



*Helping you make the best childcare decision*

# Code of Ethical Conduct for Early Childhood Services

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## *Preamble*

The standards of practice that early childhood education and care services should uphold are outlined in this Code of Ethical Conduct. Guidelines are included for each standard.

The Code acknowledges that New Zealand is party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Te Tiriti o Waitangi is acknowledged as New Zealand's founding document that defines the obligations and responsibilities of early childhood services in relationship with Māori.

It is voluntarily embraced by early childhood education and care services and provides a resource for responsible decision-making and action. Feedback from early childhood services implementing the Code will inform any subsequent iteration.

## Standards

### 1. An ethic of care

Early childhood services care for and care about children. The significance of caring and relationship both as an educational goal, and as a fundamental aspect of what the service does is recognised.

#### Guidelines

- 1a** Early childhood service providers and practitioners attend to the needs of children first and put children ahead of their own needs and that of other stakeholders such as Government and its agencies.
- 1b** Early childhood services give emphasis to the contributions the family of the child makes to the child's development. Early childhood services support and strive to bolster the contribution the family makes as the primary educator<sup>1</sup>.
- 1c** Parents/caregivers are recognised as experts on and a source of information about their children.
- 1d** With personal attention, care and affection the early childhood service aims to help each child to flourish personally.
- 1e** Early childhood service decisions do not conflict with what is in the best and appropriate interests of children and their parents/caregivers.
- 1f** Actions are not taken that could result in harm to any child and family associated with the early childhood service.
- 1g** The right of children, caregivers/parents and families to confidentiality and privacy of personal information is respected and upheld.
- 1h** Early childhood services are not indifferent to parents/caregivers' emotions and parenting and personal worries. Compassion and empathy is shown.
- 1i** A supportive, non-threatening and non-judgemental environment for children and parents/caregivers is provided. Management and staff or contractors are conscious of their own biases and are careful not to let their views influence how they treat any child, parent, or group of children and families.
- 1j** No child is refused enrolment or restricted from participation in any aspect of the early childhood programme for reasons of parent/caregiver occupational status or income, national origin, political belief, family structure, or a child's gender, race, religion, personal disability or individual differences.

## 2. Compliance with the law and maintenance of social cohesion

Early childhood services observe standards consistent with the law and maintenance of social cohesion for the well-being of all its members.

### Guidelines

- 2a** All laws are upheld, including legal requirements pertaining to education and early childhood education, human rights, consumer, building and facilities, employment and copyright.
- 2b** Early childhood services do not condone anyone disregarding any law even in the case where this may be for their benefit<sup>ii</sup> (e.g. to save money or time).
- 2c** Early childhood service adults provide role models to children of respectful and inclusive behaviour.
- 2d** Any instances of hateful, hurtful or discriminatory behaviour (including bullying), attitudes, and language by any adult or child at the service are picked up promptly before escalation and addressed in a constructive and considerate way.

## 3. Being well-informed and professionally connected

Early childhood services stay well-informed by, for example, enabling the adults who work for it to engage in relevant professional development, inviting parent/family critique and input into what it does, and holding membership with a professional network.

### Guidelines

- 3a** Early childhood service adults are provided with opportunities to develop and also to share their new learning, thinking, and activities with others in their service.
- 3b** Feedback from parents/caregivers is formally and informally invited and welcomed at all times<sup>iii</sup>. Also, every 12 to 18 months comprehensive feedback and advice is formally asked of the families of all enrolled children and responded to<sup>iv</sup>.
- 3c** Early childhood services are connected through membership with a professional group such as the ChildForum Early Childhood Network for the sharing of ideas and approaches that work, access to best practice guidelines, advice, research, and information on new developments and current events<sup>v</sup>.

#### **4. Accountability, honesty and openness**

Early childhood services accept they are accountable and maintain a climate of openness and transparency.

##### Guidelines

- 4a** An open door policy enables parents/caregivers to observe the early childhood service in action anytime. Special times of invitation<sup>vi</sup> are also organised for families to see there is transparency in its objectives.
- 4b** Input into decision-making on financial matters, policies, and the programme is invited and welcomed from parents/caregivers and all adults working at the service.
- 4c** It is made safe for any family or adult at the early childhood service to raise concerns or make a report in good faith and there is no retaliation.
- 4d** The early childhood service operator as the overseer accepts ultimate responsibility for any mistake, harm caused, or breach of this Code even when this may be due to the actions of a volunteer, committee member, or educator working as an independent contractor, or a company external to the early childhood service supplying services to it. Mistakes and wrongful behaviour are apologised for and put right where possible. The early childhood service acts with sensitivity toward those affected by any mistake or incident.
- 4e** All reporting to parents/caregivers, the early childhood service community, government agencies and others is done ethically and is timely, correct and factual.

## 5. Socially and professionally responsible

Early childhood services act in a socially and professionally responsible manner.

### Guidelines

**5a** Early childhood services promise only what can be delivered and declare any risks. This is so children, parents/caregivers, employees, government agencies, and others will see they can trust the service to do what it says it will do and give the benefits it says it can, while parents can make informed decisions about use and their child's participation.

**5b** Advocacy or speaking out and taking action on behalf of children and parents/caregivers to protect their rights is viewed as an essential professional responsibility<sup>vii</sup>.

**5c** Early childhood services support national initiatives and policies that promote the well-being of young children and their families and contribute towards raising awareness of the importance of quality early childhood education and care for children in all settings.

**5d** Early childhood services conduct business in a way that maintains goodwill within the early childhood field and builds the confidence of parents, fellow professionals, and the community:

- An early childhood service that knows of another service engaging in illegal practices should report this to the appropriate authority<sup>viii</sup>.
- An early childhood service should aim to strengthen its reputation in a way that brings credit to and upholds the reputation of the sector.
- Children and parents/caregivers are treated as human beings and not as money and numbers<sup>ix</sup>.
- All employees are paid a fair living wage commensurate with qualifications, experience, and responsibilities held. Volunteers and independent contractors are not unfairly taken advantage of.
- All adults working for the early childhood service are treated with respect. Measures are in place to identify and reduce stress, help maintain good health, and provide a supportive collegial environment<sup>x</sup>.

**5e** Early childhood services act in ways that benefit society<sup>xi</sup>.

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## ENDNOTES

i As opposed to undermining or ignoring this.

ii Examples may include bringing into the service an illegally made copy of a children's music CD or overlooking the fact that a parent's car needed to provide transport for a group of children may not have a current warrant of fitness.

iii An example of informal feedback can be through conversations between staff and parents. Formal feedback may be obtained for example by providing a box for parents to post suggestion and complaint forms.

iv A survey purpose-built and tested by the ChildForum Early Childhood Network for services to collect anonymous parents/caregiver input is available.

v Note that affiliation with an early childhood political lobby group or a management group that represents political and/or business interests does not constitute membership of a neutral professional network/national organisation.

vi For example, a grandparents' morning tea.

vii Note that this can include supporting parents to get access to specialist services and reporting child abuse and neglect.

viii For example, the Police, Ministry of Education, or Ministry of Health.

ix For example, although it does not break Ministry of Education funding rules under the 20 Hour Funding Scheme to ask parents to pay for 8 hours of childcare when they might want 6 or fewer daily hours it does not mean it is ethically right to do so.

x It is recognised that the work can be physically taxing and emotionally draining while staff (paid and unpaid) may work long hours and also have caregiving and family responsibilities outside of the service.

xi Examples may include: holding a fund-raiser for a local children's charity, caring for a homeless animal, visiting elderly people in the community who are lonely, and recycling food scraps and recyclable materials.