

# The basics

## 2. Ethics the fundamental way we guide our thinking



There is no better way to start a conversation about Ethics, than to provide a link to the Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics.

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics/>

Recognized internationally as a foundation document of our profession, it is so well known that some might wonder why we are discussing it. Early Childhood Australia don't just provide the Code [as we shall call it here], they provide periodic education on using the Code, and they produce learning materials to go with it.

It is available in Chinese, Arabic, Hindi, and ECA have stated that they are looking forward to providing the document in other languages in the future. How ... ethical?

Hmm, is that the right use of the word? We'll get back to that.

**We asked an Educator what a Code of Ethics is**, and they couldn't answer. So, we asked 20 Educators. None could give a statement. The thing is, all 20 have the Code up in a frame in their service. It has been there for quite a while. Long enough to become wall paper.

“The ECA *Code of Ethics* is a set of statements about appropriate and expected behaviour of early childhood professionals”

ECA tell us that it was

“Designed especially for early childhood education and care environments, and based on the principles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1991) the ECA *Code of Ethics* reflects current pedagogical research and practice, providing a framework for reflection about the ethical responsibilities of early childhood professionals who work with or on behalf of children and families in early childhood settings.”

It is different than a Code of Conduct which is a statement from an employer about how you will act and which Regulation 168 requires you to have - - but it can form part of one.

How Educational Leaders work with the Code of Ethics:

1. Know it

You have to be across it!

The best advice we can give is to put a reminder into your professional diary or your professional life (such as linking it to your First Aid CPR refresher) and reread the Code, and work through your ECA [\*Ethics in Action: A practical guide to implementing the ECA Code of Ethics\*](#) there is a link on their website.

## 2. Understand the function of a Code

It will provide:

- Inspiration and guidance
- Support
- Deterrence
- Mutual understanding
- Contribution to a shared language of the profession
- Sharing the intent of professional practice with the parents.

It will not:

- Act as a regulation
- Be evidence if someone isn't acting appropriately
- Answer all questions
- Be clear to everyone the first time.

## 3. Understand that it may bewilder some staff!

This is incredibly important. Working through the Code requires an Educator to conceptualise scenarios and changes in scenarios. It can also require Educators to relate to behaviours that they haven't thought of in that way before, and it requires Educators to make judgements that they may either not feel empowered to do or may not feel knowledgeable enough to do.

So how do you make the Code of Ethics a living, breathing inspiring document that leaps off the wall and dances around in your service!

## *You talk about it.*

**Scenario A:** An Educator comes to you, concerned that they have heard that a parent, who they know to be well off financially, is getting Child Care Subsidy.

How do you respond:

Step 1: Talk to your Educator about how, as professionals we face complex questions. These questions can be answered if we use a guide such as the Code.

Step 2: Discuss how the Code helps us to sort out the thoughts we may have in any circumstance.

For example [and these are only some examples] deciding that if the Code speaks of professional decisions drawing on specialised knowledge and multiple perspectives, then how much knowledge does she need to gain to decide on her question. What other perspectives might she draw on to help her through her question?

Step 3: Don't let go. This may be a pivotal time in your Educator's professional learning. Work with her on the question and how she can use the Code.

Step 4: Follow up with another example. Work with the Educator on 2 or 3 examples. This embeds knowledge, ensures that you are sure they can use the Code well, and it empowers your educator to make decisions.

Step 5: Congratulate the Educator on their increasing decision making on complex professional questions. Do this in a way that is meaningful to them.

**Scenario B:** You are asked multiple complex and often repeated questions from one end of the corridor to the other. Some you can deal with BUT, for the rest, do you answer them quickly or do you ask Educators to look for guidance from the Code.

In this case: Use phrases like 'The Code of Ethics can help there...' or 'In the Code of Ethics we can see that ...' or 'I have used the Code before on this, and I learned ...'.

Why? Because investing time in your Educators in this way will save you more time later as they become more independent at answering the professional questions that they come up against.