropriate for every situation. Evaluations and how they are conducted can have a huge impact on the success of the business, employee morale, team engagement, promotions, demotions, resignations, and terminations. "It's not just about having a process in place, it's about choosing one that actually supports the outcomes you care about" (Lance, 2025, para 3). Liz Lockhart Lance breaks employee appraisal methods into two types, common and niche.



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7.3: Common Performance Appraisal Types

Type	Best for	Key Benefit	Watch Out for
Traditional Top-Down	Clear hierarchies	Simple and direct	Can feel one-sided or biased
360-Degree Feedback	Leadership development	Well-rounded feedback	Time-consuming and sometimes inconsistent
Self-Assessment	Coaching and reflection	Promotes ownership	Can be inflated or too self-critical
Peer Review	Team-focused roles	Captures peer-level insights	Risk of bias or tension
Management by Objectives (MBO)	Goal-driven work	Aligns goals and outcomes	Can miss the human side of work
Rating Scale (1-5)	Standardizing performance	Easy comparisons	Can oversimplify performance
Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS)	Roles with observable behaviors	Reduces subjectivity	Time intensive to build and maintain; may cause fatigue
Checklist / Weighted Checklist	Large teams or admin simplicity	Fast and consistent	Lacks nuance
Continuous Performance Management (CPM)	Fast-paced environments	Real-time feedback	Can overwhelm if unstructured

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7.4: Niche Performance Appraisal Types

Type	Best For	Key Benefit	Watch Out For
Critical Incident Method	Coaching or behavioral roles	Ties feedback to specific events	Misses broader patterns
Narrative Appraisal	Complex or creative roles	Personalized, detailed feedback	Inconsistent across reviewers
Project-Based Appraisal	Short-term or freelance work	Timely and relevant	Hard to track long-term behaviors
Competency-Based Appraisal	Skill development	Clear growth targets	May miss impact on outcomes
Forced Ranking	High-competition environments	Sharp differentiation	Can damage morale or teamwork
HR Accounting Method	Finance-driven orgs	Ties talent to ROI	Can feel impersonal or abstract
Psychological Appraisal	HiPo identification	Predicts future potential	Requires trained professionals and care in delivery

Using a combination of methods is typical in many settings. For example, Self-Assessment can be used with Management By Objectives (MBO), and /or Critical Incident Method. In Self-Assessment employees evaluate their own performance, reflect on their accomplishments and challenges, and set personal development goals. This can be paired with Management by objectives (MBO), where employees and their supervisors or mentor/coaches, collaboratively set specific, measurable goals, and evaluate them based on whether those objectives are achieved. The Critical Incident Method gives feedback on a specific event that was observed, and then that event is the basis for reflection and discussion (Lance, 2025). It should be noted that co-creating goals with mentees tends to increase ownership and commitment.

Code Prep 3.5- Keep roles separate when our involvement with an adult learner involves more than one role (e.g., instructor, employer, supervisor), and provide decisions, recommendations, and give feedback appropriate to the different contexts.

This was addressed in Code Prep 2.2. Employers should provide appropriate support to fulfill their roles and meet program expectations and roles should be clearly defined. Specifically, the role of the mentor/coach is intended to provide guidance, support, and encouragement to the less experienced mentee. In addition, **Code Admin 1.9** also applies. All employees should have a copy of any written personnel policies, which should define the roles within the agency. If recommendations and feedback are given, they must follow any set policies on employee evaluations.

Supervising and Mentor/Coaching Adult Learners

New teachers need daily or even hourly support. Thus, mentor/coaches must plan to spend some time each day observing them, teaching them, and modeling best practices, which creates a rich learning environment for everyone. “What you are doing, in effect, is providing hourly or daily support during the initial trust-building period but stepping back when the new teacher can function independently. You are scaffolding the experience for the teacher just as you would for a child in the classroom, gradually increasing the challenge as you stay nearby because your ongoing support is still important when things do not go well” (Sciarra et al., 2016, p. 308).

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7.5: Summary

Ethical responsibilities in practicum settings require adult educators to prepare learners, clarify roles, maintain confidentiality, and foster professional relationships rooted in respect and support. Practicum placements function as collaborative partnerships, where thoughtful planning, communication, and mutual expectations help ensure success for both adult learners and early childhood programs.

Best practices in mentoring include goal-setting, consistent feedback, and culturally responsive support tailored to individual learners. Strategies for resolving mismatches between mentors, mentees, and placement sites prioritize the well-being of children and the growth of adult learners. Ethical considerations also extend to supervision, confidentiality, course alignment with standards, and appropriate boundaries when educators serve in multiple roles. Clear expectations, ongoing reflection, and equitable evaluation practices help adult educators support development, accountability, and trust across practicum experiences.

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7.6: Vocabulary

- **Practicum:** *A supervised, hands-on learning experience in a real-world setting where adult learners apply what they've learned in the classroom.*
 - **Confidentiality:** The ethical responsibility to keep private information about children, families, staff, and programs secure and not shared without permission.
 - **Role Clarification:** Clearly defining the responsibilities and expectations of everyone involved, such as the mentor, mentee, and supervisor, to avoid misunderstandings.
 - **Reflective Feedback:** Thoughtful and constructive input provided to help someone learn from their experiences and improve their skills.
 - **Culturally Responsive Mentoring:** Mentoring practices that recognize, respect, and integrate the diverse cultural backgrounds and identities of adult learners.
-

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7.7: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- [The Reflective Educator/Links to an external site.](#)

This Website provides ideas for elementary school teachers who wish to practice "reflective education"

- [Council for Professional Recognition \(CDA\)/Links to an external source:](#)

The Council for Professional Recognition administers the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, which includes resources on professional standards, mentoring, and ethical practices in early childhood education. It discusses role clarification, confidentiality, mentoring action plans, competency-based training, and guidelines for mentoring in practicum settings.

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7.8: References



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Finished Chapter 7

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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8.1: Chapter Introduction

8



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 8, students will be able to:

- **SLO 8.1:** Describe the historical evolution of leadership theory and its relevance to early childhood education.
- **SLO 8.2:** Identify and compare key types of leadership styles, including Great Man Theory, Trait Theory, Style Theory, and Learned Needs Theory.
- **SLO 8.3:** Analyze the impact of toxic leadership and how to recognize ineffective or harmful leadership traits.
- **SLO 8.4:** Reflect on one's own type of leadership style and how it influences relationships with children, families, and colleagues.

Chapter 8 Short Overview



Chapter 8 explores how leadership theories have evolved from top-down industrial models to more collaborative, constructivist paradigms. It examines key theories, such as Great Man Theory, Trait Theory, Leadership Styles Theory, and Theory of Learned Needs, and how these inform different approaches to leadership in ECE settings. It also encourages reflection on how these types of leadership styles influence educational environments and relationships.

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8.2: Bridging Ethics and Leadership- A New Focus



Let's Take a Deeper Look

Having explored the ethical responsibilities that guide early childhood educators, grounded in the NAEYC Code of Ethics, we now turn our attention to a new but closely connected dimension: leadership. While ethics helps us determine *what is right*, leadership determines *how we bring that rightness into action*. Ethical principles give us a moral compass; leadership gives us the tools to navigate the journey, especially when working with diverse teams, managing complex systems, and responding to the ever-changing needs in today's world. In this chapter, we will examine various leadership styles and theories that can strengthen our ethical practice, elevate our influence, and support sustainable change within early learning environments.



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8.3: Leadership Theories Introduction

It was once thought that to be a “leader,” employees had to be in a formal “position” of leadership, such as a director, supervisor, or boss. However, contemporary leadership theory recognizes that leadership is not limited to a job title, it is a shared and relational process grounded in influence, collaboration, and meaningful change. Understanding these theories helps early childhood professionals align their leadership actions with values that promote equity, reflection, and learning.

The Factory Model

The Factory Model dates back to the late 1920s and early 1930's. In this model, leadership is linked with what is called the “industrial paradigm,” where linear and bureaucratic decisions are made from the top and passed down to workers. The model is management oriented, tightly linked to a single leader (often male), and stresses goal achievement, driven by quantitative data (Biddle, 2012). The top-down bureaucratic nature of the Factory Model paradigm extends to the classroom, affecting teaching and learning.

Factory Model Flaws:

- Educators often feel isolated
- Educators are typically told what to teach and how to teach it
- A lack of autonomy can lead to dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and high personnel turnover (revolving door)
- It promotes high levels of student absenteeism, truancy, and lack of student and educator interest
- It promotes poor classroom management and challenging or difficult behavior

Supporters of the factory model often adapt a “teacher-proof” curriculum, sometimes called “curriculum in a box,” where the educator reads text from curriculum instructions verbatim, like a “script” with one “correct” answer. Teachers are expected to carry out the decisions made by directors without having the opportunity to offer any input. This often results in a loss of wonder, curiosity, and lack of motivation to learn on everyone’s part. The educator's effectiveness is usually judged in terms of whether or not goals are met (Biddle, 2012).

Typical Top-down Factory Model Education Goals:

- Use and implement preset mandated curriculum
- Collect and report student progress data
- Maintain preset schedules
- Follow state standards and federal guidelines and prescribed goals
- Implement annual government mandated assessment systems
- Complete paperwork and accountability records



A Change in Leadership Paradigms

Social reform in the 1960's and 1970's and the landmark report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), caused a significant shift in leadership thought within education. The focus moved away from the industrial paradigm toward a model that emphasizes an influence-based relationship among leaders and followers. Its intention was to create meaningful change aligned with shared goals. In this reformed theory, leadership is not a position held by one person, but a mutual relationship where everyone works together collaboratively.

The Constructivist Leadership Approach

By the mid to late 1990's, leadership theories were increasingly viewed as shared responsibilities, grounded in collective purposes of the educational community. Linda Lambert (1998), in her book, *Building Leadership Capacity in Schools* (1998), defined leadership as "the reciprocal learning process that enables participants in a community to construct and influence their own purposes and to support one another in the process" (p. 5). She went on to describe the following core constructivist leadership principles.

Core Principles of Constructivist Leadership or Key Tenets of Constructivist Leadership in Education:

- School leadership needs to be considered as a broad concept, separate from the presumed role of a leader
- Leadership needs to be imbedded in the school community as a whole
- Leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively
- Leadership involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, information, and assumptions through continuing conversations
- Leadership involves seeking to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information
- Actions are created and grow out of new understandings

This constructivist philosophy, like that found in Reggio Emilia, HighScope, the Bank Street Approach, and Montessori, serves as a link between the theories of leadership and early childhood education, by emphasizing the importance of students and teachers actively co-constructing knowledge and understanding and applying that knowledge, instead of accumulating, memorizing, or recalling information (the one "correct" answer).



To be effective, constructivist educators must also take into consideration the following types of goals:

- Constructing and maintaining relationships with students and families
- Engaging in professional development
- Collaborating with colleagues and specialists
- Creating inclusive, equitable learning environments
- Managing classroom behavior
- Fostering social-emotional development
- Adapting instruction for diverse learners
- Conducting observations
- Engaging in reflective practice

The present educational landscape is focused on demonstrated evidence of what works and what doesn't. This focus on quality has opened up numerous debates about what to measure; who to measure; how to measure; how often to measure; when to measure; and even should we measure?

New Paradigm on "Who Is a Leader?"

In today's ECE landscape, **quality** is shaped by multiple dynamic variables and is in stark contrast to the rigid, top-down structure of the factory model. Leadership in ECE is no longer confined to titles or formal positions; it has become a **continuously evolving paradigm** rooted in relationships, collaboration, and reflective practice.

Leadership begins the moment educators:

- Build authentic relationships with one another, families, and children
- Engage in reciprocal learning with students, parents, and peers
- Reflect critically and consistently on their own professional practices

In this broader view, a leader is anyone whose actions positively influence learning and community growth. Leaders are not just those individuals with leadership jobs and degrees, but they are:

- **ECE administrators and educators** who guide learning environments
- **Parents** who are actively involved in supporting their child's development
- **Study group facilitators and participants** who engage in shared professional inquiry
- **University faculty** who mentor and inspire pre-service teachers
- **School volunteers** who contribute time and care
- **Thought leaders and advocates** whose ideas foster meaningful educational change
- **Anyone whose thinking and actions promote intentional, ethical learning**
- Anyone who leads (Biddle, 2012).

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8.4: Different Types of Leadership Styles

In addition to overall leadership theories and their evolution, there is an even more specific category that is well studied, types of leadership styles. The type of leadership present can determine the organizational success of an agency. It is affected by many variables such as personal paradigms, professional development opportunities, level of education, years of experience, communications systems, and organizational structures.

The best educators recognize their own dominant needs and find a balance between their own type of leadership style and the developmental, emotional, and professional needs of both children and adults in their programs. When you understand your type of style, you can “manage differences in how you deal with people, with other types of leadership styles more effectively. You are also able to navigate your own professional growth opportunities, strengths and challenges” (Creighton University Staff, 2024, para. 6). Knowing your type of leadership style can help you make an impact, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that one type of style is better than another (Creighton University Staff).

There are many theories on the different types of leadership styles. The following section zooms in and takes a closer look at the details of some of the common types.



Great Man Theory

The discussion of whether leadership is a behavior, a trait, or a skill has been ongoing. It began with an emphasis on identifying the qualities of “great men.” Much of this theory was developed in the 19th century and is linked to the work of the historian Thomas Carlyle (1841), who commented on the great men or heroes of history saying, “The history of the world is but the biography of great men” (p. 47).

According to the Great Man Theory, a leader is inherently gifted with unique qualities such as superior intellect and leadership abilities, that capture the imagination of the masses and have had a decisive impact on history. The main assumptions were that “powerful leaders are born and not made and that they possess beneficial inherited traits; and they can arise when there is a great need” (Junega, 2025, para 4). All others had to be “led,” and one’s destiny could not be changed because it was innate (Germain, 2008).

Leadership Traits Theory

The Leadership Traits Theory was derived from the Great Man Theory. Trait Theory still emphasizes inherent personality traits and leadership was thought to be a matter of birth, but it added positive traits such as integrity, moral courage, and humility. The emphasis is now on identifying the personal qualities, traits, and abilities that distinguish effective leaders and effective leadership (Germain, 2008).

The Trait Theory approach focuses exclusively on the leader, not the traits of the people being led. In essence, the trait approach is concerned with what traits leaders exhibit and who has those traits. “It does not lay out a set of hypotheses or principles about what kind of leader is needed in a certain situation or what a leader should do, given a particular set of circumstances. Rather, this approach emphasizes that having a leader with a certain set of traits is crucial to having effective leadership. It is the leader and her or his personality that are central to the leadership process” (Germain, 2008, p. 2).



Bunny Trail Footnote 4: Earlier leadership was considered as a quality associated mostly with males; therefore, the theory was named as the great “man” theory and many of the traits cited as being important for effective leaders are often seen as

more typically masculine traits. However, with a significant shift in contemporary research and with the emergence of many great women leaders, the name was changed to the Great “Person” Theory (Junega, 2025).

Research indicates that the possession of certain traits alone does not guarantee leadership success; however, research indicates that there is an association between having certain personality traits and being an effective leader (Germain, 2008). According to Kirkpatrick & Locke (1991), there is evidence that effective leaders are different from non-leaders in six key traits.



Six Key Leadership Traits:

1. **Drive:** A strong motivation to achieve goals, persist through challenges, and take initiative.
2. **The Desire to Lead:** A strong motivation to achieve goals, persist through challenges, and take initiative.
3. **Honesty and Integrity:** A commitment to ethical behavior, transparency, and keeping promises.
4. **Self-confidence:** A belief in one's own abilities and decisions, even in uncertain or difficult situations.
5. **Cognitive Ability:** The capacity to think critically, analyze information, and solve complex problems.
6. **Knowledge of the Business:** An understanding of the organization's operations, goals, and the environment in which it functions (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991).

Data emerged from this research that points to the important role of various personality traits in the leadership process (Germain, 2008).

Lewin's Leadership Style Framework Theory

Kurt Lewin's (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939) early work in the late 1930s laid the foundation for understanding different leadership style approaches with his identification of autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles.

- Autocratic Leadership: (Also called authoritarian leadership) The leader makes decisions unilaterally, with little to no input from group members.
 - o Clear, top-down direction
 - o Strict rules and expectations
 - o Little collaboration or shared decision-making
 - o Quick decision-making
 - o Effective in crisis or time-sensitive situations
 - o Creates low morale
 - o Lacks creativity or engagement from team members

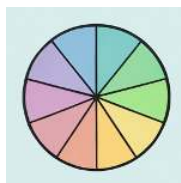
- **Democratic Leadership:** (Also called participative leadership) The leader involves group members in decision-making, encouraging collaboration and input.
 - o Shares leadership and group discussion
 - o Encourages creativity and ownership
 - o Focuses on consensus-building
 - o Creates high morale and team satisfaction
 - o Promotes creativity and diverse perspectives
 - o Can be slower in urgent situations
 - o Risk of indecision if consensus is difficult
- **Laissez-faire Leadership** (French for “let do” or “let them be”) The leader provides minimal guidance and allows group members to make their own decisions and manage their own work.
 - o High autonomy and independence
 - o Leader acts more as a resource than a director
 - o Encourages self-motivation and innovation
 - o Works well with highly skilled or experienced teams
 - o Lack of direction or structure
 - o Can result in confusion or lack of accountability
 - o Can feel like neglectful leadership

Lewin’s leadership theory was groundbreaking because it was one of the first to use empirical research to show how leadership style directly influences group behavior, motivation, and productivity. His theory provided a foundational framework that continues to shape how educators, managers, and leaders understand the relationship between leadership behavior and team dynamics.

Transformational Leadership Theory

In the mid 1970s, Burns (as cited in Sergiovanni, 2001) identified two different leadership styles, transformational and transactional. His work marked a turning point in leadership theory by shifting the emphasis to motivation, ethics, and shared vision. He noted that transformative leadership focuses on higher-order, more intrinsic moral motives and needs and is a process where leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation in pursuit of common goals. Furthermore, transactional leadership focuses on extrinsic motives and needs, where leaders and followers exchange needs and services to accomplish independent goals and objectives.

Today, these two leadership style categories, Lewin’s Leadership Style Framework and Transformational Leadership Theory, have merged and grown into ten common leadership styles: coaching, visionary, servant, autocratic, laissez-faire, bureaucratic, democratic, pacesetter, transformational, and transactional.

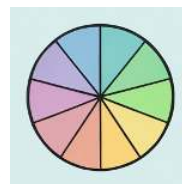


The 10 Common Styles of Leadership

1. **Coaching Leadership:** This style focuses on the individual growth and development of each team member, providing support, guidance, and opportunities for skill enhancement. Coaching leaders prioritize creating a collaborative and empowering environment, helping employees unlock their full potential and maximize performance.

2. **Visionary Leadership:** This style is also known as authoritative leadership, this style involves a leader articulating a clear and compelling vision for the future, inspiring and motivating their team to work towards it. Visionary leaders often act as mentors, providing guidance and feedback while building trust and confidence in their teams.
3. **Servant Leadership:** This style prioritizes the needs of their team and the community, focusing on the well-being and development of others. This style emphasizes empathy, listening, and fostering a culture of trust and inclusion, empowering employees to thrive and contribute meaningfully.
4. **Autocratic Leadership:** This style involves a single leader making decisions with little or no input from the team or subordinates. Autocratic leaders prioritize efficiency and rapid decision-making, often in situations requiring immediate action or in highly regulated industries.
5. **Laissez-faire Leadership:** This style gives employees a high degree of autonomy and independence, trusting them to manage their own work and make decisions. The word laissez-faire is French and means “allow to do.” This style of leadership can foster creativity and individual initiative, but may lack direction, engagement, or accountability if not properly managed.
6. **Bureaucratic Leadership:** This style emphasizes strict adherence to rules, policies, and procedures within a structured hierarchy. Bureaucratic leadership promotes efficiency and consistency, particularly in regulated industries or large organizations with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
7. **Democratic Leadership:** This style is known as participative leadership. It emphasizes collaboration, teamwork, and actively involving all members in the decision-making process. Democratic leaders foster transparency, encourage open communication, and value diverse perspectives, leading to higher employee engagement and satisfaction.
8. **Pacesetter Leadership:** This style sets high performance standards and leads by example. Leaders hold their team accountable for meeting those goals. This style can be effective in motivating high-performing teams in fast-paced environments, but may risk lowering morale if not balanced with appropriate support.
9. **Transformational Leadership:** This style focuses on inspiring and motivating employees to go beyond their self-interests and work towards the betterment of the team and organization. Transformational leaders empower employees, encourage adaptability, and prioritize long-term growth and innovation.
10. **Transactional Leadership:** This style motivates employees through incentives and consequences, setting clear expectations and monitoring performance against specific goals. Transactional leadership thrives in structured environments and is often used in roles with repetitive tasks and measurable outcomes, such as sales (Palmer, 2023).

It is important to remember that many leaders use a blend of these 10 styles depending on the specific situation, team, and context. Flexibility is key.



Sergiovanni's Three Mindscapes of Leaderships

In *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective*, Sergiovanni (2001) introduces three leadership mindscapes: mystics, neats, and scruffies. These distinct approaches help educators reflect on their dominant approach and incorporate elements of the others to lead more wholesomely and effectively. Sergiovanni argued that effective educational leadership requires awareness of all three mindscapes:

- **Mystics:** Reflective, purpose-driven; they bring vision, intuition, and moral grounding.
- **Neats:** Orderly, system-focused, data-oriented; they bring clarity and structure.
- **Scruffies:** Situational, adaptable, community-focused; they bring flexibility, context, sensitivity, and responsiveness.

Mystics approach school administration through intuitive, holistic insight. They see their role as *craft-like*, emphasizing moral imagination, deep values, and personal judgment rather than data-driven metrics. Mystics rely on intuition and principled vision,

viewing leadership as an art grounded in moral purpose.

Neats operate with an *applied-science* mindset, valuing structure, organization, and evidence-based practices. They emphasize systems, procedures, and measurable outcomes, using rational analysis to solve problems. Neats prefer technical precision and standardized methods, seeing leadership as management grounded in data.

Scruffies embrace a *craft-like, pragmatic* approach, which is flexible, adaptive, and good with the immediate, real-world messiness of schools. They prefer hands-on problem-solving over rigid frameworks. Scruffies balance between intuition and structure, valuing context, relationships, and practical judgment as they navigate unpredictable daily challenges.



The 3Rs of Leadership Style

The 3Rs of ECE are important (previously discussed in Chapter 3); and to expand on this concept, we shall examine Biddle's (2012) 3Rs of Leadership. The two concepts are very similar, but not exactly the same.

The Leadership 3Rs

- **Relationship Building:** Seeks to build strong relationships with students, parents, and colleagues
- **Reciprocal Learning:** Everyone is on a learning journey that must be encouraged, supported, and respected.
- **Reflective Practice:** A practice of regular reflection is imperative to becoming a "reflective educator" and strong leader (Biddle, 2012).

The 3Rs of Early Childhood Education (See Chapter 3)

- **Respectful:** Respects all- People, animals, nature, and people's belongings
- **Responsive:** Seeks to be responsive to the needs of others
- **Reciprocal Relationship building:** Technically we have 4Rs here. Relationships should be equal, bidirectional, and reciprocal

The 3Rs of Leadership with Colleagues Requires

- Valuing vulnerability more than power or control
- Being comfortable with uncertainty
- Relinquishing the idea that there is one right answer
- Risk taking and experimentation over prescription
- An emphasis on learning together rather than on figuring things out in isolation
- A shared commitment to community (Biddle, 2012).

Theory of Learned Needs

McClelland's Theory of Learned Needs, also known as the Three Needs Theory, categorized motivational needs and how they might influence behavior. He proposed that people are motivated by three primary needs: achievement, affiliation, and power (Marotz & Lawson, 2007).



1. Need for **Achievement**: “I want to succeed.”

- Leadership Implications
 - Leaders can set high standards, focus on goals, love a challenge, and seek continuous improvement
 - They may push for innovation, excellence, and data-driven assessments
 - Often aligns with transformative leadership, which tends to motivate staff to exceed expectations
 - The risk is that they may focus too much on outcomes and overlook the relational aspects, which are crucial



2. Need for **Affiliation**: “I want to be liked and belong.”

- Leadership Implications
 - Leaders can emphasize teamwork, teambuilding, positive relationships, and a collaborative culture
 - The focus on creating supportive and inclusive environments.
 - Aligns well with servant leadership or democratic leadership, where relationship building is key.
 - The risk is that they may avoid conversations or conflict to preserve harmony.



3. The need for **Power**: “I want to influence and lead.”

- Leadership Implications
 - Leaders tend to be driven to organize, direct, and influence others, either personally (personal power) or organizationally (institution power).
 - The focus can be on effective advocacy, policy leadership, and system-wide reform
 - Can align with a authoritative leadership (clear vision and direction) or instructional leadership (focused on outcomes)
 - The risk is being overly dominant and may alienate team members or overlook collaborations

McClelland (McClelland & Burnham, 1976, as cited in Maritz & Lawson, 2007) suggested that:

- Individuals with a high need for power seek status, social recognition, and influence over others and that these qualities were needed to be an effective leader.
- Individuals who are high achievers are reluctant to delegate tasks to other workers, preferring instead to maintain control of decisions and outcomes; and when work or work environments no longer provide an adequate challenge, they are likely to leave the job.
- Individuals with a high need for affiliation do not make effective leaders or supervisors because they find it difficult to give critical feedback, often show favoritism, and are reluctant to enforce the rules or policies (pp. 38-39).

While his ideas are used primarily to assess work performance, McClelland conducted other studies that centered on how motivation affected one's health, and how an individual's drive to succeed can cause stress, high blood pressure, or abnormal hormone levels. This demonstrated that internal factors, such as a motive, can cause a physical response” (Serhat, 2021, para. 4).



Toxic Leader Theory

The opposite of a good leader is a toxic or bad leader. While one hopes not to have toxic leaders at work- it happens. Educators can learn “what not to do” by looking at this type of style. Marcia Lynn Whicker (1996) coined the term “Toxic Leaders” in her publication *Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad*. She described these leaders as ones who abuse power and leave their organizations and followers in worse condition than they started. Barbara Kellerman (2004) furthered this theory and developed a model to identify seven bad leadership traits.

Seven Types of Toxic Leaders

1. **Incompetent:** Lacks the ability, knowledge, or will to lead effectively and achieve results.
2. **Rigid:** Unwilling or unable to adapt to new ideas, feedback, or changing circumstances.
3. **Intemperate:** Lacks self-control and behaves recklessly, often to the detriment of the organization.
4. **Callous:** Shows a disregard for the needs and well-being of others; emotionally indifferent.
5. **Corrupt:** Engages in unethical or dishonest behavior for personal gain.
6. **Insular:** Disregards the interests, values, or welfare of those outside their own group or circle.
7. **Evil:** Commits or enables harm intentionally, often causing serious moral, psychological, or even physical damage to others.

While confronting toxic leadership can be uncomfortable, it is essential for educators to recognize these traits to safeguard their own well-being and create healthier work environments. Awareness of toxic dynamics allows professionals to set boundaries, seek support, and advocate for cultures that prioritize mental health, ethical behavior, and mutual respect.

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8.5: A Note on Types of Leadership Styles

Leadership theories are not rigid formulas; they are flexible tools educators can draw upon to guide their professional practice. The most effective educators do not rely on a single leadership style, but they adapt and blend various approaches to meet the diverse needs of children, families, and colleagues. By understanding their own tendencies and remaining responsive to their context, educators can lead with both clarity and compassion. As Sergiovanni (2001) reminded us, “When the world cannot be changed to fit your theory, you had better change your theory to fit the world” (p. 49).

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8.6: Summary

Leadership thinking in ECE has developed over time, shifting from rigid, hierarchical, top-down models toward more collaborative and relationship-driven approaches. Leadership is not limited or confined to a title or position, but is instead a dynamic, shared process grounded in influence, ethical action, and reflective practice. Students are encouraged to consider how leadership shapes learning environments and impacts relationships with children, families, and colleagues. The chapter discusses various leadership styles and how they influence team dynamics, communication, and organizational success. It also addresses the warning signs and consequences of toxic leadership, helping educators recognize and respond to harmful behaviors. By reflecting on their own leadership tendencies, students are better prepared to lead with intentionality, adaptability, and compassion in diverse early learning settings.

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8.7: Vocabulary

- **Paradigm:** *The word paradigm comes from the Greek word paradeigma, meaning “example” or “pattern.” A paradigm is a model, framework, pattern of thinking, or an overarching system of ideas and practices that shapes how people understand and interpret the world; thus, the term describes how problems are understood and addressed, such as the constructivist paradigm in ECE, which emphasizes learning through experience and interaction*
 - **Policy:** A policy is a formal rule, guideline, principle, or an official statement adopted by an organization, institution, or government to guide decisions and actions. They are designed to promote consistency, fairness, and accountability in how procedures are carried out and outline expectations or procedures, such as a school’s discipline policy or a state’s early childhood education policy governing teacher qualifications and child-to-adult ratios.
 - **Procedure:** A procedure is a clearly defined, specific, step-by-step set of instructions for how to carry out a task or implement a policy, such as the sign-in and sign-out procedures. They ensure that actions are performed consistently, safely, and efficiently.
 - **The Main Difference between Policies and Procedures:** Policies are overarching rules or principles that guide decision-making and reflect an organization’s values and goals. In contrast, procedures are the specific, step-by-step instructions that explain how to carry out those policies in daily practice. Policies say what to do; procedures explain how to do it.
-

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8.8: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- [Creighton University Blog/Links to an external source](#)

The Creighton University blog post titled *8 Most Common Leadership Styles* provides accessible and practical descriptions of widely recognized leadership styles, including visionary, servant, transformational, transactional, democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, and pacesetter

- [ERIC Document/Links to an external source:](#)

The ERIC article *Traits and Skills Theories as the Nexus Between Leadership and Expertise* offers a scholarly review of how leadership theories have evolved, particularly focusing on the traits and skills approach.

- [Education Library/Links to an external source](#)

The Education Library article on *McClelland's Three Needs Theory* explains how three core motivational drivers, power, achievement, and affiliation, influence leadership behavior.

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Finished Chapter 8

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: Mentorship Theories in Education

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9.1: Chapter Introduction

9



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 9, students will be able to:

- **SLO 9.1:** Identify and describe key features of mentoring theories relevant to early childhood education.
- **SLO 9.2:** Compare and contrast traditional mentoring approaches with equity-based or reciprocal mentoring models.
- **SLO 9.3:** Apply mentoring theories to real-world scenarios involving new teacher support, professional growth, or leadership development.

Chapter 9 Short Overview

Chapter 9 introduces students to ten influential mentoring theories that support ethical leadership and adult learning in early childhood education. Building on the leadership foundations from Chapter 8, this chapter highlights how mentoring serves as a bridge between theory and practice. Each model offers tools for cultivating reflective, inclusive, and growth-centered relationships. These approaches empower mentors to guide, support, and advocate for emerging educators.

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9.2: Introduction to Mentor Theories



Let's Take a Deeper Look

In the evolving field of ECE, strong leadership is grounded not only in theory and style, but also in the relational practice of mentorship. Having explored foundational leadership theories and diverse leadership styles in chapter 8, we now turn to the heart of how those theories are applied through mentoring. Mentorship is a powerful tool for cultivating professional identity, building reflective practice, and ensuring ethical, inclusive, and effective teaching. Whether formal or informal, hierarchical or reciprocal, mentoring relationships shape how educators grow, learn, and lead. In this chapter, we explore ten key mentoring theories, our “Top 10 List,” that offer insight into how mentors can support, challenge, and empower early educators. These models provide diverse pathways for fostering professional development, resilience, and social justice within the ECE workforce.

1. *Cognitive Apprenticeship (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989)*

Cognitive apprenticeship emphasizes learning through directed participation in authentic activities through guided experience in real-world contexts. In this model, mentors serve as expert practitioners who model thinking processes, problem-solving strategies, and reflective decision-making for their mentees. This theory highlights the importance of making thinking visible and supports the development of reflective, competent professionals. The approach includes six key components: modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, and exploration.

In early learning environments, this translates to a mentor demonstrating how to manage a classroom, engage with children in developmentally appropriate ways, or navigate family communication, all while gradually transferring responsibility to the mentee. By making tacit knowledge explicit, mentors help novices internalize the “why” behind the “what,” preparing them for independent and confident teaching. Mentors help mentees unpack these subtleties by modeling strategies and inviting reflection; thus, creating a bridge between theory and practice. (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989).

2. *Critical Mentoring (Weiston-Serdan, 2017)*

Critical mentoring centers on equity, identity, and systemic awareness and calls for a reexamination of traditional mentoring practices. Unlike traditional models that emphasize assimilation or skill-building alone, critical mentoring addresses the social, political, and cultural contexts that affect mentees’ lives and development. Weiston-Serdan’s work highlights how mentorship must acknowledge and address race, power, privilege, and identity. Mentors are not just role models or guides; they are co-conspirators in equity. Critical mentoring encourages mentees to challenge oppressive systems and provides space for their lived experiences and voices to be validated.

This approach is vital for cultivating inclusive classrooms and responsive educators. Critical mentors engage in dialogue about race, power, and oppression, helping mentees grow as advocates for children and families who are marginalized or underserved. This model shifts mentoring from neutral support to a transformative, justice-oriented practice. It is particularly important for developing leaders who serve diverse children and families and who must be prepared to advocate for systemic change within educational and policy contexts.

3. *Situated Learning/Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991)*

Situated learning theory suggests that learning is inherently social and context-dependent. Communities of Practice (CoP) provide a supportive framework for continuous learning, where early educators build their identity and competence through relational, real-world engagement. The mentor is not a distant expert, but a fellow participant. Rather than acquiring knowledge in isolation, mentees develop expertise through participation in authentic tasks within a community. Learning is most effective when it takes place, or is “situated,” in the context in which it is applied, allowing newcomers to learn from experts by participating in shared practices.

This theory comes to life when new educators engage with more experienced peers through collaborative lesson planning, shared observations, co-teaching, and reflective discussion during staff meetings. Over time, new educators move from peripheral participation (observing or assisting) to fuller engagement in the professional culture and become more central to the community, gaining confidence and competence through relational and contextual learning.

4. *Developmental Mentoring (Kram, 1985; Clutterbuck, 2004)*

Developmental mentoring offers a framework that sees mentoring as a dynamic relationship typically unfolding in four stages: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. This theory describes the evolution of a mentoring relationship over time, and includes two broad functions: career support and development (like coaching, sponsorship, and exposure); and psychosocial support (such as encouragement, role modeling, and emotional guidance). Clutterbuck expanded this model to highlight how effective mentors adapt their style to meet mentees' changing needs over time. The strength of developmental mentoring lies in its recognition that mentoring relationships evolve and deepen with trust and mutual growth.

In ECE, mentors typically helping new teachers learn classroom techniques while also nurturing their professional identity and confidence. This model is particularly helpful in settings where new educators need both professional skills and emotional resilience. A mentor might begin by helping a mentee adjust to daily routines and later become a trusted advisor for career planning or leadership development.

5. *Reflective Practice (Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996)*

Reflective practice involves learning through thoughtful examination of one's actions, beliefs, and outcomes. It is foundational to both professional development and ethical decision-making. Donald Schön introduced the concepts of "reflection-in-action" (during practice) and "reflection-on-action" (afterward), emphasizing how professionals learn by analyzing their own actions in real time and retrospectively. Zeichner and Liston expanded this idea to include critical reflection on systemic issues and assumptions.

Mentoring with a reflective lens involves creating space for mentees to ask deep questions, revisit experiences, and engage in cycles of inquiry. It encourages educators to continuously examine their teaching, assumptions, and professional values. It also helps educators become more aware of their values and biases, strengthening their capacity to lead with intentionality and care. Reflective practice fosters a deeper understanding of child development, ethical dilemmas, and classroom dynamics, helping mentees build a habit of lifelong reflection, learning, and intentional practice.

6. *Transformational Mentoring (Mezirow, 1991; Freire, 1970)*

Transformational mentoring focuses on deep, paradigm-shifting learning that reshapes a mentee's worldview and creates profound changes in thinking and identity. It builds on Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, which promotes new perspectives through critical reflection and the examination of assumptions, and Freire's concept of "conscientização," or developing critical consciousness, as a path to empowerment and liberation. **Conscientização** is the process by which individuals develop a deep, reflective awareness of their social, political, and economic realities, particularly the structures of oppression that shape their lives. It is not just about gaining knowledge, but about awakening to the ways systems of power function and learning to take action to transform them.

Transformational mentoring invites educators to question assumptions about children, families, and education systems. It encourages the use of voice, agency, and advocacy, helping mentees become change agents who shape more just and empowering learning environments. In mentoring relationships, this means guiding mentees not only toward technical skill, but also toward self-awareness, equity-mindedness, and social responsibility. Transformational mentoring is especially powerful for preparing educators to challenge inequities, support diverse families, and view teaching as a practice of freedom.

7. *Peer/Reciprocal Mentoring*

Peer mentoring, sometimes called reciprocal mentoring, recognizes the power of non-hierarchical learning partnerships and emphasizes mutual learning. Both parties are learners and teachers, offering mutual support, shared problem-solving, and co-reflection. Colleagues mentor one another by sharing experiences, strategies, and reflection. This model values collaboration, respect, and equality.

Peer mentoring is particularly effective in collaborative ECE environments where educators may be at similar levels of experience, but each brings different strengths. They can coach each other through classroom challenges, co-plan curriculum, or co-reflect on ethical questions. Peer mentoring supports a culture of teamwork and shared leadership. It also reduces power imbalances and builds professional trust. Whether formalized through team teaching or informal check-ins, peer mentoring fosters collegiality, openness, and continuous learning, making it a strong model for inclusive and supportive professional growth. Peer mentoring can be especially empowering in diverse and distributed learning communities.

8. *Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 1997)*

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) emphasizes growth through connection, mutual empathy, and authenticity. Unlike traditional models that frame mentoring as a one-way transfer of knowledge, RCT frames the relationship itself as the site of learning and transformation. This theory is grounded in the belief that growth occurs through relationships characterized by empathy, mutuality, authenticity, and emotional presence. RCT challenges individualistic and power-laden models of development, focusing instead on connection and emotional presence.

In mentoring relationships, RCT supports the development of trust, safety, and shared growth. Mentors and mentees engage in a two-way process of learning and healing. In ECE, where relationships are central to all teaching and leadership, this model affirms the emotional labor of teaching, nurtures resilience, and aligns with the values of care, empathy, and relational presence. A mentor grounded in RCT listens deeply, shares vulnerability, and honors the humanity of the mentee. This creates a safe space for risk-taking, identity formation, resilience, and transformation, especially important in emotionally demanding work like early childhood education.

9. *Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1980s)*

Malcolm Knowles' theory of adult learning, known as andragogy, suggests that adults learn best when they are self-directed, bring prior life experience to the process, and engage with learning that is relevant and problem-centered. The benefit from choice, collaboration, and meaningful application. Key principles of this theory include the use of life experience as a resource, recognizing readiness to learn based on real-life needs, and fostering intrinsic motivation tied to meaningful application. Adult learners are viewed as capable, autonomous, and highly motivated when learning is participatory and applicable to their lives.

Mentoring grounded in adult learning theory treats mentees as partners in the learning process. Mentors engage in dialogue, tailor support to the individual needs and goals of the mentee, and encourage reflective and independent learning. This approach fosters autonomous learning and empowers adult educators to grow with purpose, confidence, and agency. In ECE, adult learning theory reminds mentors to avoid overly directive or top-down approaches. Instead, mentors collaborate with mentees to co-construct goals, reflect on real-life challenges, and apply theory to practice. This learner-centered stance reinforces autonomy, intrinsic motivation, meaningful engagement, and long-term professional growth.

10. *Sponsorship and Network-Based Mentoring (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; Higgins & Kram, 2001)*

Sponsorship and network-based mentoring emphasize the importance of advocacy, visibility, and strong relationships in helping people grow professionally in career advancement. While traditional mentoring often focuses on support and advice, sponsorship adds another layer. Mentors actively open doors and create opportunities for their mentees. This might include recommending them for leadership roles, introducing them to influential colleagues or stakeholders, publicly endorsing their work, or speaking up on their behalf in important conversations. They help underrepresented educators gain access to policy circles, professional organizations, and leadership pathways.

Network-based mentoring also recognizes that one mentor cannot do it all. Instead, mentees benefit from having a group of mentors, each offering something unique, such as different experiences, skills, or access to networks. This approach is especially valuable for advancing equity, supporting educators from underrepresented backgrounds, and helping them move into leadership roles. A network-based approach ensures that professional growth is shared, supported, and rooted in community. It also safeguards that mentees are not overly dependent on a single mentor and are instead supported by a community of advocates, enriching their professional growth and resilience.

Figure 9.1 Top 10 Mentoring Theories in Early Childhood Education

	Theory	Key Contributors	Core Concepts	ECE Connection
1.	Cognitive Apprenticeship	Collins, Brown, & Newman (1989)	Modeling, coaching, scaffolding; learning through guided practice	Mentors make thinking visible and gradually transfer responsibility; aligns with hands-on, reflective learning in ECE.
2.	Critical Mentoring	Weiston-Serdan(2017)	Focus on identity, power, and social justice in mentoring relationships	Encourages equity-minded educators who advocate for marginalized children and families.
3.	Situated Learning / CoP	Lave & Wenger (1991)	Learning as participation in social contexts; legitimate peripheral participation	Supports collaborative learning environments like team teaching and reflective staff practices.
4.	Developmental Mentoring	Kram (1985); Clutterbuck (2004)	Career and psychosocial support; evolving stages of mentoring	Supports new educators' adjustment, confidence building, and career growth over time.
5.	Reflective Practice	Schön (1983); Zeichner & Liston (1996)	Reflection-in-action and on-action; systemic and ethical reflection	Promotes thoughtful, ethical, and intentional teaching practices.
6.	Transformational Mentoring	Mezirow (1991); Freire (1970)	Critical reflection, identity shifts, empowerment	Helps educators develop agency, challenge assumptions, and become advocates for justice.
7.	Peer / Reciprocal Mentoring	Various	Mutual support and shared learning among peers	Fosters collegiality, teamwork, and reflective practice within early childhood teams.
8.	Relational Cultural Theory	Jordan (1997)	Growth through empathy, mutuality, and emotional presence	Honors relational and emotional nature of ECE teaching and mentoring.
9.	Adult Learning Theory	Knowles (1984)	Adults are self-directed, goal-oriented, and bring prior experience to learning; learning is most effective when relevant and problem-centered	Guides mentors to respect adult learners' autonomy, build on their experiences, and create practical, meaningful learning opportunities in ECE settings
10.	Sponsorship and Network-Based	Ibarra, Carter, & Silva (2010); Higgins & Kram(2001)	Advocacy, visibility, and diversified mentoring relationships	Supports underrepresented educators in gaining access to leadership

pathways and builds a broad support network.
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9.3: Summary

The mentoring theories explored in this chapter reveal that effective leadership is not only about directing others but also about cultivating growth through intentional relationships. Each model offers a unique lens, whether it's the hands-on guidance of cognitive apprenticeship, the transformative possibilities of critical or transformational mentoring, or the emotional resonance of relational cultural theory. These approaches help build ethical, collaborative, and equity-focused early childhood educators. As we move into Chapter 10, we will examine how these mentorship practices intersect with broader systems of change. Understanding change theories will further equip leaders to navigate complex educational landscapes, advocate for systemic transformation, and lead with clarity and purpose in times of uncertainty.

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9.4: Vocabulary

- **Communities of Practice:** *Groups of learners who share knowledge and develop professionally through collaborative participation.*
 - **Reflective Practice:** *The ongoing process of examining one's teaching beliefs, actions, and outcomes to improve practice.*
 - **Andragogy:** The theory of adult learning that emphasizes self-direction, life experience, and relevance in educational experiences.
 - **Sponsorship** – *A mentoring function in which a mentor actively advocates for a mentee's advancement by using their influence and networks.*
-

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9.5: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- [National Mentoring Resource Center/links to an external source:](#)

Offers research-based tools, resources, and best practices related to mentoring across diverse fields, including education. Useful for understanding formal and informal models of mentoring.

- [Harvard Graduate School of Education– Usable Knowledge: Mentorship Articles/links to an external source:](#)

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/uk> (Search: "mentoring")

Provides digestible summaries of research on mentoring, adult learning, and teacher development. Good for connecting theory to practice.

- [Learning Forward– Mentoring and Coaching Resources/links to an external source:](#)

<https://learningforward.org> (Search: "mentoring")

Focuses on mentoring and coaching within professional learning communities. Offers strategies for leadership, support, and reflection in educational environments.

- [The Center for Reflective Community Practice– MIT OpenCourseWare/links to an external source:](#)

<https://ocw.mit.edu> (Search: "reflective practice")

Offers open-access content on reflective practice, adult learning, and transformational leadership, all central to mentoring frameworks.

- [The Center for Equity and Inclusion/links to an external source:](#)

Supports deeper understanding of identity, power, and equity- core themes in critical and relational-cultural mentoring.

- [Adult Learning Principles \(by Knowles\)/links to an external source:](#)

A well-regarded overview of Malcolm Knowles' adult learning theory, foundational for mentorship in ECE and beyond.

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Finished Chapter 9

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Leading Ethical Change

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10.1: Chapter Introduction

10



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 10, students will be able to:

- **SLO 10.1:** Identify the difference between Individual change and systemic change.
- **SLO 10.2:** Evaluate personal leadership strengths and growth areas in relation to guiding ethical and sustainable change in education.
- **SLO 10.3:** Identify common sources of change in early childhood programs and assess their potential impact on educators, children, and families.
- **SLO 10.4:** Analyze major change models and describe how they can be applied in real-world ECE settings.

Chapter 10 Short Overview

Chapter 10 explores the difference between individual and systemic change in early childhood education, emphasizing the importance of ethical leadership in driving meaningful transformation. The chapter introduces major change theories for reflection. It examines how change happens across policies, relationships, and beliefs, and how educators can lead with both strategy and empathy. The chapter encourages a relational, reflective, and justice-centered approach to leadership.

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10.2: Change Theories



Let's Take a Deeper Look

Change is a common thread that runs through life. The world evolves rapidly, and organizations must adapt just as quickly; and the field of education is no exception. In early childhood programs, change may come in many forms: staffing shifts, funding cycles, new state mandates, or emerging best practices. Organizations that handle change well tend to thrive; those that do not may struggle to survive.



Systemic change transforms the underlying structures, policies, mindsets, and relationships of an entire system. In ECE, it typically refers to programs, agencies, and institutions, rather than just individual people and their practices. However, individual change and systemic change often occur simultaneously. An example of an individual change might involve a teacher choosing to bring in books on inclusion or revising classroom rules to be more inclusive and responsive to individual needs. A systemic change, however, might involve leadership or management reviewing and updating inclusion policies and then adopting an organization-wide training on supporting children with disabilities or those who are differently abled.

The following theories on change help illuminate how meaningful transformation happens, not just within individual classrooms, but across entire systems. The different frameworks offer practical tools, clear steps, and helpful insights for guiding change with purpose and care.



Water of Systems Change Framework

One useful model for understanding the depth of systemic change in ECE is the *Water of Systems Change* framework developed by the Early Childhood Developmental Health Systems initiative (2024). They state, “Systems change is about shifting the conditions that hold a problem in place. The Water of Systems Change framework provides an actionable model that early childhood system leaders can use to produce measurable, lasting impact” (paras. 1-2).

Additional studies by Kania, Kramer, & Senge (n.d), found that “agencies involved in systemic change can increase their odds for success by focusing on the least explicit, but most powerful conditions for change, while also turning the lens on themselves” (Kania, Kramer, & Senge, para. 1). *The Water of Systems Change model* is depicted as an “inverted triangle,” with Six Conditions of Systems Change.



Bunny Trail Footnote 5: There has been much debate in the field of ECE about what words should be used for children with disabilities. For many years, the term “children with special needs” was used. The words “children with” intentionally preceded the word “special” and adheres to “people first language.” The word “special” was also intentionally used because every young child is special and it does not focus on what the child cannot do; whereas, the word “disabled” implies that the person is “un-able” to do something. The debate continues, but some prefer the term “differently abled,” because it shifts the focus from what a person “cannot” do, to the unique ways they “can” do things.

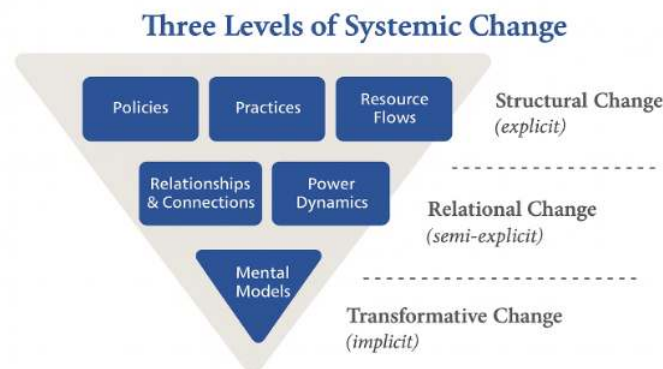
The Six Conditions of Systems Change

(Starting from the bottom of the inverted triangle with the implicit or “least explicit.”)

- Level 1- Implicit: (Transformative Change)
 1. Condition 1- Mental Models
- Level 2- Semi-explicit: (Relational Change)
 2. Condition 2- Relationships and Connections
 3. Condition 3- Power Dynamics
- Level 3- Explicit: (Structural Change)
 4. Condition 4- Policies
 5. Condition 5- Practices
 6. Condition 6- Resource Flow

Figure 10.1 Three Levels of Systemic Change

(Figure 10.1 The Water of Systems Change image is an AI generated graphic through ChatGPT)



The Water Systems Change framework gives educators a practical way to create a fairer and more equitable environment, by looking at the bigger picture. So, instead of just fixing surface-level problems, it helps shift the deeper conditions that keep those problems in place. Moreover, in order to really make lasting change, educators need to reflect on their own beliefs and habits, and they must be open to doing things differently. Real lasting change is more likely to occur when we work on the three interconnected levels: implicit conditions (the hidden beliefs and assumptions that shape how we see the world, including mental models and deeply held beliefs); semi-explicit conditions (the way people relate and share power- power dynamics and relationships); and explicit conditions (what we can clearly see and change, such as policies, rules, routines, and practices).

“Real and equitable progress requires exceptional attention to the detailed and often mundane work of noticing what is invisible to many”

(Kania, Kramer, & Senge, n.d., para. 4).

Lewin's Change Management Model

In the 1940s, Kurt Lewin, the same theorist who described Lewin's Leadership Style Framework in Chapter 8, developed a change model known as *Unfreeze, Change, Refreeze*. This theory refers to the three-stage process of change, described using the analogy of changing the shape of a block of ice.

If you have a cube of ice but want a sphere, you must:

- **Unfreeze:** Melt the ice to make it amenable to change. This stage prepares the organization by helping stakeholders recognize the need for change, communicating reasons and benefits, and addressing concerns or resistance through involvement.
- **Change (Transition):** Pour the melted water into a spherical mold and make actual changes to processes, structures, or behaviors. Provide coaching, support, and maintain clear communication to reduce uncertainty and build confidence.
- **Refreeze:** Freeze the water into the new shape, solidifying the new state as the norm. Reinforce behaviors and processes, ensure changes are incorporated into culture and practices, and encourage ongoing feedback for continuous improvement.

Remember, resistance to change is natural. Change should be viewed as an ongoing process, not a one-time event. Lewin's straightforward model helps leaders manage change initiatives and foster a culture of adaptability (Bell, 2025).

Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model

John Kotter (1996) offers a structured, step-by-step approach to leading organizational change. His model has been widely used in business and education to guide successful transformation.

Kotter's Eight Steps:

1. **Create a sense of urgency:** Highlight why change is needed now to motivate action
2. **Build a guiding coalition:** Assemble a team with credibility and influence to lead the effort
3. **Form a strategic vision and initiatives:** Develop a clear direction and actionable steps
4. **Enlist a volunteer army:** Communicate widely to win support and engagement
5. **Enable action by removing barriers:** Address policies, structures, or attitudes that block progress
6. **Generate short-term wins:** Celebrate early successes to maintain momentum
7. **Sustain acceleration:** Keep learning, adjusting, and pushing forward
8. **Institute change:** Embed new approaches into culture, policies, and everyday practice

Kotter's model reminds leaders that implementation matters as much as vision. Without careful attention to sequencing, communication, and inclusion, even the best ideas can fail to take root.

Effective systemic change requires more than a compelling vision, it requires the intentional development of the people responsible for implementing it. Sustainable, center-based change is achieved through ongoing, embedded staff development that aligns with the program's mission and values. Rather than relying on one-time trainings or top-down mandates, effective leadership fosters regular participation, reflective, and responsiveness to the evolving needs of educators. Ethical leadership promotes adult learning environments grounded in trust, professional respect, and shared responsibility. Educators must not only manage change, but develop the capacity of others to grow with it (Bloom, 2011).

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10.3: Leadership, Ethics, and Morality

Not all change is good change, and not all leadership is ethical. As discussed in Chapter 8, toxic leadership is marked by exclusion, control, or dishonesty and can lead to fear, burnout, and resistance. Effective educational leadership goes beyond managerial competence; it demands moral clarity, cultural sensitivity, and strategic reflection. That's why change cannot be only about new strategies or systems; it must also be grounded in strong morals and values.

*“Technique without morals is a menace
Morals without technique is a mess”*

(J. A. Mackay, as quoted by P. Mesa, personal communication, 2005).

The following frameworks offer powerful tools that not only outline how change can happen, but they also help to ensure that change is rooted in morality and ethics.

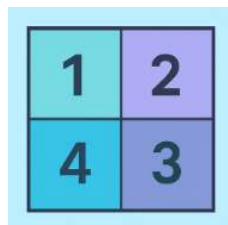
Fullan's Change Theory

Michael Fullan (2007) emphasizes that change in education is complex, nonlinear, and deeply human. His theory recognizes that resistance is normal and often rooted in fear, exhaustion, or past failures, not laziness or incompetence. Leaders must focus on capacity building, not just compliance. Fullan's work looked at moral purpose and the ethical commitment to making a difference in the lives of all students, particularly those who are underserved. Moral purpose must be paired with relational trust, collaborative capacity, and strategic *action* to create meaningful, lasting change.

Key concepts from Fullan's work:

- **Relationships matter:** Lasting change happens in trusting, collaborative environments
- **Resistance is information:** Listen carefully, opposition often highlights overlooked issues
- **Shared purpose is essential:** Vision must be co-constructed, not imposed
- **Sustainability depends on systems, not heroes:** Leadership is distributed, not centralized

Fullan reminds us that real change isn't driven by charismatic individuals alone, but by collective responsibility and shared values. Change isn't easy, but when people feel supported, connected, and aligned around a shared goal, even difficult changes become possible.



The Leadership Quadrants of Concern

Pete Mesa and Diana Ketelle (Ketelle & Mesa, 2006) in their publication *Leadership Quadrants of Concern* described how ethical leadership, uses both technical skill and ethical clarity for sustainable, meaningful change.

This model provides a practical framework for understanding the multifaceted and complex nature of educational leadership. It identifies four interdependent domains of responsibility that serve as anchors for moral, ethical, and empathetic leadership planning, decision-making, and reflection:

1. **Socio-Political:** Community engagement, partnerships, public relations, and political climate.
2. **Programmatic:** Curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development.
3. **Climate/Culture:** School norms, student-teacher relationships, morale, and emotional safety.
4. **Organizational Management:** Resource allocation, scheduling, personnel, and operations.

Three Considerations

Each quadrant should be viewed through three reflective considerations to ensure empathetic, ethical, and inclusive leadership: Time, Context, and Point of View (POV).

1. **Time:** This consideration requires the leader to consider the past history of change in the organization; the present readiness in the organization for changing the organization; and the future as it is envisioned in five years.
2. **Context:** What are the norms and the values of the organization? What are the community norms and values? What is the psychological-emotional climate? Is the school environment troubled, conflicted, or relaxed?
3. **Point of View (POV):** Leaders need to actively seek out alternative points of view and this can be done by framing issues from the perspective of the leader, the organizational member responsible for serving the organization or its clients, or the organization's client or an objective other. Alternative points of view can also be sought from professional literature, from experienced and knowledgeable consultants, or from persons with experience in leading in specific kind of change.

Quadrants and Considerations Together

The Leadership Quadrants of Concern represent a way to conceptualize an educational leader's job. The quadrants help to consider how forces can be brought in line to support school change and organizational functioning. By addressing the 3 considerations (Time, context, and POV) in each quadrant, a leader is more likely to ensure that perspectives, opinions and beliefs of a wide constituency will be considered. This reduces the probability of overlooking essential obstacles.

Mesa's Five Guiding Questions

In addition to quadrants and considerations, Mesa (2005, personal correspondence) in a doctoral lecture at Mills College, posed guiding questions to offer a reflective scaffold, which anticipates challenges and aids in ethical, effective decision making.

Five Guiding Questions for Systemic Change

1. Does the Change Align with Our Purpose?
 - o Does it advance the mission and support student well-being?
2. How Will This Change Impact Resources?
 - o What are financial, time, and staffing costs? Can we afford it without compromising core functions?
3. What Are the Ethical and Legal Considerations?
 - o Is the change morally and legally defensible? Does it align with organizational values?
4. Does This Decision Advance Community Aspirations?
 - o Is it inclusive? Does it uplift community hopes and values?
5. What Are the Human Consequences?
 - o Will people be alienated or displaced? Are affected voices respected?

Sergiovanni's Five Forces of Leadership

Sergiovanni (2001), previously discussed in chapter 8, also proposed five interrelated forces that highlight the need to integrate management skills with human values, cultural awareness, and symbolic leadership. Effective schools not only operate efficiently but also inspire shared meaning and community commitment.

- **Technical Force:** Power derived from sound management and organizational operations
- **Human Force:** Leadership centered on interpersonal relationships, fostering trust and motivation
- **Educational Force:** Leadership rooted in expertise on teaching, learning, and curriculum
- **Symbolic Force:** Use of stories, rituals, and symbols to emphasize core values and inspire identity
- **Cultural Force:** Nurturing community values, traditions, and norms to build cohesion and shared purpose

Sergiovanni argues that balancing these forces with moral purpose and shared vision fosters effective, resilient educational communities.

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10.4: Leadership as a Moral and Political Act



Ethical leaders in ECE must be advocates, courageously questioning the status quo and using their influence to shift systems, not just practices. It is their responsibility to ensure that equity, inclusion, and justice are embedded in personal values, institutional frameworks, and public policy. True change in early childhood education begins when leadership is guided by both their heart and their conscience, grounded in relationships, and committed to transforming systems for the betterment of children.

A new system implemented without reflection on who it serves, or who it harms, can become just another form of oppression. True systemic change requires examining power, challenging assumptions, and working together to build more equitable and inclusive communities

As Paulo Freire famously asserted:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire, 1970, p. 34).

In other words, education can either be used to make people fit into the current system and follow its rules, **or** it can help people think critically and creatively so they can understand the world and work to change it. Freire's insight reminds us that education is not neutral; it is either a tool for maintaining existing power structures, or a stimulus for freedom and transformation. bell hooks (1994), in her book titled *Teaching to Transgress*, emphasized Freire's notions and the concept that real education is a political act; one that should challenge and change oppressive systems rather than uphold them. Ethical leadership must foster dialogue that empowers all voices in the change, especially those voices most impacted by inequities in our systems.

While systemic change provides a powerful framework for shifting policies, practices, and power structures, real transformation begins with people, and the conversations they are willing to have. Ethical leadership in ECE isn't just about redesigning systems from the top down; it's about creating space for authentic dialogue, lived experience, and courageous voice from the bottom up. As hooks and Freire indicated, change that leads to justice must be rooted in relationships, reflection, and a commitment to listening, especially to those who have historically been oppressed and silenced.

"I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform"

(Dewey, 1897, p. 80).

Curriculum as a Change Agent

John Dewey (1897) viewed education not merely as a vehicle for individual growth but as a catalyst for social progress and democratic reform. He believed that true learning emerges when children engage with real social situations, connecting the students' school to life, thus connecting students' knowledge to the world. Dewey emphasized the importance of balancing individual development with collective responsibility, and he urged educators to align curriculum with economic, technological, and cultural changes of society. In this view, curriculum is not just a set of standards or content areas, it is a living force that shapes citizens and prepare them for democratic participation in society.

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10.5: Theories on Change- From Systemic to Individual Change

“Voice is power; and academic voice is persuasive power!”

(Daly, 2025).

“Voice” is a powerful tool, and it is needed to enlighten and educate others on differing viewpoints. In past traditional school settings, voice has often been seen as an invalid interruption or distraction, something that detracts from the educator’s authority (Paratore & McCormack, 1997). Many classrooms have operated under the assumption that students should be silent and passive. However, voice is an important aspect of the curriculum, and not an interruption to learning, but an indication that learning is occurring. Voice enriches all participants and creates a democratic learning environment. Hooks (1994) stated:

Making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy... As the classroom becomes more diverse, teachers are faced with the way the politics of domination are often reproduced in the educational setting. For example, white male students continue to be the most vocal in our classes. Students of color and some white women express fear that they will be judged as intellectually inadequate by these peers (p. 136).

Voice builds community within the classroom and creates a climate of openness; and intellectual rigor depends on recognizing the value of each individual voice. This shared commitment to dialogue binds learners together in pursuit of common goals. This aligns with the constructivist classroom and Vygotsky’s theory of Semiotic Mediation, discussed in chapter 5, which describes the process of moving between public interaction and private thought. Vygotsky believed that learning was enhanced when children engaged in dialogue with peers; and that these social exchanges mediated thinking and helped to construct meaning. Through discussion, learning and understanding are shaped collaboratively (Bodrova, & Leong, 2007). Voice is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of one’s lived experience, making experience a legitimate and powerful way of knowing.



Experience as a Valid Way of Knowing

Hooks (1994) saw experience as a “valid and vital form of knowledge” and challenged conventional hierarchies from privileged, expert-derived knowledge. Educators can dismantle what is known as Freire’s (1970) “banking model” of education, by placing students’ life experiences at the center of education. In the Banking Model, teachers deposit information and students are just passive receptacles, absorbing information without engagement. Teaching becomes a one-way “narrative” process where educators deliver content, and students are expected to memorize it, and repeat it without change or much critical reflection. The Banking analogy is much like making a deposit at the bank and being able to withdraw it at whatever moment one fancies. The teachers withdraw the information in the form of quizzes, exams, written work, or in-class questions. However, in reality, people’s knowledge is not like bank deposits and withdrawals.

According to Freire (1970), educators must create learning spaces rooted in mutual respect and shared authority. By treating personal and cultural experience as valid forms of knowledge, classrooms become more meaningful and connected to real life. When we allow our personal and cultural experiences into the classroom, learning becomes more meaningful and connected to real life. Valuing a person’s experience does not hinder discussion; instead, it enriches it by linking abstract concepts to concrete reality.

Conflict and Discomfort in Learning

Open dialogue can sometimes lead to tension, conflict, or emotional discomfort. Pain and struggle are natural parts of shifting perspectives and adopting new ways of knowing. This discomfort does not necessarily cause harm but signals growth and transformation (hooks, 1994). Allowing passionate debate and emotional expression in the classroom challenges the notion that

intellectual engagement requires detachment from feelings. Instead, combining analytical thinking with emotional experience fosters deeper learning.

Fear of Change

Fear of change often holds educators back from adopting new teaching practices or transforming systems. This fear may stem from concerns about losing respect, disrupting established routines, or relinquishing power. Overcoming these fears is essential for moving toward more democratic, inclusive, and ethical educational environments.

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10.6: Summary

Systemic change in ECE requires more than just new strategies, it demands a deep commitment to ethics, relationships, and equity. Effective change leadership requires more than managing logistics. It involves self-awareness, moral reflection, and the ability to listen to and include diverse perspectives. Rather than viewing resistance as a problem, ethical leaders see it as valuable information and an opportunity to learn, adjust, and grow.

The above models offer structure for navigating change thoughtfully and help leaders balance the technical aspects of change with the human side, ensuring that transformation is rooted in shared values and aligned with the needs of the community.

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10.7: Vocabulary

- **Systemic Change**

Transformation that addresses underlying structures, policies, beliefs, and relationships across an entire system rather than isolated individuals.

- **Voice**

The act of expressing personal experiences and perspectives, especially those traditionally marginalized, as a valid and essential form of knowledge and agency in educational settings.

- **Mental Models**

Deeply held assumptions, beliefs, or mindsets that shape how people perceive the world and respond to change; considered the most implicit level of systemic conditions.

- **Equity-Centered Leadership**

A leadership approach that prioritizes fairness, inclusion, and the dismantling of systemic barriers in educational systems and policies.

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10.8: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- [Water of Systems Change – FSG/links to an external source:](#)

Official publication outlining the Six Conditions of Systems Change. Excellent for exploration of implicit, semi-explicit, and explicit change dynamics.

- [Michael Fullan's Educational Leadership Resources/links to an external source:](#)

Offers articles, books, and practical tools related to systemic educational change, moral leadership, and school transformation.

- [Harvard Business Review – Leading Change \(John Kotter\)/links to an external source:](#)

A foundational article that introduces Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model, including insights for school and nonprofit leaders.

- [The Equity-Centered Leadership Framework – Education Leaders of Color \(EdLoC\)/links to an external source:](#)

Provides a lens on leadership that promotes racial equity, voice, and systems-level transformation.

- [The Leadership Learning Community/links to an external source:](#)

Offers free tools and resources for developing leadership that is collective, inclusive, and rooted in systemic equity.

- [The National Equity Project/links to an external source:](#)

Offers frameworks, workshops, and tools for understanding equity, power dynamics, and leading for justice in education.

- [Teaching Tolerance / Learning for Justice – Social Justice Standards/links to an external source:](#)

Supports teachers and leaders in creating anti-bias, inclusive curriculum and systemic change practices.

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Finished Chapter 10

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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[11.3: The Power of Your Thoughts](#)

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11.1: Chapter Introduction

11



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 11, students will be able to:

- **SLO 11.1:** Identify practices that support self-care and emotional well-being for early childhood educators.
- **SLO 11.2:** Define and explain the concepts of mindfulness, metacognition, and emotional intelligence.
- **SLO 11.3:** Describe relational, authentic, and compassionate approaches that extend mindfulness in educational settings.
- **SLO 11.4:** Recognize the relationship between trauma-informed responses (e.g., fight, flight, freeze, and fawn) and boundary-setting in professional roles.

Chapter 11 Short Overview



Through self-awareness, intentional practices, and relational presence, individuals can create conditions that support both personal growth and a healthy organizational culture. Practices such as reflection, emotional regulation, and mindful connection not only sustain educators through challenges but also contribute to ethical and emotionally safe workplaces. These interpersonal approaches help extend personal well-being into the broader organizational culture. The strategies presented in this chapter are essential for maintaining professional integrity, preventing burnout, and fostering emotionally safe environments. Ultimately, this reminds us that sustainable change begins with how we care for ourselves and for one another.

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11.2: Common Practical Self-Care Methods for Educators



Let's Take a Deeper Look

The following strategies offer practical and concrete ways for educators to protect their well-being, sustain emotional balance, and foster resilience in daily professional life.

- Set and Protect Boundaries
- Create a Daily Ritual (Not Just a Routine)
- Practice Mindful Breathing and Presence
- Engage in Reflective Practice
- Move Your Body Regularly
- Connect with Trusted Colleagues
- Seek Support When Needed
- Nourish Yourself (Literally and Emotionally)
- Unplug Regularly from Technology
- Reclaim Joy and Play

Set and Protect Boundaries

Early childhood educators tend to be conscientious, agreeable, kind, compassionate care givers who want to help people. While this is a beautiful characteristic and absolutely needed when working with young children, sometimes they have difficulty saying, “No.” This leaves them vulnerable to taking on more responsibility than they should. Establish limits around work hours, availability, and emotional energy. Saying “no” respectfully is an act of self-preservation, not selfishness. The following are strategies that can help you with this.



Strategies for Setting and Protecting Boundaries

1. Use “I” Statements to Communicate Limits

Practice assertive but respectful language, such as: “I’m not able to take that on right now,” or “I need to leave by 4:00 to honor my schedule.”

Clear communication of limits and boundaries is not about being rigid or unkind, it’s about preserving your energy, sanity, and effectiveness in the long run. When educators don’t communicate their boundaries, they risk emotional exhaustion, role confusion, and even burnout.

2. Use “I” Statements to Communicate Feelings

I statements are powerful tools, not only for setting boundaries, but also for expressing difficult emotions with clarity and ownership.

In the ECE classroom, we begin teaching emotional expression around age two:

For example, when working with 2 years old, we teach them to identify **how** they feel. “I feel _____” (Fill in the blank.).

- “I feel happy.”
- “I feel angry.”
- “I feel sad.”

The “I statement” method also works for adults. Take the time to think about how you feel. Emotions can be complex, even for experienced professionals. There is often a fine line between similar feelings, such as anxiety and excitement. Taking time to accurately identify and articulate your emotional experience can be cathartic, and even transformative.

As children grow, around age three, we add the context of **what**. “I feel _____ (Fill in the blank), when this happens _____” (Fill in the blank.).

- “I feel happy when you stop by to visit.”
- “I feel angry when you don’t put away your work.”
- “I feel sad when you roll your eyes at me when I am speaking.”

Connecting our feelings to what is causing them, takes the mystery out of emotions. This gives us deeper insight into what specific action did or did not work. Without understanding what caused our feelings, our feelings can seem random, overwhelming, or even shameful.

By the time children turn 4 years old, we add the context of **why**. “I feel _____ (Fill in the blank), when this happens _____” (Fill in the blank.), because _____ (Fill in the blank.).

- “I feel happy when you stop by to visit, because that shows me that you care about me.”
- “I feel angry when you don’t put away your work, because it makes it difficult for me to use this counter space for my project this afternoon.”
- “I feel sad when you roll your eyes at me when I am speaking, because I feel disrespected and not heard.”

When we identify why we feel upset, anxious, or overwhelmed, we can choose how to respond rather than reacting automatically or impulsively. But when we understand their source, we gain the power to reflect, make meaning, and move forward in alignment with our values. Emotional clarity supports professional behavior and prevents relational harm.

Pre-Plan Responses to Common Requests

Having a few go-to phrases helps reduce anxiety in the moment. When you feel put on the spot, your nervous system can go into fight, flight, freeze, or fawn mode, making it difficult to think clearly or respond with confidence. Pre-planned phrases act as verbal boundaries, giving you time, space, and dignity in how you communicate your limits.

Here are some examples:

- “Let me think about that and get back to you.”
- “I appreciate being asked, but I need to say no this time.”
- “I’m at capacity right now, but I hope you’ll ask me again another time.”
- “That’s not something I can commit to, but I can help you brainstorm other options.”
- “I’m not able to help with that, but thank you for including me.”

Having these phrases in your mental “toolkit” allows you to:

- Respond with calm instead of reacting out of guilt or pressure
- Buy yourself time to reflect
- Set boundaries without damaging relationships
- Maintain professionalism while preserving your energy

Practicing these responses aloud or writing them down on a sticky note or journal page can help. Just like children rehearse social scripts, adults benefit from repetition and self-talk to build confidence. Learning to say no with grace is a leadership skill. The goal

isn't to avoid helping others, it's to make sure you're not helping at the expense of your own well-being or effectiveness.

Figure 11.1 Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn:
Understanding Trauma Responses in the Workplace

Response	What It Looks Like	What You Might Feel	Common Triggers	Healthier Alternatives
Fight	Arguing, controlling, pushing back, defensiveness, over-assertiveness	Anger, frustration, urgency, feeling cornered or disrespected	Feeling powerless, threatened, or micromanaged	Pause to breathe, use assertive "I" statements, seek win-win solutions
Flight	Avoiding conflict, changing topics, quitting tasks midstream, overworking to escape stress	Anxiety, restlessness, dread, urgency to "get away"	Overwhelm, fear of confrontation or failure	Break tasks into steps, ask for support, engage in grounding activities
Freeze	Shutting down, feeling stuck, mental fog, zoning out, inaction	Numbness, disconnection, panic, helplessness	High pressure, unclear expectations, sensory overload	Self-soothing (breathing, movement), clarify next small action, name what you feel
Fawn	People-pleasing, over-apologizing, saying yes to everything, suppressing needs	Guilt, fear of rejection, low self-worth, resentment	Unclear boundaries, fear of conflict, past invalidation	Practice saying "no," name your needs, re-center your worth and values



Block Time for Yourself on Your Calendar

Literally schedule lunch breaks, planning time, and "do not disturb" zones during your day. Treat these as sacred appointments, not optional luxuries. If you don't protect your time, no one else will. Educators often pour energy into others all day long, sometimes forgetting that their own needs. Blocking time is a way of saying, "*My needs matter, too.*"



Clarify Your Role and Stick to It

Knowing way to honor your professional identity and capacity. When requests arise that fall outside your scope, it's perfectly reasonable to redirect them with grace and clarity. Gently remind others when a request falls outside your scope:

- "That sounds like something administration might be better suited to handle."
- "I'd love to support that, but it's not within my current role."



Ask Yourself: “Is This Mine to Carry?”

Pause before taking on a new task. Not every problem, task, or emotional burden belongs to you, even in caring professions. Before automatically agreeing to something, pause and reflect:

- “Does this align with my values and energy right now?” If not, it's okay to decline.
- “Do I have the capacity for this right now?”
- “Am I taking this on out of guilt, habit, or fear of disappointing someone?”

When educators habitually take on others’ problems or responsibilities, it’s often rooted in fawn responses or people-pleasing patterns. By asking, “Is this mine to carry?” we invite more discernment, emotional boundaries, and trust in others’ ability to carry their own load. If the answer is no, give yourself permission to let it go.

Create a Daily Ritual (Not Just a Routine)

Start or end your day with a grounding practice: a quiet cup of tea, journaling, a short walk, lighting a candle, or reading or listening to something that nourishes your spirit. The key is that it feels intentional, calming, and centering, not just another task on your to-do list. In emotionally intense fields like early childhood education, enjoyable daily rituals create predictability, calm, emotional regulation, and a sense of personal agency, especially when everything else feels rushed or reactive.

Even short rituals can:

1. Reduce cortisol (stress hormone) levels
2. Promote mindfulness and presence
3. Strengthen professional boundaries
4. Cultivate inner calm before or after challenging interactions
5. Anchor you to your values in ethically complex moments



Mindful Breathing, Presence, and Emotional Intelligence

When stress hits, our nervous systems often shift into overdrive, reacting instead of responding. Mindful breathing helps bring us back into our bodies and regulate emotional overwhelm. Even 30 seconds of intentional breathing can reset mood, focus, and tone. These short practices activate the parasympathetic nervous system, slowing heart rate, lowering blood pressure, and signaling safety to the brain. This is especially helpful in early childhood education, where emotional co-regulation is essential. Educators might find apps like *Insight Timer* or *Calm* useful for integrating breathwork into daily routines.

This mindfulness framework is supported by empirical research demonstrating its positive impact on innovation and leadership effectiveness (Thich Nhat Hanh & Weare, 2017). This approach helps leaders stay grounded in their values while becoming more aware of their internal states, allowing them to better support the emotions and needs of those they lead. Such attentiveness enables leaders to remain calm under pressure, make ethical decisions, and hold space for discomfort and uncertainty. By modeling mindful behavior, educators foster emotionally safe, focused work environments. This practice has been shown to reduce burnout and promote clear, values-aligned decision-making.

An example of this is a preschool director might recognize staff anxiety during a major policy shift. She could schedule a quiet check-in meeting, begin with a mindfulness exercise, listen attentively to concerns, and adjust expectations based on the emotional

tone in the room. Mindful educators are fully present in the moment, able to pause before reacting, and make thoughtful decisions rooted in clarity and compassion (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

In connection with mindfulness, emotional intelligence (EI or EQ) offers another vital skillset for sustainable well-being and being fully present. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others. It encompasses emotional awareness, empathy, self-regulation, motivation, and social competence. This framework aligns with Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences, specifically intrapersonal (self-reflection) and interpersonal intelligence (understanding others). According to Daniel Goleman (1995), "Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships" (p. 317).

Exploring your own emotional intelligence can be insightful and even fun. Try this interactive assessment from the Greater Good Science Center (2025) at the University of California, Berkeley:

 [Take the Emotional Intelligence Quiz/links to an external source:](#)



Engage in Reflective Practice

Taking time to reflect, through journaling, peer discussion, or mentorship, allows educators to grow with intention and purpose. Reflection transforms everyday experiences into meaningful insight and helps shift automatic reactions into thoughtful responses. Far from being indulgent, reflective practice is a professional responsibility that supports emotional clarity, ethical decision-making, and long-term resilience.

Use a journal or mentor relationship to reflect on and explore emotional triggers, clarify goals, celebrate successes, and identify areas for growth. This kind of intentional reflection fosters self-awareness and emotional regulation, essential tools in the emotionally demanding field of ECE. Whether you jot down thoughts at the end of the day, talk through a challenge with a trusted colleague, or pause to consider what worked and why, reflective practice keeps you grounded in your purpose and connected to your core values.



Move Your Body Regularly

Movement is one of the most accessible and effective forms of self-care. Whether it's stretching between classroom transitions, dancing with children, walking your dog after work, or practicing yoga on the weekend, regular physical activity helps release stress, reset your nervous system, and restore energy. You don't need a gym membership or an hour of free time to benefit. Even small bursts of intentional movement throughout the day can reduce tension, improve focus, and support emotional regulation.

Try these ideas:

- Set a reminder to stretch or do a few shoulder rolls between classroom transitions
- Take a 10-minute walk after your shift to clear your head
- Use music and movement breaks with children to co-regulate and connect

- Practice “mindful movement,” noticing how your body feels as you move, rather than just rushing through it

You carry a lot, not just physically, but emotionally. Movement helps your body *let go* of what your heart has been holding onto.

Connect with Trusted Colleagues

Teaching is relational work, not just with children, but with each other. Surrounding yourself with supportive community can be one of the most powerful forms of self-care. Laughter, shared experiences, and honest conversations help educators process emotions, celebrate wins, and navigate challenges. Healthy workplace relationships reduce burnout, increase job satisfaction, and foster collective resilience. When we feel seen, heard, and understood, we are more grounded, present, and able to offer that same attunement to children and families.

Seek Support When Needed

Just like we encourage children to ask for help, educators must remember that reaching out is a sign of strength, not weakness. Therapy, counseling, coaching, or support groups can be transformative tools for processing chronic stress, trauma, grief, or burnout, especially in a field as emotionally demanding as early childhood education. Don’t wait until you’re overwhelmed or in crisis. Proactive support builds resilience and helps prevent emotional exhaustion.



Nourish Yourself (Literally and Emotionally)

Your body and mind are the instruments through which you care for others. Nourishing yourself, physically and emotionally, is not a luxury; it’s a form of dignity and sustainability. Eat food that fuels your energy and steadies your mood. Drink water consistently to support focus and physical well-being. Just as importantly, offer yourself emotional nourishment: engage in music, art, beauty, laughter, rest, and nature, not just when you “earn” it, but because you are human.

- Pack snacks that you actually enjoy (and will remember to eat!)
- Keep a water bottle nearby and refill it as a small self-check-in ritual
- Step outside between tasks, even for 60 seconds, fresh air counts as fuel
- Create a joy menu: list a few things that bring you delight (music, podcasts, sketching, a favorite tea) and keep it handy for low-energy days
- Use food and breaks as *care*, not reward or punishment



Unplug Regularly from Technology

Set digital boundaries: no email after a certain time, social media breaks, or screen-free weekends. Constant connectivity drains your mental space.

Reclaim Joy and Play

Do things that light you up, dance, garden, sing, draw, paint, hike, explore. Joy is not a reward for hard work, it's a necessity for staying in the work long term. Happy educators tend to have happy students. This concept connects to the theory of "mindfulness."

The Science of Happiness and Metacognition

Although happiness has always been a core human pursuit, only recently has research in neuroscience, mindfulness, and positive psychology begun to show how it can be cultivated, sustained, and increased (Project Happiness, 2016). According to the National Library of Medicine (2023), there are over 35 million citations and abstracts, reflecting a vast and continuously growing body of scientific research on happiness and well-being.



Bunny trail Footnote 6: The category "fawn" was recently added as a **trauma response**. It is a survival mechanism that involves **people-pleasing, appeasing, or submitting to avoid conflict or harm**. It joins the classic trauma responses of **fight, flight, and freeze**, but instead of resisting or withdrawing from danger, the fawn response tries to **neutralize a threat by pleasing it**. While educators may not be in physical danger, they may still unconsciously appease others to avoid discomfort or conflict. Fawning is not the same as being kind. True compassion involves mutual respect and boundaries. Fawning, on the other hand, often emerges from fear of conflict or rejection, past trauma, chronic invalidation, being raised in environments where saying no felt unsafe, and not from a genuine, empowered choice to help. "Fawning is often learned in environments where one's safety or acceptance depended on pleasing others. In early childhood settings, where relationships are central, this pattern can go unnoticed, even praised, which can normalize this experience. By recognizing fawning behaviors in ourselves or our teams, we can begin to foster a workplace culture built on authenticity.

Use this checklist to assess your current well-being, emotional boundaries, and relational habits. Reflect honestly, this tool is for your protection, not judgment.

Emotional Well-being Checklist

✓ Emotional Boundaries

- I set healthy boundaries with colleagues, children's families, and supervisors.
- I can say "no" without feeling guilt or fear of conflict.
- I recognize when someone is emotionally manipulating or gaslighting me.
- I limit my exposure to toxic behavior, even in "helping" roles.

Empathy and Identity

- I recognize that my empathy is a strength—but it doesn't mean sacrificing myself.
- I can hold space for others without losing sight of my own needs.
- I do not feel solely responsible for "fixing" other people's emotional states.
- I check in with myself as often as I check in with others.

✓ Warning Signs of Empathic Overload

- I often feel emotionally drained or fatigued by the end of the day.
- I put others' needs ahead of my own—every time.
- I feel like I can't take time off or ask for help.
- I stay silent in meetings or around authority figures to avoid conflict.

Protective Practices

- I take time each week to reflect on how I'm really feeling.
- I engage in regular wellness routines (rest, movement, mindfulness, etc.).
- I have a safe space—person or practice—where I can process hard emotions.
- I seek out leadership that values empathy, equity, and ethical practice.

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11.3: The Power of Your Thoughts

Metacognition is the ability to think about one's own thinking. It allows individuals to:

- Reflect on their thoughts
- Plan strategies for learning new tasks
- Solve problems
- Use higher-order thinking to deepen understanding
- Analyze information
- Monitor and control their cognitive processes

But here's what's interesting, metacognition is strongly linked to resilience and happiness. Happiness is a skill set that can be learned and strengthened through consistent practice. By becoming aware of our thought patterns, we can interrupt negative loops and create more positive emotional outcomes. Research indicates that intentional habit change has a greater impact on happiness than external circumstances (Project Happiness, 2016).

According to Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, (2005), here is the breakdown of happiness factors:

1. Only **10%** of happiness is based on life circumstances
2. The remaining **90%** is internal
 - **50%** is determined by genetics
 - **40%** is shaped by intentional activities and choices

This data indicates that one can increase their happiness by up to 40% through daily mindset and behavior changes. Now that's powerful.

“Your thoughts reshape your brain, and thus are changing a physical construct of reality. So think wisely”

(Parton, 2015, para. 4).

Habits of Mind Theory

Mindfulness practices help educators center themselves, regulate stress, and respond to challenges with presence and clarity. Building on this foundation of self-awareness, the Habits of Mind framework (Costa & Kallick, 2000) offers 16 dispositions that support thoughtful, ethical, and resilient professional practice. These habits are not only skills for children to learn, but they are also mindsets for educators themselves. By cultivating the following habits, educators strengthen their ability to respond constructively to challenges, maintain well-being, and model lifelong learning for the children in their care.

16 Habits of Mind

1. **Persisting:** Sticking with a task through completion, staying focused, and not giving up when faced with challenges.
2. **Managing Impulsivity:** Taking time to think before acting, remaining calm, and being thoughtful and deliberate.
3. **Listening with Empathy:** Devoting mental energy to another person's thoughts and feelings and making an effort to perceive another's point of view.
4. **Thinking Flexibly:** Being able to change perspectives, generate alternatives, and consider different options.
5. **Metacognition (Thinking about your thinking):** Being aware of one's own thoughts, strategies, feelings, and their effects on others.
6. **Striving for Accuracy:** Doing one's best, setting high standards, and checking for ways to improve.
7. **Questioning and Problem Posing:** Having a questioning attitude, knowing what data are needed, and finding problems to solve.
8. **Applying Past Knowledge:** Using what you learn and transferring knowledge to new situations.

9. **Communicating Clearly:** Striving for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding generalizations, distortions, and exaggerations.
10. **Gathering Data with All Senses:** Using all senses taste, touch, smell, hearing, and sight, to observe and learn.
11. **Creating and Innovating:** Generating new and novel ideas; demonstrating fluency and originality.
12. **Responding with Wonderment and Awe:** Finding the world awesome, mysterious, and intriguing with phenomena and beauty.
13. **Taking Responsible Risks:** Being adventurous and trying new things while staying safe.
14. **Finding Humor:** Seeing the whimsical, incongruous, and unexpected; being able to laugh at oneself.
15. **Thinking Interdependently:** Being able to work and learn from others in reciprocal situations.
16. **Remaining Open to Continuous Learning:** Having humility and pride when admitting we don't know; resisting complacency.

H a b i t s o f M i n d	
 1. Persisting Stick to it! Persevering in task through to completion; remaining focused. Looking for ways to reach your goal when stuck. Not giving up.	 2. Managing impulsivity Take your Time! Thinking before acting; remaining calm, thoughtful and deliberative.
 3. Listening with understanding and empathy Understand Others! Devoting mental energy to another person's thoughts and ideas. Make an effort to perceive another's point of view and emotions.	 4. Thinking flexibly Look at it Another Way! Being able to change perspectives, generate alternatives, consider options.
 5. Thinking about your thinking (Metacognition) Know your knowing! Being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others.	 6. Striving for accuracy Check it again! Always doing your best. Setting high standards. Checking and finding ways to improve constantly.
 7. Questioning and problem posing How do you know? Having a questioning attitude; knowing what data are needed and developing questioning strategies to produce those data. Finding problems to solve.	 8. Applying past knowledge to new situations Use what you Learn! Accessing prior knowledge; transferring knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.
 9. Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision Be clear! Striving for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding over generalizations, distortions, deletions and exaggerations.	 10. Gather data through all senses: Use your natural pathways! Pay attention to the world around you Gather data through all the senses; taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight.
 11. Creating, imagining, and innovating Try a different way! Generating new and novel ideas, fluency, originality	 12. Responding with wonderment and awe Have fun figuring it out! Finding the world awesome, mysterious and being intrigued with phenomena and beauty.
 13. Taking responsible risks Venture out! Being adventuresome; living on the edge of one's competence. Try new things constantly.	 14. Finding humor Laugh a little! Finding the whimsical, incongruous and unexpected. Being able to laugh at oneself.
 15. Thinking interdependently Work together! Being able to work in and learn from others in reciprocal situations. Team work.	 16. Remaining open to continuous learning I have so much more to learn! Having humility and pride when admitting we don't know; resisting complacency.

Figure 11.2 Habits of mind image was created by AI through ChatGPT

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11.4: Practices the Extend Mindfulness and Support Happiness

In addition to practices like mindfulness and metacognition, there are also interpersonal approaches that support emotional well-being and ethical integrity in educational settings. These approaches emphasize not just self-awareness, but also how we show up in relationship with others. They highlight the value of connection, authenticity, and compassion in professional settings.

Relational or Empathetic Approach

Relational approaches emphasize emotional presence, mutual respect, and connection. The theory is built on the idea that leadership emerges through relationships and co-constructed meaning. This style centers on empathy, deep listening, and maintaining supportive relationships where power is shared and trust is nurtured.

Relational practitioners are attuned to the emotional climate and interpersonal dynamics within their group. They show up fully in conversations, honor diverse perspectives, and co-create solutions. Their presence is demonstrated through eye contact, active listening, patience, and affirming others' experiences, especially vital in culturally diverse educational environments (Uhl-Bien, M. (2006).

For example, during a team conflict, a program director might bring all voices to the table, listen reflectively without interruption, and help the team reconstruct norms through consensus-building, affirming each voice as valuable.

Authentic Practice

Authentic practice encourages self-awareness, transparency, and moral clarity. It is rooted in an internal moral compass and emphasizes ethical behavior, consistency, and vulnerability. Educators who are present in an authentic way communicate openly, acknowledge uncertainty, and create emotionally honest work cultures.

Being present as an authentic leader means showing up as your full self, honest, reflective, and value-driven, which builds trust by being consistent and courageous, even in the face of challenge (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Compassionate Presence

Compassionate presence centers on empathy, moral courage, and concern for the well-being of others. Educators who adopt this approach prioritize emotional connection, psychological safety, and human dignity in their interactions. This approach is especially relevant in caregiving and educational settings, where emotional labor and relational trust are central. Compassionate practitioners attend to suffering, respond with care, and foster environments where people feel seen, heard, and valued. Their actions are grounded in the belief that kindness and accountability can coexist (Worline & Dutton, 2017).

For example, an early childhood program director may notice that a teacher is overwhelmed. Instead of offering generic encouragement, the director listens with empathy, validates the teacher's stress, and collaboratively explores support options such as scheduling relief or coaching. This compassionate approach creates a more resilient and connected workplace.

Self-care and relational, authentic, and compassionate approaches help create emotionally safe and supportive environments, it's equally important to recognize when those environments become unsafe. Emotional intelligence and mindfulness can heighten awareness of patterns that undermine professional integrity. These practices described in Chapter 11 do more than just support individual well-being; they create cultures of emotional safety and collective resilience. However, even in communities committed to mindfulness and connection, challenges can arise. Chapter 12 explores how to identify and navigate toxic dynamics that may emerge in educational settings.

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11.5: Summary

Emotionally safe and supportive environments are created by relational, authentic, and compassionate approaches, grounded in self-care. The practices described do more than just support individual well-being; they create cultures of emotional safety and collective resilience. However, even in communities committed to mindfulness and connection, challenges can arise. Emotional intelligence and mindfulness can heighten awareness of patterns that undermine professional integrity. These practices do more than just support individual well-being; they create cultures of emotional safety and collective resilience. However, even in communities committed to mindfulness and connection, challenges can arise. In the next chapter, we turn our attention to the darker side of education and explore how toxic dynamics and patterns can emerge, how even moral educators might struggle, and why empathy remains a critical safeguard in navigating professional harm in educational settings.

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11.6: Vocabulary

- **Metacognition:** *The awareness and regulation of one's own thinking processes, including reflection, planning, and problem-solving.*
 - **Mindfulness:** *The practice of intentional, present-moment awareness with nonjudgmental attention to thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensation.*
 - **Emotional Intelligence (EI or EQ):** *The ability to perceive, understand, and regulate one's own emotions and respond effectively to the emotions of others.*
 - **Trauma Informed Care (TIC):** *An approach that recognizes the widespread impact of trauma and integrates this understanding into policies, practices, and interactions to promote healing, safety, and empowerment.*
-

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11.7: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- [Mindful Schools/links to an external source:](#)

Offers mindfulness tools, research, and free practices tailored for educators and children. Includes short, guided meditations and PD resources.

- [The Center for Healthy Minds \(University of Wisconsin–Madison\)/links to an external source:](#)

Research-based practices on mindfulness, emotional well-being, and resilience. Founded by neuroscientist Dr. Richard Davidson.

- [Greater Good in Education/links to an external source:](#)

Developed by UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center. Provides SEL (Social-Emotional Learning), mindfulness, and self-care practices designed for educators.

- [Calm Classroom/links to an external source:](#)

A school-based mindfulness program with short, scripted practices that foster focus and calm. Free and paid resources available.

- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(NCTSN\)/links to an external source:](#)

Offers trauma-informed care resources, including videos and downloadable guides for educators working with children affected by trauma.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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12.1: Chapter Introduction

12



Learning Objectives

By the end of Chapter 12, students will be able to:

- **SLO 12.1:** Identify how empathy influences ethical leadership in ECE.
- **SLO 12.2:** Identify toxic leadership dynamics and its impact on ECE settings.
- **SLO 12.3:** Describe critical pedagogy and its relevance to leadership and systemic change.
- **SLO 12.4:** Explain the concept of the hidden curriculum and its implications for leadership practices

Chapter 12 Overview



Effective leadership doesn't come from techniques or strategies alone; it is deeply rooted in values, self-awareness, and personal well-being. Empathy, moral clarity, and critical pedagogy work together to foster ethical leadership practices that create supportive, equitable environments.

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12.2: Recognizing Toxic Dynamics in Leadership

Educators, particularly those in caregiving professions like early childhood education, are often characterized by high levels of empathy, nurturance, and relational sensitivity (O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013). Teachers are personally and emotionally invested in their work because so much of it involves caring for and about others (O'Connor, 2008). These beautiful, caring qualities, while essential to the field, can also leave professionals more vulnerable to manipulation or exploitation. Sandra Brown (2014) notes in her research on relational harm, how individuals with specific traits, such as high empathy, compassion, a cooperative and tolerant nature, strong trust in others, resourcefulness, and goal orientation, are particularly vulnerable to psychopathic or narcissistic relationships. Dr. Kerry McAvoy (2023) adds that highly agreeable and conscientious individuals are often the most exploited because of these very strengths.



Recognizing toxic leadership patterns is essential for protecting one's professional well-being. Recognizing these dynamics is not about judgment, but about safeguarding personal well-being. Toxic individuals often use others' moral behavior against them, exploiting their values and empathy for personal gain (McAvoy, 2025, personal correspondence). Understanding how systemic dysfunction and psychological patterns can play out in leadership allows educators establish boundaries, seek support, and advocate for healthier environments.

Impostor Phenomenon (Impostor “Syndrome”)

Psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes first described the Impostor Phenomenon, also known as “Impostor Syndrome,” as persistent feelings of self-doubt and fraudulence despite clear evidence of competence and success (Clance & Imes, 1978). This phenomenon is particularly prevalent among high-achieving individuals in helping professions, especially women. Individuals experiencing impostor feelings often doubt their abilities, attribute accomplishments to luck, and fear being “found out.” Despite their accomplishments, they may feel that they have somehow deceived others into thinking they are more successful than they truly are. Even with evidence of their competence, they still believe that do not deserve their success. These perceptions are often shaped by early family experiences and societal expectations, but therapeutic techniques can be effective in helping individuals change these negatively held beliefs about themselves (Clance & Imes, 1978).

Leaders struggling with impostor thoughts may:

- Overwork to prove their worth
- Avoid delegating responsibilities
- Resist accepting credit
- Micromanage tasks
- React defensively to feedback

While not malicious, these behaviors can damage staff morale and contribute to workplace anxiety. Educators with strong empathetic tendencies often assume the best in others. Recognizing that even well-intentioned leaders may struggle with impostor thoughts helps us set appropriate boundaries, respond compassionately, and reflect on our own development. This approach reduces shame and empowers ECE leaders to normalize vulnerability, seek mentorship, and build authentic confidence.

The Peter Principle

The Peter Principle, introduced by Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull (1969), suggests that individuals are often promoted based on their performance in their current role rather than on qualifications or suitability for the next. As a result, people may advance to a position for which they are unprepared - reaching their “level of incompetence.”

For example, a skilled preschool teacher may be promoted to a director role based on classroom performance. However, administrative leadership demands different competencies, such as budgeting, conflict resolution, and supervision, skills that may not come naturally. Without adequate training or support, these transitions can lead to ineffective management, staff dissatisfaction,

and burnout. This outcome is not necessarily a moral failing; ethical leadership requires acknowledging skill gaps, seeking professional development, avoiding defensiveness when challenges arise, and demonstrating humility in areas needing growth. The Peter Principle asserts that leadership is a dynamic process that requires ongoing learning and adaptation, emphasizes the importance of aligning one's role with individual strengths, and fostering ongoing professional development.

Cluster B Personality Disorders

The DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) identifies Cluster B personality disorders as patterns of emotional dysregulation and interpersonal disruption. These include:

- **Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD):** Disregard for others' rights, manipulative behavior, deceit, and lack of remorse (includes psychopathy and sociopathy)
- **Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD):** Emotional volatility, instability, fear of abandonment, and impulsivity
- **Histrionic Personality Disorder (HPD):** Excessive emotionality, attention-seeking
- **Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD):** Grandiosity, entitlement, lack of empathy, and a need for admiration (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)



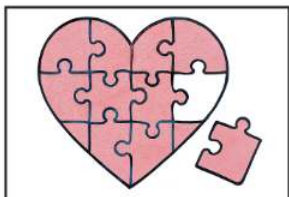
Bunny trail Footnote 7: It is important to note that only a mental health professional can diagnose. While diagnosis is the role of mental health professionals, recognizing patterns of **toxic behavior** that create fear, confusion, or harm is valid, and essential for protecting workplace well-being.

While only licensed clinicians can diagnose these conditions, harm can be real even when diagnosis is not possible or appropriate. However, educators may observe behaviors that reflect similar toxic traits in leadership, such as:

Typical Toxic Patterns

- Manipulating staff for personal gain
- Shifting blame and avoiding responsibility
- Exploiting employees' loyalty, empathy, and compassion
- Exhibiting emotional outbursts, over-reactions, or mood swings
- Undermining others to elevate or promote themselves
- Creating divisive or chaotic team environments
- Denying other's perception of reality (gaslighting)

Toxic patterns can have serious emotional and professional consequences. Recognizing these patterns empowers educators to protect their well-being through boundary setting, documenting concerns, and seeking external support (McAvoy, 2025, personal correspondence).



Understanding Narcissism in Educational Settings

Dr. Ramani Durvasula (2024) describes narcissistic leaders as often entitled, grandiose, controlling, lacking empathy, and needing admiration and validation. They tend to exploit highly empathetic individuals (people-pleasers, empaths, and fixers). At its core,

narcissism is just a defense mechanism, used to manipulate people, advocate for their needs, and protect their fragile, underdeveloped sense of self (Grandstaff, 2024).

Empathic people are often targeted by narcissists because of their tendency toward tolerance, forgiveness, cooperation, collaboration, and the willingness to give second chances. For empathetic personalities, awareness of these traits is crucial for recognizing red flags, establishing firm boundaries, and practicing self-care strategies, as discussed in Chapter 11.

Educators who understand narcissistic traits and abusive dynamics are better equipped to:

- Navigate toxic leadership without internalizing blame
- Support themselves and their colleagues in challenging work dynamics
- Foster emotionally safe and transparent workplace environments

One key distinction of narcissistic personalities is a lack of empathy. The following section examines why empathy is essential for healthy, ethical leadership.

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12.3: Empathy as Foundational in Leadership

Empathy is not optional in leadership; it is essential. Empathy builds trust, collaboration, and supportive environments. While many agree that leadership requires managing relationships, which is an inherently empathetic task, few theorists have described how empathy is developed and practiced in leadership. In Chapter 10, we examined the Quadrants of Consideration Theory by Diane Ketelle and Pete Mesa (2006), which laid the groundwork for understanding how empathy plays a key role in leadership. Now we shall further examine their ideas on empathy in leadership. “Empathetic understanding is foundational to leadership. People follow leaders who sense and articulate their deepest needs, while manifesting the capacity to organize and rally them to action in order to satisfy those needs” (p. 144).

Empathy requires more than feeling; it involves self-awareness, reflection, and moral grounding. It enables leaders to distinguish between their own needs and the needs of their team. Importantly, empathy is not inherently moral. As Ketelle and Mesa explain, “Just because a leader is empathetic it does not mean the leader will act morally... The goal is for empathetic understanding to enhance moral leadership” (p. 145). Empathy is not inherently moral and just because a leader is empathetic, does not mean they will act morally. The ultimate “goal is for empathetic understanding to enhance moral leadership” (Ketelle & Mesa, 2006, p. 145).

Empathy Versus Sympathy

Empathy involves cognitive self-awareness that enables leaders to distinguish their own needs from those of the people they lead. Developing this level of insight requires ongoing reflection, practice, patience, and a commitment to uncovering personal biases. True empathy fosters connection and is defined as the capacity to share in another’s feelings and the cognitive ability to accurately assess and understand another person’s perspectives. Synthesizing an understanding of both feelings and cognition can contribute to successful leadership (Hoffman, 1977).

Empathy involves not only the emotional experience of “feeling with” someone, but also the objective process of fact finding to understand their reasons and feelings. It requires deeply sharing and understanding of another person’s emotions, where one directly experiences or internalizes the feelings of another. In contrast, sympathy is an emotional response to another person’s struggles, misfortune, or suffering. It is often characterized by feelings of pity or sorrow, coupled with a desire to offer comfort or support.

While empathy is about “feeling with” someone, sympathy is more about “feeling for” someone. Sympathy tends to involve a more detached, observational form of understanding. It reflects concern or sorrow but does not necessarily involve internalizing the other person’s emotions. Sympathy, therefore, can create emotional distance, making it more subjective than empathy, which is characterized by shared emotional experience and understanding.

Cultivating Empathy

Empathy can be strengthened and developed through training, which helps leaders and enhance their empathic feelings, understanding, and responses. Empathy training allows leaders to identify their own emotional states, as well as those of others. This awareness, when combined with reflection, leads to high quality connections with others.

Exposure to misfortune, distress, or trauma, trends to increase empathetic feelings. However, for many individuals, the ability to imagine and gain insight into another’s point of view does not come easily. Repeated opportunities to practice reflection and perspective-taking can significantly enhance empathy over time.

Methods, such as role-taking or role-playing activities are especially effective because critical leadership qualities can emerge from the imitative processes. Leaders can enhance empathy by cultivating the following abilities:

1. Practicing strong and active listening skills
2. Clarifying and confirm understanding
3. Imagining and considering alternative perspectives



4. Posing constructive ideas and reflective questions
5. Taking thoughtful, informed action

“We need to cultivate a culture of empathy and compassion in our educational institutions”

(Giroux, n.d.-a).

While developing empathy is crucial for effective leadership, it is equally important to recognize that empathy must be balanced with personal boundaries. Without boundaries, the very act of caring for others can lead to emotional exhaustion and personal harm. As Dr. Ramani Durvasula emphasizes, empathy without boundaries is self-destruction (Durvasula, 2024), underscoring that in helping professions, compassion must be paired with healthy limits to prevent burnout and maintain integrity.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the art, science, and practice of teaching. It includes the methods, strategies, and approaches educators use to facilitate learning, as well as the beliefs and values that guide how and why teaching takes place. Pedagogy is not just about delivering information; it involves understanding how students learn, designing meaningful learning experiences, and fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and personal growth.

In short, pedagogy is **how** teaching happens. It is shaped by educational philosophy, cultural context, and the needs of learners.

Here is an example of pedagogy in a preschool setting. A preschool teacher notices that several children are fascinated by the worms they find on the playground after it rains. Instead of simply giving a lecture about worms, the teacher uses inquiry-based pedagogy, with hands-on learning activities to build on the children’s curiosity. She sets up a sensory table with soil, magnifying glasses, and books about worms, encouraging the children to observe, ask questions, and record their findings through drawings and simple notes. The teacher then facilitates a group discussion, asking questions like, “What do you think worms do for the garden?” and helps the children connect their observations to the idea of ecosystems and soil health.

This example shows pedagogy in action because it reflects how the teacher is guiding learning: by using children’s interests to design meaningful, hands-on experiences, encouraging inquiry, and supporting early science thinking, all while promoting collaboration and language development.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy involves looking at teaching and learning critically, examining what is taught, how it is taught, and whose voices are included or excluded. It also involves making ethical judgments about whether teaching practices and content are just, fair, and relevant to the learners and society. Critical pedagogy challenges social injustice, questions power structures, and encourages people to view education as a pathway to personal growth. It is rooted in Paulo Freire’s concept of *conscientização* (critical consciousness), which was discussed previously in chapter 9.

Critical pedagogy emphasizes dialogue, reflection (critical thinking), and action (praxis) as essential for recognizing and addressing inequality in communities and society (Freire, 1970). Rather than treating students as passive recipients of knowledge, critical pedagogy invites them to become active co-creators of learning, using critical inquiry capable of transforming themselves and their world through both personal growth and social transformation.

Henry Giroux, expands on critical pedagogy theory and describes that its goal is to empower students and educators to question social injustices, challenge power structures, and take action toward a more equitable society. He stated, “critical pedagogy becomes a project that stresses the need for teachers and students to actively transform knowledge rather than simply consume it” (Giroux, 2011, p.7).

Key ideas of Giroux on critical pedagogy include:

- Education is never neutral, it either reinforces or challenges existing social norms and power structures
- Learners should engage critically with content, examining whose voices are amplified and whose are silenced
- Teachers act as transformative intellectuals, fostering dialogue, reflection, and social responsibility
- Emphasis on reflection and praxis (reflection + action) to create meaningful change

- Pedagogy is always a form of cultural and political engagement

The Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum teaches students not simply what is explicitly required by the subject matter, but the underlying norms, values, and dispositions that prepare them to accept their place in a pre-given social order (Giroux, 2011).

Giroux expands on Freire's concept of conscientização (critical consciousness), by calling attention to the "hidden curriculum." This refers to the implicit lessons, values, and norms that are taught in schools but are not part of the official curriculum. These include attitudes about authority, work, compliance, gender roles, race, and social hierarchy. These lessons are often unspoken and unexamined, yet they powerfully shape how students view themselves and society. For example, if staff are discouraged from questioning decisions, or if labor is expected without acknowledgment, then silence and over-functioning become the unwritten rules.

According to Giroux, educational systems often present themselves as neutral spaces designed simply to impart knowledge. However, he notes that these systems frequently reproduce existing social hierarchies and power relations, often privileging dominant groups while marginalizing others. For example, the way history is taught may emphasize dominant cultural narratives while omitting or minimizing marginalized voices. The norms of obedience, punctuality, and unquestioned respect for authority prepare students for workplace hierarchies rather than democratic participation.

The "hidden curriculum" works to normalize certain worldviews, often promoting conformity and discouraging critical questioning of injustice or inequality. Schools might stress individual achievement while downplaying structural inequalities, making social problems seem like personal failings rather than systemic issues. This reinforces existing power structures because it discourages collective action and social critique.

Ethical leadership requires a willingness to recognize and name these patterns and create spaces where people can reflect, speak up, and participate meaningfully. Empathic leaders are attuned to what is said and what remains unspoken. They notice who is at the table and who is not. They take responsibility not just for outcomes, but for the emotional and cultural dynamics that shape them.

Giroux's work provides a powerful lens for understanding why empathy, moral clarity, and critical awareness are not only desirable in leadership, but necessary. He reminds us that children have fewer rights than almost any other group and few institutions protecting these rights. Consequently, their voices and needs are almost completely absent from the debates, policies, and legislative practices that are constructed in terms of their needs (Giroux, n.d.-2). For early childhood educators and leaders, Giroux's insights offer a compelling summary of what ethical leadership truly entails.

The Tendency to Avoid Our Problems

Giroux's insight on how individuals and institutions often conceal uncomfortable truths, reveals what might be called a human tendency to "cover up our mistakes." Since the beginning of civilization, people have been trying to hide or camouflage their sins or mistakes, whether it be with fig leaves, paint and spackle, or attorney representation- humans have a tendency to hide their errors rather than confront them openly. Critical pedagogy encourages transparency, reflection, and dialogue as antidotes to this tendency. By applying these principles, leaders can create environments where mistakes are acknowledged and addressed, rather than concealed, fostering cultures of trust and continual growth. We cannot change that which we deny.

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12.4: Textbook Wrap Up

Educators and administrators are never simply teaching content or enforcing policies, they are shaping human beings and communities. Every choice communicates values, whether selecting classroom books, setting the tone in staff meetings, or delivering feedback.

For early childhood leaders, this insight carries particular urgency. The youngest learners are deeply shaped by emotional tone and relational trust. Leadership grounded in empathy, self-awareness, and a commitment to justice nurtures ethical climates where children, families, and educators can thrive. Leadership, in this view, is not about control or authority, it is about stewardship of community well-being.



This perspective embraces critical hope, a belief in the possibility of meaningful change, combined with the courage to challenge harmful systems. Leaders are called to foster democratic agency by cultivating spaces of dignity, voice, and mutual accountability.

In early childhood education, this means creating emotionally safe and culturally responsive environments, not just for children, but for adults as well. It also requires interrupting toxic leadership patterns, resisting conformity when it undermines integrity, and embracing a pedagogy of care. Giroux reminds us that educators are public intellectuals and moral agents, whose role is not solely to instruct, but to imagine and model what a just, empathetic community can look like.

This kind of leadership requires deep reflection, humility, and resilience. It involves listening to discomfort, holding space for complexity, and leading with relational courage. Empathy, in this context, is more than a personal trait- it is a moral practice that shapes institutional culture and social possibilities.

Ethical leadership in early childhood education is built on empathy, reflection, and moral courage. By understanding toxic dynamics, establishing healthy boundaries, and cultivating empathetic practices, leaders create emotionally safe, inclusive, and democratic communities. Critical pedagogy reminds us that leadership is both relational and political, requiring moral imagination and a commitment to justice. Empathy, when paired with self-awareness and ethical clarity, becomes a transformative force for positive change in educational systems.

“When we interact, I touch you and you touch me, and we are both changed. The change might be for better or worse; it might be significant and powerful or small and unnoticed, but we both are changed. Let’s endeavor to make our interactions positive and encouraging”

(Dr. Linda Perez, 2005, personal communication).



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12.5: Summary

Educators, particularly in ECE, often bring high levels of empathy and care to their work, which are qualities essential to the profession, but which can also make them vulnerable to toxic leadership and manipulation. Recognizing harmful dynamics and hidden power structures is vital for protecting well-being and creating healthier workplace environments. Critical pedagogy insights remind us that teaching and leadership are never neutral; they either reinforce or challenge social injustices and unspoken cultural norms. Ethical leadership requires self-awareness, transparency, and a commitment to inclusion, reflection, and meaningful social change.

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12.6: Vocabulary

- **Pedagogy:** *The art and practice of teaching, including the methods, strategies, and approaches educators use to help students learn.*
 - **Critical Pedagogy:** *An approach to teaching that examines what is taught, how it is taught, and whose voices are included or excluded, with a focus on equity, social justice, and empowerment.*
 - **Conscientização (Critical Consciousness):** The process of developing awareness of social, political, and economic injustices and taking action to challenge and change them.
 - **Hidden Curriculum:** The unspoken or implicit lessons, values, and expectations conveyed in schools that influence students' beliefs and behaviors beyond the official curriculum.
 - **Praxis:** The cycle of reflection and action used to apply theoretical ideas to real-world practice, often linked to social change in education.
 - **Inquiry-Based Pedagogy:** A teaching approach that encourages students to ask questions.
 - **Transformative Intellectuals:** Educators who not only teach content but also inspire critical thinking, social responsibility, and action toward positive social change.
 - **Cluster B Personality Disorders:** A group of personality disorders, including narcissistic, borderline, histrionic, and antisocial personality disorders, characterized by emotional intensity, impulsivity, and challenges in interpersonal relationships.
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12.7: Extra Internet Resources for Understanding



- [Center for Creative Leadership/links to an external source:](#)

Provides research-based leadership development programs and resources to help individuals and organizations build effective, inclusive, and adaptive leadership skills

- [Ontario Institute for Studies in Education \(OISE\) – University of Toronto/links to an external source:](#)

Offers advanced research, academic programs, and professional learning focused on educational leadership, equity, and innovation in teaching and learning

- [Edutopia SEL Resources/links to an external source:](#)

Shares practical strategies, research, and tools to support social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools, helping educators create emotionally safe and supportive learning environments

- [American Psychological Association – Leadership Topics/links to an external source:](#)

Provides psychology-based research and articles on leadership, workplace behavior, and effective organizational practices to support healthy, ethical leadership.

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Appendix A

APPENDIX A

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (2024, draft)

Note. Reprinted from Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment (pp. 6–13), by National Association for the Education of Young Children, (2024, draft) <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/posi...thical-conduct>

Ethical responsibilities for early childhood educators working with young children, families and other educators

1. Ethical Responsibilities to Children

Our paramount responsibility is to provide education and care in diverse settings- including centers, homes, and schools- that are safe, healthy, nurturing, and responsive for each and every child. We are committed to supporting each child's development; fostering joyful learning; respecting individual differences; and helping children learn to play, live, and work in community. We are also committed to promoting children's self-awareness, self-worth, physical and mental well-being, competence, and resiliency.

We shall:

1.1- Do no harm to children

1.2- Care for and educate children in positive emotional, social, cultural, and learning environments that are developmentally appropriate, cognitively stimulating, and that affirm, support, value, and promote all aspects of each child's identities and abilities.

1.3- Support children's well-being by:

- a. encouraging the development of strong bonds and trusting relationships between and among children, families, educators, and communities.
- b. recognizing the multiple assets all young children bring to the early learning program as unique individuals and as members of families and communities.
- c. partnering with families and communities to promote those assets through cultural consistency, connections, and stability between the program and home.

1.4- Be aware of and apply all program policies regarding our obligations to children consistently, fairly, and without bias.

1.5- Use appropriate, and, to the extent possible, valid, unbiased, and reliable assessment systems, which include multiple sources of information, to understand and assess children's learning, development, and program experiences.

1.6- Treat child assessment information confidentially and share this information only when there is a legitimate need for it.

1.7- Be familiar with the risk factors for, and signs of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse and physical, emotional, educational, and medical neglect.

- a. Be familiar with the ways in which reporting suspected abuse and neglect may be unjustly influenced by biases and stereotypes having a disproportionate impact on under-resourced communities, communities of color, and persons with disabilities.
- b. Follow state laws and community procedures (including reporting, informing, resource connections, community supports, and follow-up) that protect children against abuse and neglect when we have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or serious neglect.
- c. Assist in taking appropriate action or informing a parent and/or others who can act when another person shares a suspicion that a child is being abused or neglected.

1.8- Strive to prevent, limit, and eliminate suspensions and expulsion of children in early childhood settings.

- a. Strive to build individual relationships with each child; make individualized adaptations and transition plans in teaching strategies, learning environments, and curricula; and consult with the family so that each child benefits from the program.
- b. Collaborate with the child's family and appropriate specialists to determine the additional services needed and/or the placement option(s) most likely to ensure the child's success if after such efforts have been exhausted, the current placement does not meet a

child's needs, or the child is seriously jeopardizing the ability of other children to benefit from the program (Aspects of this principle may not apply in programs that have a lawful mandate to provide services to a particular population of children).

1.9- Only utilize and integrate technology, interactive media, and artificial intelligence when it is done intentionally, responsibly, and within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, and particularly to support learning goals established for individual children, strengthen family relationships, and provide equitable access for children with special needs.

1.10- involve all those with relevant knowledge (including family members and staff) in decisions concerning a child, making every effort to use families' preferred language while ensuring confidentiality of sensitive information.

1.11- Not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children.

1.12- Not base high-stakes decisions, such as those related to enrollment, retention, or assignment to special education services, on a single assessment, such as a test score or a single observation.

1.13- Not permit or participate in research that could hinder the education, development, or well-being of children.

1.14- Not participate in practices that discriminate against children by denying benefits, giving special advantages, or excluding them from programs or activities based on their abilities and identities (aspects of this principle do not apply in programs that have a lawful mandate to provide services to a particular population of children).

2. Ethical Responsibilities to Families

Families are the foundation of children's development. As families and early childhood practitioners typically share a common interest in a child's well-being, early childhood educators must recognize a primary responsibility to communicate, cooperate, and collaborate with each child's home, family, and community in ways that enhance that child's development and well-being.

We shall:

2.1- Partner with families to ensure that each family is involved in significant decisions affecting their child, and that family input contributes to the planning and implementation of the program and policies.

2.2- Work to create a respectful environment for and a working relationship with all families.

2.3- Make every effort to use two-way communication to effectively communicate with all families in their preferred language, calling upon external resources for translation and interpretation, which may include responsible use of artificial intelligence and interactive technology, when programs do not have sufficient internal resources.

2.4- Apply all policies regarding obligations to families consistently, fairly, and without bias.

2.5- Provide families with complete, honest, and non-biased information concerning the program's enrollment practices, philosophy, policies, curriculum, assessment system, cultural practices, and personnel qualifications.

2.6- Positively respond to families' requests to the extent that the requests are congruent with program philosophy, standards of good practice, and the resources of the program.

2.7- Interpret and communicate assessment information and results fairly, accurately, and in ways that convey the strengths of children as well as acknowledge the limitations of the evaluation instruments. Guarantee that assessment results are accessible to families.

2.8- Explain to families how data about their child will be used, maintain confidentiality, and respect the family's right to privacy, except in the case where a child's welfare is at risk, when it becomes permissible to share confidential information with agencies, organizations and/or individuals who have legal responsibilities to intervene in the child's interest.

2.9- Ensure that parents and legal guardians have access to their child's records and classroom or program setting, except in the case where access is denied by court order or other legal restriction.

2.10- Inform the family of injuries and incidents involving their child, of risks such as exposures to communicable diseases that might result in infection, and of occurrences that might result in emotional stress.

2.11- Strive to be familiar with community resources and support services; appropriately refer families as needed; and follow up to ensure that services have been provided appropriately and received.

2.12- Work proactively in cases where family members and/ or staff are in conflict with one another and to help all parties involved express their particular needs and perspectives to make informed decisions and to support family members in doing the same.

2.13- Not involve children in research projects without fully informing parents or legal guardians, and providing them with the opportunity to give or withhold consent without penalty.

2.14- Not use our relationship with a family for private advantage or personal gain or enter into relationships with family members that might impair our judgement or have a negative impact on children.

2.15- Not honor any request from a family that puts a child in a situation that, in the context of professional expertise, knowledge, and judgement, would create physical or emotional harm. In such instances, we shall communicate with the family the reason(s) why the request was not honored and work toward an alternative solution.

3. Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues and Employers

A caring, cooperative workplace respects human dignity, promotes professional satisfaction, and supports and sustains positive relationships. Based upon our core values, our primary responsibilities to colleagues, including staff and volunteers, and employers are to establish and maintain inclusive environments and respectful relationships that support meaningful work as well as each individual's physical and mental well-being.

A- RESPONSIBILITIES TO COLLEAGUES

We shall:

3A.1- Recognize and honor the perspectives, strengths, and contributions of our colleagues to the program.

3A.2- Honor confidentiality related to job performance, and respect a right to privacy regarding personal and personnel issues.

3A.3- Exercise care by acknowledging and addressing personal biases in expressing views regarding personal attributes or professional conduct.

3A.4- Express concerns regarding colleagues' behavior, competence, fairness, ethics, or accuracy in a way that shows respect for personal dignity and diversity.

a. As long as children's well-being is not at risk, we shall attempt to resolve the matter collegially and in a confidential manner.

b. If children are at risk or the situation does not improve after it has been brought to the colleague's attention, we shall report the colleague's unethical or incompetent behavior through official channels and/or to an appropriate authority.

3A.5- Not participate in practices that discriminate against a colleague.

3A.6- Not participate in practices that diminish our colleagues' reputations or impair their effectiveness in working with children and families.

B- RESPONSIBILITIES TO EMPLOYERS

We shall:

3B.1- Follow all program policies. When we do not agree with program policies, we shall attempt to effect change through constructive action.

3B.2- Inform the program's administration or, when necessary, other appropriate authorities, when we have a concern about circumstances or conditions that impact the quality of education and care within the program.

3B.3- Speak or act on behalf of an organization only when authorized by that organization; and take care to acknowledge when we are speaking for the organization and when we are expressing a personal judgement.

3B.4- Be familiar with laws and regulations that serve to protect the health and safety of children in our programs and be vigilant in ensuring that these laws and regulations are followed.

3B.5- Not participate in practices that are in violation of laws and regulations designed to protect the health and safety of children in our programs, and in the case that we become aware of such violations, we shall take appropriate action consistent with this Code.

4. Ethical Responsibilities to Community and Society

Early childhood education programs operate within the context of their immediate community made up of families and other institutions concerned with children's well-being. Our responsibilities to the community are to provide programs that meet the diverse needs of families, to cooperate with agencies and professions that share the responsibility for children, to assist families in gaining access to those agencies and allied professionals, and to assist in the development and resourcing of community programs that are needed but not currently available.

As individuals, we acknowledge our responsibility to provide the best possible programs of education and care for children and to conduct ourselves with honesty and integrity.

Because of our specialized expertise in early childhood development and education and because the larger society shares responsibility for the welfare and protection of young children, we acknowledge a collective obligation to advocate for children within early childhood programs and in the larger community and to serve as a voice alongside young children and families.

We shall:

4.1- Communicate openly and truthfully about the nature and extent of services that we provide and be objective and accurate in reporting the knowledge upon which we base our program practices to those served, the public, and with relevant oversight bodies.

4.2- Rely on our professional perspectives, relevant experience, knowledge of child development, and standards of practice to provide informed opinions on issues, practices, products, or programs.

4.3- Ensure that any research we conduct appropriately reflects the diversity of the population upon whom its results may have future impact.

4.4- Exercise caution particularly when recommending commercial products or services.

4.5- Inform ourselves about the systems, policies, and practices that contribute to inequitable and unethical outcomes for children, and work to change them.

4.6- Hire or recommend for employment persons whose competence, qualifications, and character make them well-suited for the position.

4.7- Make a case-by-case determination of whether to report problems and disclose program identities to appropriate authorities or the public. These determinations must be based on a fair assessment of the evidence which concludes that a program or agency that enacts policies or provides services intended to protect children's health and safety or ensure children's well-being, is requiring employees to violate this Code or failing to meet its obligations. If a fair assessment determines that a public report is not necessary, this decision should not put children at risk.

4.8- Not mislead families or the public by offering services that we do not have the competence, qualifications, or resources to provide.

Ethical responsibilities specific to program administrators

Administrators of programs for young children, including those operating, owning, or working in family child care settings, have a wide diversity of pedagogical and operational responsibilities. Program administrators face unique responsibilities and ethical challenges in the course of managing and guiding their programs and assume leadership roles within and beyond their programs.

Administrators may be responsible for providing pedagogical leadership, managing program operations, and representing the field to the community.

As managers and leaders, they are called upon to build and sustain relationships with a wide variety of constituencies; share their professional knowledge and expertise with families, personnel, governing boards, and others; demonstrate empathy for the families and children they serve; and communicate respect for the skills, knowledge, and expertise of teaching staff, other personnel, and families.

Programs providing early education and care operate under various public and private auspices with diverse governing structures, funding streams, missions, and levels and mechanisms of oversight and accountability. Administrators must be responsive to these various structures, while ensuring the program's stability and reputation through licensing, participation in quality rating systems, and accreditation; recruiting, selecting, orienting, and supervising personnel; maintaining a safe and secure facility or home where children and staff can thrive; and following sound fiscal practices.

Administrators accept primary responsibility for executing the program's mission as well as developing and carrying out program policies and procedures that support that mission. They also make a commitment to continue their own professional development and to support the continuing education of the personnel in the program they lead. Administrators may also support educators and staff in being advocates for all children, and may participate in their own advocacy capacity in helping children and families gain equitable access to high-quality, inclusive early learning environments.

Given the nature and complexity of their responsibilities, administrators often face additional ethical challenges, particularly when conflicts surface in the areas of enrollment policies; dealings with personnel; and competing obligations to families, licensing and monitoring agencies, governing boards, sponsoring and fiscal agencies, and others in the community.

The next section examines Administrators' ethical responsibilities to coworkers and employers that are included in the Code of Ethical Conduct, Section III, Part A and Part B and offers additional sets of ethical responsibilities unique to early childhood program administrators, specifically addressing two areas of their professional relationships: (a) with personnel they supervise and/or employ, and (b) with sponsoring agencies and governing boards.

ADMIN 1: ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO PERSONNEL

We shall:

Admin 1.1- Provide staff members with safe and supportive working conditions, environments, and facilities that respect human dignity and diversity, honor confidences, value well-being, encourage professional growth, and facilitate ethical decision-making.

Admin 1.2- Make every effort to seek out and provide resources that ensure that all children, including those with special needs, can benefit from the program.

Admin 1.3- Support and encourage personnel in their efforts to implement strengths-based programming that enhances children's positive and joyful learning and development.

Admin 1.4- Work to achieve shared understandings between families and staff members. In the case of disagreements, we shall help all parties express their particular needs and perspectives.

Admin 1.5- Seek out, value, and draw upon different kinds of education, training, professional experience, lived experience, and expertise held by personnel, when making decisions concerning children and programs.

Admin 1.6- Provide access to continuing professional development and advancement, and work to ensure that it reflects current research and is relevant to staff members' responsibilities.

Admin 1.7- Provide training for and hold program staff accountable for knowing and following all relevant standards and regulations.

Admin 1.8- Develop and maintain written policies for the protection of confidentiality and the disclosure of children's records, which shall be made available to all program personnel and families.

a. Disclosure of children's records beyond parents or legal guardians, program personnel, and consultants having an obligation of confidentiality shall require familial consent (except in cases of suspected abuse or neglect).

Admin 1.9- Develop and maintain comprehensive and clearly stated, written personnel policies that define program standards and expectations, are given to all new staff members, and are easily accessible and available for review by all staff members.

Admin 1.10- Apply all policies regarding work with personnel consistently, fairly, and without bias.

Admin 1.11- Appropriately address incidents that are not consistent with our policies.

Admin 1.12- Be familiar with and observe laws and regulations that pertain to employment discrimination, and make hiring, retention, termination, and promotion decisions based solely on a person's competence, professional preparation, record of accomplishment, and ability to carry out the responsibilities of the position.

Admin 1.13- Be familiar with and abide by the rules and regulations developed by unions or other groups representing the interests or rights of personnel.

Admin 1.14- Evaluate the performance of all staff.

a. Inform staff whose performance does not meet program expectations about areas of concern and, when possible, assist them in improving their performance by providing additional supports and coaching.

b. Inform staff about grievance procedures if they do not agree with their performance evaluation.

Admin 1.15- Conduct personnel dismissals, when necessary, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.

a. Inform staff who are dismissed of the reasons for termination.

b. When dismissal is for cause, ensure there is evidence of inadequate or inappropriate behavior that is current, accurately documented, and available for review

Admin 1.16- Be accurate and truthful in making personnel evaluations, judgements, and references.

Admin 1.17- Not make hiring, retention, termination, and promotion decisions based on an individual's identities.

Admin 1.18- Not allow staff to implement activities or practices that put any child in a situation that creates physical or emotional harm.

ADMIN 2: ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO SPONSORING AGENCIES AND GOVERNING BODIES

We shall:

Admin 2.1- Review all program policies set forth by sponsoring agencies and governing bodies to ensure that they are in the best interest of the children.

Admin 2.2- Comply with all relevant regulations and standards that support quality care and education for young children and families.

Admin 2.3- Do our jobs conscientiously, attending to all areas that fall within the scope of our responsibilities.

Admin 2.4- Manage resources responsibly and accurately account for their use.

Admin 2.5- Evaluate our programs using agreed-upon standards and report our findings to the appropriate authority.

Admin 2.6- Thoroughly and honestly communicate necessary information, while making every effort to preserve confidentiality in the absence of a compelling reason.

Admin 2.7- Express our professional concerns about directives from the sponsoring agency or governing body when we believe that a mandated practice is not in the best interest of children

Ethical Responsibilities Specific to Adult Educators in Professional Preparation Programs

Adult educators working in professional preparation and training programs maintain a primary responsibility to the development of knowledge, skill, and dispositions in adult learners. This will further one's ultimate commitment to the well-being, learning, and

development of young children. This ECE work includes related and intertwined obligations to support and nurture adult learners and to provide caring and competent professionals to work with young children and their families.

As to the obligation to help develop caring and competent professionals, those facilitating educator preparation and professional development must look to the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, which presents the essential body of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices required of all early childhood educators working with children from birth through age 8, across all early learning settings. Likewise, the *Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education* position statement lays out eight key recommendations focused on preparing current and prospective early childhood educators to provide equitable learning opportunities for all children (NAEYC, 2024, p. 12).

With these supports, and as they fulfill their day-to-day responsibilities focused primarily on the professional preparation and development of adult learners, teacher educators and professional development specialists encounter some unique ethical challenges in the context of a complex network of relationships, including those with sites providing practicum experiences, employing institutions of higher education, and agencies that provide professional development. These entities, agencies, and institutions also have ethical obligations to early childhood education students, teachers, and faculty members, but again, those obligations are beyond the scope of this Code of Ethics.

Therefore, this section is designed specifically to set forth a conception of early childhood teacher educators' professional, ethical responsibilities in the context of three relationships with:

- a. adult learners;
- b. sites providing practicum experiences, and
- c. institutions of higher learning, and agencies that provide professional learning opportunities.

Although this section is rooted in the ethical responsibilities and recurring ethical dilemmas that early childhood teacher educators face in associate and baccalaureate and graduate degree-granting institutions, many of its provisions are equally applicable to early childhood educators who provide access to credentials, nondegree professional learning opportunities, and mentoring to adults in early childhood education and care settings.

PREP 1: ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO ADULT LEARNERS IN TRAINING CLASSES AND HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES

We shall:

Prep 1.1- Provide learning experiences that are consistent with the best practices for adult learners and that are responsive to the strengths, needs, learning styles, cultures, languages, practice settings, and stages of development of adult learners at all points in their educational journey.

Prep 1.2- Provide sound educational experiences for adult learners that enable them to understand and nurture the optimal development of children, communicate with and provide support for families, and attend to their own health and well-being.

Prep 1.3- Inform learners of conduct and work expectations, including institutional standards for writing, performance, and academic integrity, including the responsible use and integration of artificial intelligence.

Prep 1.4- Honor confidentiality, sharing only necessary information about an adult learner, only to those who need to know, and only through appropriate professional channels.

Prep 1.5- Build into all required training minimum required levels of demonstration of understanding and competence, and give all learners equitable pathways to succeed, demonstrate competence, and perform at high levels.

Prep 1.6- As applicable, ensure adult learners have in-person and, where necessary, virtual access to practicum settings, including

centers, schools, and family child care homes, where staff are qualified to work with young children, where mentors can successfully support adult learners, and which to the greatest extent possible reflect the diverse communities in which adult learners will be working.

Prep 1.7- Provide and recommend the use of institutional and additional support for adult learners, including but not limited to dual language learners and multilingual adult learners, who have the potential to work effectively with young children but have difficulty meeting academic standards, as well as those who demonstrate academic excellence but experience difficulty working with young children in practice.

Prep 1.8- Help adult learners identify alternative educational paths and goals when after we have made concerted efforts to work with the adult learners, it becomes apparent that they are not able to benefit from our training, class, or program.

Prep 1.9- Support adult learners who come to us with concerns about a colleague's competence, fairness, ethics, or accuracy by helping them clarify their concerns, and deciding and following through on a course of action to address the problem.

Prep 1.10- Not sell products and/or services from which we stand to gain financially in professional development unless they are relevant, serve educational goals, and we have explicitly stated this connection at the outset of the training.

Prep 1.11- Not allow adult learners to pass a course or move to the next level of professional credentialing if they have not demonstrated expected levels of knowledge and competence in course or training content or if they do not demonstrate the ability to relate positively and effectively with children and families.

Prep 1.12- Not allow adult learners to complete a program if we have direct evidence that they may cause harm by endangering children's physical, emotional, or psychological well-being.

PREP 2: ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO PRACTICUM SITES

We shall:

Prep 2.1- Clearly state all parties' roles and responsibilities and prepare adult learners, mentors, and administrators for practicum experiences.

Prep 2.2- Recognize and respect the reciprocal relationship between the early childhood program and the institution of higher education, and work to be a partner in addressing needs and providing appropriate support for all parties' efforts to fulfill their roles and meet program expectations.

Prep 2.3- Ensure that qualified personnel conduct regular supervision of practicum experiences in order to support professional development of adult learners and monitor the welfare of children.

Prep 2.4- Honor confidentiality, guard the privacy of the programs, its teachers, families, and children—including on all social media platforms—and instill in adult learners a professional obligation to do the same.

Prep 2.5- Make every effort to move adult learners to more appropriate placements in the event that a practicum placement is not supporting adult learners' professional development or is not beneficial to the student or children.

PREP 3: ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING AND AGENCIES PROVIDING TRAINING

We shall:

Prep 3.1- Offer professional learning and instruction only in areas in which we have or can obtain appropriate experience and expertise.

Prep 3.2- Ensure that relevant course and training content is aligned to the Professional Standards and Competencies.

Prep 3.3- Respect the integrity of courses by following approved course descriptions and updating content based on up-to-date research.

Prep 3.4- Evaluate adult learners fairly and without bias, using those standards that are congruent with the mission of our institution and regarded as accepted practice in the field.

Prep 3.5- Keep roles separate when our involvement with an adult learner involves more than one role (e.g., instructor, employer, supervisor), and provide decisions, recommendations, and give feedback appropriate to the different contexts.

This version of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct is in draft form as of 2024 and subject to final revisions by NAEYC.

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About the Author

About the Author

Dr. Laurie Daly has been a full-time professor at Woodland Community College's Lake County Campus since 2007, where she teaches in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Department. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from Pacific Union College, a Master's degree in Education with an emphasis in ECE from Sonoma State University, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Mills College. Her dissertation, *Aggressive Behavior in Preschool Children and Its Influences*, was based on field research conducted in Lake County, California (Daly & Perez, 2009).

With a lifelong commitment to children, families, and communities, Dr. Daly began her career in early childhood education at the age of 19 as a preschool teacher's aide. In her mid-twenties, she became the founding preschool director of Papermill Creek Children's Corner, the first full-time, permanent childcare facility in Point Reyes, California.

Dr. Daly was first certified as a Mentor Teacher in 1992 in Marin County and holds credentials in all five modules of WestEd's Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). Professionally, she integrates the roles of professor, child development specialist, researcher, and child advocate. Passionate about ethical leadership and high-quality early learning, Dr. Daly continues to inspire the next generation of educators with insight, warmth, and deep respect for the children they serve.



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Glossary

Accountability | The responsibility to answer for one's actions and decisions and to accept the consequences. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Adult Learning Theory | A framework that explains how adults acquire knowledge differently than children, emphasizing self-direction, experience, and practical application. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Advocacy | The act of speaking up, supporting, or taking action to promote a cause, policy, or group. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Andragogy | The theory of adult learning that emphasizes self-direction, life experience, and relevance in educational experiences. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Civic Engagement | Actively participating in community and public affairs to help improve society and promote the common good. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Cluster B Personality Disorders | A group of personality disorders, including narcissistic, borderline, histrionic, and antisocial personality disorders, characterized by emotional intensity, impulsivity, and challenges in interpersonal relationships. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Collaboration | The process of working together with others to achieve a common goal or complete a shared task. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Communities of Practice | Groups of learners who share knowledge and develop professionally through collaborative participation. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Confidentiality | The ethical and legal obligation to protect personal or sensitive information from being shared without permission. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Conflict Resolution | The process of finding peaceful solutions to disagreements or disputes through communication and negotiation. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Conscientização | The process of developing awareness of social, political, and economic injustices and taking action to challenge and change them. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Constructive Feedback | Thoughtful, helpful, and specific information given to guide improvement and encourage positive growth. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Critical Pedagogy | An approach to teaching that examines what is taught, how it is taught, and whose voices are included or excluded, with a focus on equity, social justice, and empowerment. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Cultural Competence | The ability to understand, respect, and effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and interact effectively with people of different cultures. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Culturally Responsive Mentoring | Mentoring practices that recognize, respect, and integrate the diverse cultural backgrounds and identities of adult learners. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Developmentally Appropriate Practice | An educational approach that tailors teaching methods and learning experiences to match the age, individual needs, and developmental stage of each child. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Emotional Intelligence | The ability to perceive, understand, and regulate one's own emotions and respond effectively to the emotions of others. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Equity | The fair and just treatment of individuals by recognizing and addressing their unique needs and circumstances to ensure equal opportunities. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Equity-Centered Leadership | A leadership approach that prioritizes fairness, inclusion, and the dismantling of systemic barriers in educational systems and policies. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Ethical Responsibility | Obligations and principles that guide what is right and wrong behavior in a professional setting. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Executive Functioning | A set of mental skills that help individuals plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and manage multiple tasks. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Family Engagement | The active collaboration between families and educators to support and enhance children's learning and development, partnership with families in the educational process. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Flow State | A mental condition of complete focus and immersion in an activity, often leading to high productivity and enjoyment. The Optimal performance zone where skill meets challenge. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Hidden Curriculum | The unspoken or implicit lessons, values, and expectations conveyed in schools that influence students' beliefs and behaviors beyond the official curriculum. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Inquiry-Based Pedagogy | A teaching approach that encourages students to ask questions. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Integrity | The quality of being honest and consistently adhering to strong moral and ethical principles. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Learning Styles | The preferred ways individuals absorb, process, and retain information. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Mental Models | Deeply held assumptions, beliefs, or mindsets that shape how people perceive the world and respond to change; considered the most implicit level of systemic conditions. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Metacognition | The awareness and regulation of one's own thinking processes, including reflection, planning, and problem-solving. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Mindfulness | The practice of intentional, present-moment awareness with nonjudgmental attention to thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensation. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Moral Commitment | A deep personal dedication to act ethically and uphold values, even when it is difficult or inconvenient. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Moral Dilemma | A situation where a person must choose between two or more actions, each with ethical implications and possible consequences. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Paradigm | The word paradigm comes from the Greek word *paradeigma*, meaning "example" or "pattern". A paradigm is a model, framework, pattern of thinking, or an overarching system of ideas and practices that shapes how people understand and interpret the world; thus, the term describes how problems are understood and addressed, such as the constructivist paradigm in ECE, which emphasizes learning through experience and interaction. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Pedagogy | The art and science of teaching, including the methods and strategies used to facilitate learning. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Policy | A policy is a formal rule, guideline, principle, or an official statement adopted by an organization, institution, or government to guide decisions and actions. They are designed to promote consistency, fairness, and accountability in how procedures are carried out and outline expectations or procedures, such as a school's discipline policy or a state's early childhood education policy governing teacher qualifications and child-to-adult ratios. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Practicum | A supervised, hands-on learning experience in a real-world setting where adult learners apply what they've learned in the classroom. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Praxis | The cycle of reflection and action used to apply theoretical ideas to real-world practice, often linked to social change in education. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Procedure | A procedure is a clearly defined, specific, step-by-step set of instructions for how to carry out a task or implement a policy, such as the sign-in and sign-out procedures. They ensure that actions are performed consistently, safely, and efficiently. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Professional Code | A formal set of ethical guidelines and standards that govern the behavior and responsibilities of individuals within a specific profession. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Public Policy | A set of laws, regulations, and actions created by governments to address societal issues and guide decision-making. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Reciprocal Relationships | Mutually beneficial interactions where all parties actively give and receive support, fostering trust and collaboration. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Reflective Feedback | Thoughtful and constructive input provided to help someone learn from their experiences and improve their skills. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Reflective Practice | The process of thoughtfully examining one's own teaching or professional actions to learn, grow, and improve future practice. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Role Clarification | Clearly defining the responsibilities and expectations of everyone involve, such as the mentor, mentee, and supervisor, to avoid misunderstandings. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Social Justice | The fair and equal distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights to ensure all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Sponsorship | A mentoring function in which a mentor actively advocates for a mentee's advancement by using their influence and networks. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Systemic Change | Transformation that addresses underlying structures, policies, beliefs, and relationships across an entire system rather than isolated individuals. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

The Main Difference between Policies and Procedures | Policies are overarching rules or principles that guide decision-making and reflect an organization's values and goals. In contrast, procedures are the specific, step-by-step instructions that explain how to carry out those policies in daily practice. Policies say what to do; procedures explain how to do it. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Transformative Intellectuals | Educators who not only teach content but also inspire critical thinking, social responsibility, and action toward positive social change. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Transparency | The practice of being open, honest, and clear about actions, decisions, and information. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Trauma Informed Care | An approach that recognizes the widespread impact of trauma and integrates this understanding into policies, practices, and interactions to promote healing, safety, and empowerment. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

Voice | The act of expressing personal experiences and perspectives, especially those traditionally marginalized, as a valid and essential form of knowledge and agency in educational settings. [Dr. Laurie A. Daly]

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