

Code of Professional Responsibilities and Code of Ethics For Early Years Educators





Professionalisation Sub-Group of the **Early Years** Forum

Contents



Foreword by Minister for Children and Youth Affairs	2
Code of Ethics for Early Years Educators ¹ in Ireland	4
1. Introduction by Dr Mary Moloney, Chairperson of the Professionalisation Sub-Group	8
2. Using the Code of Professional Responsibilities	10
3. Principles Underpinning the Code of Professional Responsibilities	12
4. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Children	13
Scenario 1	15
5. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Parents and Families	16
Scenario 2	17
6. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Colleagues	18
Scenario 3	19
7. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Employers	20
Scenario 4	21
8. Professional Responsibilities Relating to the Early Childhood Education and Care Profession	22
Scenario 5	23
9. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Communities	24
Scenario 6	25

Foreword by Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I welcome the publication of the Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Responsibilities for the early learning and care workforce. In 2016, I established a Forum for the early learning and care sector where issues of relevance could be discussed among key stakeholders and to enable consultation and engagement between myself, key Department of Children and Youth Affairs officials and key representatives of the sector. This Forum provides a platform for early learning and care representative groups to have an input into the policy process and to work together through sharing of good practice.

This publication is an initiative of the Professionalisation Sub Group (P-SG) of the Early Years Forum. The role of the P-SG is to examine the issues that impact on the professionalisation of the early learning and care workforce and to prepare proposals for consideration by the National Early Years Forum which relate to the professionalisation of the workforce. Proposals include topics such as sector recruitment, development of a professional body, and a code of ethics, which I am delighted to see is included in this publication. The P-SG is made up of a range of organisations representing the early learning and care sector.

Among the many important developments initiated in recent years to strengthen and underpin early learning and care in Ireland is this joint publication of the Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Responsibilities, which outlines the values and standards expected of the sector's workforce. Both Codes were the subject of an extensive consultation process with early learning and care partners and stakeholders, including the general public, the workforce and interested bodies. This document has been designed by the early learning and care workforce, for the early learning and care workforce, which is a powerful statement. It belongs to the profession.

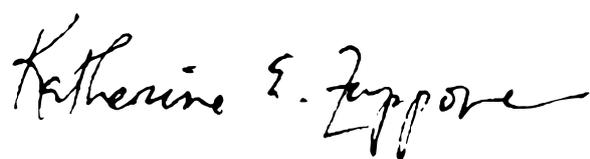


As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I want these Codes to be more than just words – I want the words to be matched by real practice on the ground. I want to see the full implementation of the Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Responsibilities, which I believe will support public trust and confidence in the profession.

I wish to record my thanks and appreciation to the members of the P-SG of the National Early Years Forum for their work on this publication and their wider efforts to support the professionalisation of the early learning and care sector.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the women and men who work at all levels of our sector, who action the code of ethics and code of professional responsibilities every day in supporting Ireland’s children grow and develop to their fullest potential.

While much of this work on professionalisation remains ongoing, I hope that you will find useful and interesting insights in these Codes that help to place your role in context. We remain determined to build on the progress achieved to date and to continue to deliver accessible, affordable and high quality early learning and care and school-age childcare for children and their families, while also creating an appropriately skilled and sustainable workforce that is supported and valued.



Dr Katherine Zappone, T.D.

MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

Code of Ethics for Early Years Educators¹ in Ireland

Preamble

This document outlines the values and ethics underpinning the work of the early years educators regardless of position. It offers to early years educators a set of principles to provide a reference point in guiding day-to-day decision making.

The Code of Ethics of early years educators is centred on the rights of the child and the rights of the child's parent/guardian as the natural and first educator of their children. It is also based on Síolta, the national quality framework for early childhood education and Aistear, the national curriculum framework for the early years.

The early years educators will use this Code of Ethics as a foundation on which to develop policies, procedures and practice. It is designed to be applied in working with children, parents², services, or within communities. Similarly, in emphasising the professional nature of early childhood education, it respects and encourages the educator's own judgements which are a fundamental part of early years pedagogy. The term 'early years educator' as used in this Code refers to the members of the early childhood education and care profession.

Values Statement

Early years educators acknowledge that:

- Every child is unique and has inalienable rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be valued, respected, nurtured, and supported in its own right;

1. The term 'early years educator' as used in this document refers to the members of the early childhood education and care profession. Alternative terms may be used in different settings. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills will be carrying out a public consultation on the most appropriate terminology for the profession during 2020.

2. The term parent is used to include parents, guardians and all persons who act in "loco parentis".



- The young child is innately driven to learn and is an active agent in her/his own development through her/his interactions with the world. The young child is a competent and confident learner.
- Early childhood education and care takes place in the context of family, community and culture;
- Children thrive best in caring and democratic communities;
- Play is a key means of supporting young children's learning and development.

Early years educators, in undertaking their roles and tasks, will seek to promote and maintain these values.

Principles of Early Years Teaching

1. The child's individuality, strengths, needs and rights are central in the provision of quality early childhood education and care settings. Children have the right to be listened to and appropriately responded to.
2. Parents are the primary educators of the young child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his health, well-being, learning and development. Open, honest and respectful partnership with parents is essential in promoting the best interests of the child. Implicit to this is the need to support parents and families in that role.
3. Positive relationships, which are secure, responsive and respectful and which provide consistency and continuity over time, are the cornerstone of the child's well-being.
4. Equality, as articulated in Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and in the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004, is a fundamental characteristic of quality early childhood care and education provision.
5. Early years educators respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural and linguistic identity valued.

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6. The health, well-being, safety, welfare and education of all children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments.
 7. Early years educators understand the role of Play as central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child.
 8. Throughout childhood, care and education are inseparable and early years educators express this by curricula or programmes of activities which take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the young child.
 9. Early years educators value training and professional qualifications, and participate in continuous professional development. They will assist students of early years teaching in their learning.
 10. In seeking to respond to the needs of young children, early years educators will seek to involve other professionals and agencies as appropriate.
 11. Early years educators, having taken into account the rights of others, will provide service users with full information, including access to records pertaining to work on their behalf.
 12. Early years educators will act with responsibility, accountability and integrity at all times. Early years educators should be prepared to reflect on and state the reasons for their practice and decisions.
 13. Early years educators will respect a service user's right to confidentiality. It is the duty of the early years educator to ensure that the nature and limits of the privacy inherent in their relationship are clearly understood and applied.
 14. Early years educators actively promote children's citizenship in their local, regional and national communities.

Code of Professional Responsibilities



1. Introduction by Dr Mary Moloney, Chairperson of the Professionalisation Sub-Group

As Chairperson of the Professionalisation Sub-Group, I welcome the development of this Code of Professional Responsibilities. It has been developed by the P-SG following extensive consultation with the ECEC workforce and interested stakeholders. The value of quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) experiences for young children is widely acknowledged. In Ireland, this recognition has resulted in increased State investment (e.g., the National Childcare Scheme and the Early Childhood Care and Education programme), regulation, inspection, training and ongoing professional development. The ECEC sector is therefore increasingly in the spotlight and, there are concomitant professional expectations and accountability of the workforce. This code of professional responsibilities has been developed to guide and support early years educators to meet their professional responsibilities across six domains relating to:

- 1. Children;**
- 2. Parents and families;**
- 3. Colleagues;**
- 4. Employers;**
- 5. ECEC profession and,**
- 6. Communities.**

It also aims to help early years educators recognise and appreciate the value of their role in the lives of children, families and communities, and to guide them in identifying and resolving behaviour issues/concerns that may arise in the course of their work and, in so doing, maintain public trust and confidence in their integrity and professionalism.



The code is first and foremost underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Síolta: the National Quality Framework (2006), Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009), the Early Years Services Regulations (2016), the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines (2016), First 5 A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2018) and, the Code of Ethics developed by the professionalisation sub-group of the Early Years Forum (2018). It also draws upon, and is informed by the codes of ethics of Early Childhood Australia (ECA), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the U.S. and Children’s First Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017) in Ireland.

Professional responsibilities are an identifying feature of a profession. Consequently, this code of professional responsibilities recognises that early years educators are in a unique position of trust and influence in their relationships with children, families, colleagues and the community. As such, their professional behaviour is reflected in their commitment to respecting and maintaining the rights and dignity of children, parents and families, colleagues and communities.

It is paramount that the service we provide to children, parents and families is of the highest possible standard. Our conduct should be such that it places the profession in the highest possible esteem.

I hope that this Code of Professional Responsibilities will inform professional practice in all ECEC settings in Ireland and become a reference point for induction training, continuous professional development and critical reflection.



2. Using the Code of Professional Responsibilities

As mentioned, this code of professional responsibilities is intended to:

1. Guide and support early years educators to meet their professional responsibilities;
2. Help early years educators recognise and appreciate the value of their role in the lives of children, families and communities;
3. Assist early years educators in identifying and resolving behaviour issues/concerns that may arise in the course of their work and, in so doing, maintain public trust and confidence in their integrity and professionalism. It can be used as the basis for:
 - Staff meetings within the ECEC setting;
 - Induction training with new staff and/or students;
 - Personal reflection or discussion with colleagues in the setting;
 - Helping early years educators to monitor their own professional standards and practice, leading to
 - Ongoing professional development and;
 - Discussion between trainers and learners.

The code will also support ECEC employers in giving a clear message that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated and that, where appropriate, disciplinary or legal action is likely to follow.

It is important to note that this code of professional responsibilities cannot cover every situation where early years educators are required to make a decision. In practice, deciding on the right course of action will often involve weighing up competing priorities and responsibilities. In most cases, the answer will be clear. However, there will be times when an early years educator is unsure of what to do in a particular situation. In such cases, an early years educator should discuss the matter in confidence with their room leader/mentor/manager and, where necessary, seek further advice, for example from an experienced colleague or external body such as Better Start, or Síolta mentor.



In relation to all actions, early years educators should ask themselves the following questions:

1. Are my actions just and fair and in keeping with legislation*?
2. Are my actions consistent with the setting's goals, the principles and standards of Síolta, the values and principles of the Code of Ethics and this Code of Professional responsibilities?
3. Is this the proper thing for me to do?
4. What will the outcome of my actions be for:
 - Children?
 - Parents and families?
 - The setting?
 - Colleagues?
 - My employer?
 - Reputation of the Early Childhood Care and Education Profession?
 - The community?
 - Others?
 - Me? (adapted from www.act.gov.au).

*Examples include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Early Years Services Regulations, 2016, the General Data Protection Regulation, 2016

3. Principles Underpinning the Code of Professional Responsibilities

The core principles set out below underpin the commitment of early years educators to respect and maintain the rights and dignity of children, parents and families, colleagues and communities and values of the early years profession.

As early years educators, we therefore:

- Appreciate that every child is unique and has inalienable rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Appreciate that early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be valued, respected, nurtured and, supported in its own right;
- Respect that the young child is a competent and confident learner who is innately driven to learn and, is an active agent in his/her development through interactions with the world;
- Recognise that early childhood education and care takes place in the context of family, community and culture;
- Recognise that children thrive best in caring and democratic communities;
- Appreciate that play is a key means of supporting young children's health and well-being, creativity, learning and development.





4. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Children

Babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally appropriate, integrated Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare

(Goal C: Objective 8)

First 5 A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (Gov. of Ireland, 2018, p.143)

Drawing upon First 5 A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families and in keeping with the core principles outlined above, early years educators commit to providing a nurturing and stimulating learning environment (Govt. of Ireland, 2018), and to upholding, supporting and enhancing young children's needs and rights within the daily life of the ECEC setting.

To fulfil this commitment, in relation to children, we will:

1. Respect the rights of children as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and commit to endorsing these rights;
2. Act in the best interests of children at all times;
3. Take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the young child;
4. Ensure that each child's health, well-being, safety, welfare, creativity and education is protected and promoted daily within the setting;
5. Care for and educate children in positive emotional, social and inclusive environments that foster each child's holistic development and support his/her culture, language, ethnicity, and family structure;
6. Respect the child's right to play, as both a process and a context for learning, development, health and well-being,
7. Appreciate play, exploration and discovery (indoors and outdoors) as the most appropriate means of learning in early childhood;



8. Plan for, support, and advocate for children’s playful learning experiences in the ECEC setting;
9. Respond to and act upon the rights of children and families with additional needs;
10. Value the relationship between children and their families, and enhance these relationships through our daily practice;
11. Build positive individual relationships with each child, that are secure, responsive and respectful and which provide consistency and continuity over time;
12. Listen to and respond appropriately to children;
13. Consult with parents and families so that each child benefits from the setting/ programme;
14. Respect children as capable and competent learners by including their perspective in planning, implementing and assessing the programme/activities;
15. Ensure that children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, sexuality, age, ability, economic status, family structure, lifestyle, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, or national origin;
16. Involve other professionals and agencies as appropriate when seeking to respond to the needs of young children, and,
17. In keeping with the requirements of the GDPR, and this code of professional behaviour, we will:
 - Ensure confidentiality of sensitive information about children, parents and families when working with other professionals and agencies;
 - Safeguard the confidentiality of information about children, parents and families, particularly when shared on digital platforms (e.g. Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter);
18. Actively promote children’s citizenship in their local, regional and national communities;



19. Support children in their transitions to (and through) ECEC settings and onwards to primary school;
20. Be aware of and, safeguard the rights of the child;
21. Ensure that no practices carried out are disrespectful, degrading, exploitative, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful in respect of any child.

Think about

No practices that are disrespectful, degrading, exploitative, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful are carried out in respect of a pre-school child whilst attending the service (TUSLA, 2016, p. 18)

Scenario 1

The children have just returned inside from playing in the garden outside. Maryam, a three year old who is sitting on the floor with her peers is struggling to put on her shoes. As Janus, an early years educator approaches the children, Maryam holds a shoe out to him seeking help. Janus dismisses Maryam's need for help saying 'you're a big girl, you should be well able to put on your own shoes'. He walks away leaving Maryam struggling with her shoes.

- Q1. How would you describe Janus' behaviour towards Maryam?
- Q2. How do you think he listened to and responded to her need for help?
- Q3. How would you respond to his behaviour towards Maryam if you witnessed it?

5. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Parents and Families

Parents and families have the most active role, and the greatest responsibility, in shaping their child's development

First 5 A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and Families (Gov. of Ireland, 2018)

In relation to Parents and Families, we will:

1. Support parents as children's first and most important educator;
2. Respect parents' and families' right to make decisions about their child;
3. Work collaboratively with parents and families and, engage in shared decision making as necessary, to support children's learning, development, health and wellbeing;
4. Develop respectful relationships with parents and families, based upon open communication to encourage family engagement and build a strong sense of belonging;
5. Learn about, respect and respond to the uniqueness of each family, their circumstances, culture, family structure, customs, language, and beliefs;
6. In keeping with the requirements of the GDPR, and this code of professional responsibilities we will:
 - Respect each families' right to privacy and safeguard information about parents/families, particularly when shared on digital platforms;
 - Ensure that the nature and limits of the privacy inherent in their relationship are clearly understood and applied;
 - Speak respectfully to and about families with colleagues and/or other professionals;
7. Be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of children and families at all times and respond in ways that empower and maintain their dignity;

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8. Facilitate and encourage parental involvement and engagement in early learning in ECEC settings;
 9. Ensure that no practices carried out are disrespectful, degrading, exploitative, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful in respect of any parent or family.

Think about

Speak respectfully to and about families with colleagues and/or other professionals

Scenario 2

Jenny, a new staff member, is having lunch with three early years educators in the setting staffroom. Two educators are talking about the parent of a toddler in the setting. They describe the parent as 'impossible to talk to, very difficult and argumentative'. They advise Jenny to 'avoid the parent, don't tell her anything'.

- Q1. How do you feel about the early years educators discussing the parent in the setting staff room?
- Q2. What impact does this discussion have on Jenny, the new staff member?
- Q3. What does this discussion tell you about professional behaviour in this setting?
- Q4. How would you deal with this behaviour if you witnessed it in the setting?

6. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Colleagues

In relation to colleagues, we will:

1. Encourage colleagues to adopt and act in accordance with this code of professional responsibilities;
2. Encourage colleagues to take action in the presence of inappropriate behaviour;
3. Build a spirit of collegiality and professionalism through collaborative relationships, and team work based on trust, respect and honesty;
4. Model quality practice;
5. Respect colleagues' contributions;
6. Acknowledge and support the diverse strengths and experiences of colleagues to build shared professional knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes;
7. Use constructive processes to address differences of opinion and to negotiate shared perspectives and actions;
8. Collaborate with colleagues to generate a culture of continual reflection and renewal of best practices in early childhood education and care;
9. Implement strategies that support and mentor colleagues (and students of Early Childhood Education and Care) to make positive contributions to the ECEC profession





Think About

We will model quality practices

Scenario 3

At the Happy Days early childhood centre, early years educators continually sit on the tables where children are working. They also sit on the storage units which house the children's equipment and materials.

Early years educators also stand around chatting during children's outdoor play. When children approach to tell them about what they're doing, or what they've seen in the garden, the educators tell them to 'just go and play'.

- Q1. How do you feel about educators sitting on children's tables and furniture?
- Q2. How do you feel about educators using outdoor activities as an opportunity to chat?
- Q3. What behaviour is modelled when early years educators tell children to 'just go and play'?
- Q4. How do these behaviours advance professional responsibilities?
- Q5. How would you address these behaviours if these educators were your work colleagues?

7. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Employers

In relation to our employer, we will:

1. Adhere to all policies and procedures, and in the case of conflict, attempt to effect change through constructive action within the setting/organisation or
2. Seek change through appropriate procedures;
3. Support work place policies, standards and practices that are fair, non-discriminatory and are in the best interests of children, families and professionals;
4. In keeping with the requirements of the GDPR and this code of professional responsibilities, we will;
 - Not engage in any action that diminishes the reputation of the setting/organisation; or colleagues who work within it





Think about

Not engage in any action that diminishes the reputation of the setting/
organisation

Scenario 4

Elaina, an early years educator, is due to open the early childhood setting at 7.00am. She stays partying until 4.30am, the previous night, and arrives to work with a headache and looks dishevelled. She tells a parent with whom she is friendly, that she had 'a hard night' and is 'not able for much today'.

- Q1. Identify the behaviours in this scenario that could bring the setting into disrepute?
- Q2. How do you feel about Elaina's behaviour?
- Q3. What constructive action could be taken within the setting to address Elaina's behaviour to ensure it does not reoccur?

8. Professional Responsibilities Relating to the Early Childhood Education and Care Profession

In relation to our profession, we will:

1. Present a positive demeanour including professional dress, good attendance, and time keeping;
2. Advocate for our profession and the provision of quality early childhood education and care;
3. Engage in critical reflection, and ongoing professional learning;
4. Be pro-active in remaining up to date with research, changes in legislation and policy, and take personal responsibility for our ongoing professional development and learning;
5. Act with responsibility, accountability and integrity at all times;
6. Value training and professional qualifications, and participate in continuous professional development; including the development of language and communication skills appropriate to the needs of children in our setting;
7. Base our work on research, theory, content knowledge, practice-evidence and understanding of the children and families with whom we work;
8. Articulate our professional values, knowledge and practice, as well as, the positive contribution our profession makes to society;
9. In keeping with the requirements of the GDPR and this code of professional responsibilities, we will:
 - Engage in respectful communication at all times;
 - Resist any action that diminishes the good standing of our profession. This includes/extends to the use of social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter etc.).

Think About

Value training and professional qualifications, and participate in continuous professional development

Scenario 5

Muniza, who holds a QQI Level 5 qualification, is now undertaking a QQI Level 8 degree in ECEC. While engaging in practicum/field experience as part of her studies, staff in the setting scoff at the idea of requiring a degree to work with young children. They inform Muniza that ‘a degree is a waste of time. You’ll get paid the same as us, your degree won’t make any difference’.

- Q1. How do these staff members value training and professional qualifications?
- Q2. How does their attitude advocate for the ECCE profession and the provision of quality early childhood education and care?
- Q3. What message does their attitude convey with regards to respect for the ECCE profession?
- Q4. How would you respond to similar comments relating to higher qualification levels?



9. Professional Responsibilities Relating to Communities

In relation to communities, we will:

1. Learn about the community in which we work, and develop and implement early childhood curricula that are responsive to those contexts and community priorities;
2. Connect with the services and agencies in the community that support children and families;
3. Provide parents and families using our service with full information, including access to records pertaining to work on their behalf (taking account of the rights of others);
4. Acknowledge the connectedness of local, national and global communities of children and families to promote shared aspirations for all children's health, well-being, safety, welfare and early education;
5. Advocate for the development and implementation of legislation/policy that promotes child friendly communities, and work to change those that impede child and family well-being;
6. Use knowledge and research to advocate for universal access to quality early childhood education and care services for all children;
7. Work to promote community understanding of how young children learn so that appropriate systems of assessment and reporting are used to benefit children;
8. In keeping with the requirements of the GDPR and this code of professional responsibilities, we will:
 - Resist any action that diminishes the good standing of the community



Think About

Connect with the services and agencies in the community that support children and families.

Scenario 6

Mortiza, a four year old Syrian boy, attends the free ECCE programme at a local pre-school setting. Staff have noticed that Mortiza is withdrawn, struggles with communication and tends to become aggressive when asked to join in activities with other children. The room leader has asked the manager about seeking support through the 'Access and Inclusion Model'³. However, the manager feels that there is no need to do this as Mortiza will only be in the setting for one year and, anyway, she is snowed under with paper work and trying to access support will take up too much time.

- Q1. How do you feel about accessing supports for Mortiza through the Access and Inclusion Model?
- Q2. How do you feel about the manager's response?
- Q3. How could this situation be resolved in a professional manner?

Remember:

Any and all of the scenarios included in this code of professional responsibilities undermine the quality of the setting. They can therefore diminish the reputation of the setting and other colleagues working within it

3. The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the ECCE programme. It supports children to meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early learning and care.

