

# Practice Guideline



November 2018

## Professionalism

Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) demonstrate professionalism in their relationships with children, families, colleagues, and the communities in which they practise. They are reflective and intentional professionals who engage in continuous professional learning. RECEs collaborate with others to ensure high quality early childhood education.

Standard IV: A, Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, 2017

Through their practice and leadership, RECEs support the advancement of the profession in their workplaces and in the wider community. They recognize that their conduct as professionals contributes to the public's trust in the profession.

Ethic C, Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, 2017

### The Profession: Care and Relationship-Based Practice

The purpose of the early childhood education profession, noted in the *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007*, is to “promote the well-being and holistic development of children.” In order to meet this commitment, the profession places a unique and primary focus on developing caring and responsive relationships with children and their families. Quality practice in this profession is linked to these caring and responsive relationships. It is a compassionate, relationship-based practice engaged in ongoing communication and collaboration.

While the practice of the profession does not always involve children and families directly, RECEs in all roles and settings know the importance of fostering caring and responsive relationships with children and families in early learning environments. RECEs also know that strong relationships with their colleagues, supervisees, the community, and the

public contribute to ongoing, quality practice as well as to a strong profession.

The College of Early Childhood Educators has developed this practice guideline to support you, an RECE, to uphold your ethical and professional responsibilities, reflect upon what it means to be a professional, and demonstrate the interrelated aspects of professionalism in your relationship-based practice.

### This practice guideline:

- Explains concepts of being a professional.
- Defines professionalism in early childhood education.
- Describes aspects of professionalism that are demonstrated in practice through relationships.
- Provides scenarios and questions to support reflective practice and discussion.

# About this Publication

Practice guidelines communicate certain expectations of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) as outlined in the **Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice**. Guidelines also highlight how those expectations may be applied in practice. They include recommended practices and provide opportunities for reflection, discussion and professional learning. The **Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice**, current research and related legislation should be consulted when considering practice guidelines. Practice guidelines support the College's role to promote high standards and continuous professional learning and govern the conduct of RECEs.

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# What Does it Mean to Be a Professional?



## Protected title and public trust

As an RECE, you are a member of a self-regulated profession through the College of Early Childhood Educators. You hold the title, Registered Early Childhood Educator or Early Childhood Educator, and the professional designation, RECE or ECE, and have a defined scope of practice, all of which are protected in the *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007*. This special status in legislation places you in a unique position of trust. Your title and scope of practice tell families, colleagues and members of the public that you take personal responsibility for your practice and that you are an ethical, accountable professional who has the education and training to practise the profession.

Your protected title and the professional designation, RECE, is not the same as your employment role or title. Take a look at the [Professional Advisory: Protected Titles and Designations](#) for more information about title protection. Ensure you use your RECE designation in documentation connected to your practice (Standard IV: C.10).



## Decision-making

The practice of an RECE will not follow a strict set of rules or apply knowledge and skills in the same way every day. One of the hallmarks of being a professional is the ability to navigate the “messiness” (Schon, 1983) of everyday, unpredictable situations in a range of working environments and in a variety of relationships.

Routinely working in ambiguous situations with others, you are a professional because at times, you are required to make difficult decisions and provide ethical and appropriate advice on complex issues. As an RECE you take responsibility for practice decisions, actions and interactions with others by using your professional judgement to support children and families and maintain strong relationships.



## Collective responsibility

All members of professions are part of a larger collective or professional community. For RECEs, being a professional means that you are part of a collective that includes all members of the College. Together, RECEs hold themselves to high standards through the *Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice* and are required, at all times, to demonstrate aspects of professionalism in their practice with others. Professionals recognize this collective responsibility and encourage it in others.



## Leadership

Standard IV: A reminds us that “all registered early childhood educators, regardless of position or title, are leaders.” Despite your work setting and employment role, you are a leader by virtue of your relationship-based practice with children, families, colleagues, and with the profession and the public.

Leadership may be assumed or appointed. You may or may not have an administrative or pedagogical leadership role. Leadership has many different functions and occurs at many levels in employment environments.

Being an RECE provides you with the opportunity to take a leadership role by participating in the self-governance of the profession through College Council or Committee representation. As a professional you demonstrate leadership by engaging with your professional community, associations or networks and advocating for children, families, RECEs and the early years sector in order to enhance the profession (Standard IV: C.5 & C.7). Throughout your career you also contribute to an evolving body of knowledge, provide mentorship, support and collaborate with other RECEs, colleagues and supervisees. (Standard IV: C.6 & C.8).

Review the College’s definition of leadership as you reflect on how being a leader is part of being a professional.

Leadership is the practice of engaging with colleagues to draw on collective knowledge and experiences to solve problems, create solutions and improve outcomes. Leadership involves taking and encouraging collective responsibility, contributing to an inclusive and collaborative working environment and creating, coordinating and directing change through vision, inspiration, commitment and contribution (*Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, 2017*).

For more information on leadership, review the College’s definition of leadership development in the [Continuous Professional Learning Portfolio Cycle Handbook, 2017](#).

RECE leaders are uniquely committed to engaging and empowering other RECEs, colleagues and supervisees to grow as leaders. Through their relationships with others in their professional community, RECE leaders have vision and determination to create and coordinate change to improve their practice and the whole profession.

Reflect on what leadership means to you. How are you a leader in your professional practice? Think about how you are engaged in your professional community, your work as a mentor or role model, how you empower others or have a vision and work to create change. As a professional, how can you further develop your leadership skills?

What it means to be a professional in early childhood education is evolving and you play an active role in the growing definition. While it includes your title, public trust, decision-making, and leadership, being a professional is also influenced by system issues, workplace environments, beliefs and cultural contexts.

Consider what it means to you to be a professional. Reflect on your professional identity and the identity of the profession as a whole.

# What is Professionalism?

A broad definition of professionalism is required—one that is informed by the relationship-based practice of the profession and accounts for the ways all RECEs, regardless of their employer or workplace environment, must demonstrate professionalism in their practice.

The College offers the following definition of professionalism in early childhood education:

Professionalism is grounded in ethical values and refers to the use of knowledge, skills and judgement in the best interest of children and families. Professionalism is demonstrated through relationships with children, families and colleagues, and accountability to the public and the profession.

Professionalism is often associated with work ethic. Does an individual come to work on time? Do they dress appropriately? Are they courteous and polite? Do they work hard? Are they a team player? While work ethic is important and RECEs are expected to have a strong work ethic and exhibit appropriate workplace habits, these aspects of professional behaviour are often defined by employment settings, policies and expectations, as well as linked to workplace cultures and dynamics.



# Aspects of Professionalism in Early Childhood Education

As an RECE you are expected to demonstrate the interrelated aspects of professionalism in your relationship-based practice by:

- upholding ethical values
- applying knowledge and skills
- engaging in continuous professional learning
- using professional judgement
- being accountable

## Upholding ethical values

Collectively, all RECEs uphold the profession's core set of ethical values of care, respect, trust and integrity. These ethical values, communicated in the Code of Ethics, underpin your responsibilities to children, families, colleagues, the profession and the public. They guide and inform your approach to your practice at all times and remind you that as a professional, your job is to ensure you act in the best interest of children and families.

Your professional ethical values also support you in your communication strategies with others and help you maintain your caring and reciprocal relationships. It is important to take the time to reflect upon your interpersonal communication skills, collaborative efforts and the nature of your relationships with children, families and colleagues. As a professional, you must ensure that your behaviour with others is caring, respectful, trustworthy and demonstrates integrity.

Ensuring you place the interests of children and families first should not mean you neglect your own well-being. As an RECE, you consider the importance of your own well-being and self-care so you are able to uphold your ethical responsibilities in your daily practice.

Reflect on your professional ethical values in relation to your personal ones. Are they the same? When discussing upholding ethical values with your colleagues, do care, respect, trust and integrity mean the same to everyone? Do you act in accordance with these values and beliefs? Reflect on your personal beliefs, perceptions and biases and consider how they impact your practice or challenge you as a professional.

## Applying knowledge and skills

One of the key aspects of professionalism is competence. You demonstrate competence as an RECE by effectively using your knowledge and skills in your relationship-based practice, regardless of your work setting or employment role.

Much of the knowledge and skills you use as an RECE are outlined in the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*. The standards highlight the knowledge and skills you have acquired in your post-secondary education and through your experience. Highlights of your knowledge and skills include:

- Understanding and applying current research, theories and legislation in your practice to support responsive relationships, well-being and child development.
- Developing and implementing curriculum and pedagogy.
- Creating safe and supportive learning environments.
- Communicating, collaborating and sharing information.
- Maintaining professional boundaries and confidentiality.

If you do not work directly with children, it is important to think broadly about your work and role and how you use the knowledge and skills communicated in the Code and Standards. You use your knowledge and skills by supporting the practice of other RECEs and by promoting high quality early childhood education and the profession.

Regardless of your role, as an RECE, you demonstrate professionalism in your practice every day by drawing from your professional knowledge and using this in your practice. While you will build new knowledge by using your skills in your practice, it is your responsibility as a professional to acquire any additional information and resources to support you in your particular work setting or employment role.

Standard IV: C.12 reminds you that RECEs must “practise within the parameters of their professional knowledge and competence. Prior to engaging in new or specialized areas of practice, or returning after a substantial time away from an area of practice, RECEs assess their knowledge and competence and seek appropriate training, ongoing professional learning or other support.”

It is also your responsibility to communicate with others about why you do what you do as a professional. The Code and Standards reminds you to “effectively communicate the foundations of [your] practice and [your] decision-making processes to families and colleagues” (Standard IV: C.2).

The Code and Standards should be used together with relevant legislation, research, resources and appropriate ongoing professional learning to help you continually use your knowledge and skills and communicate these aspects of your practice effectively.

## Engaging in continuous professional learning

Engaging in ongoing professional learning is part of the culture of the profession. It is so important to the profession that engagement in professional learning through the Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) program has become a regulation under the *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007* and is also embedded in the Code and Standards.

The CPL program formalizes and complements the ongoing learning that many RECEs do every day. By engaging in the CPL program, which is based on self-reflection and self-directed learning, you demonstrate you are a reflective and intentional RECE who is committed to improving and strengthening your professional practice throughout your career. The program also encourages you to communicate and collaborate with your colleagues in order to receive or offer support and learn from others.

Participating in the CPL program helps you to demonstrate professionalism by ensuring you reflect upon your practice, decisions and behaviours and take steps to improve them. It enables you to work toward goals that help you remain current, increase your knowledge and skills and improve your practice with others. It also supports you in communicating to families, colleagues and the public that you are a member of a distinct profession that values ongoing professional learning.

## Using professional judgement

Using sound professional judgement is essential to demonstrating professionalism in your daily practice. Your professional judgement helps you manage complex, ambiguous practice situations, make those tough decisions and communicate your decision-making processes to others (Standard IV: C.2). When there are no clear rules for a course of action, an RECE uses their professional judgement.

The College explains professional judgement as being informed by three key areas:

### 1. Ethical and professional standards

RECEs have a legal, ethical and professional obligation to practise according to the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*. The Code and Standards reminds you of the ethical values and professional knowledge and skills expected in your practice. It also supports you in your relationships, communications with others and in making ethical and informed practice decisions. Applying the Code and Standards consistently supports the development of appropriate professional judgement.

## 2. Professional knowledge and experience

Together, the professional knowledge and experience you have as an RECE help shape your professional judgement and inform your decision-making in your practice. Your knowledge may come from your education, ongoing professional learning and awareness of current research, policies or changes in the sector. Your experience is the sum of all your practical experiences throughout your education and career. Your knowledge and experience are largely influenced by your interactions and relationships with children, families, colleagues and mentors. In some situations, additional expertise, research and resources may be required to support the development of good professional judgement.

## 3. Reflective practice

Reflective practice also plays a key role in the development of your professional judgement. When you think critically about your daily practice and the impact of your choices and actions on children, families and colleagues, you are better able to understand your practice and act to improve it. You also use reflective practice to help you consider your actions before you act. Reflective practice is often deepened and more effective when you work collaboratively with others, especially with colleagues who are a part of your practice team. By using reflective practice and collaboration to plan, evaluate situations, assess risks, make informed decisions and take steps to create change to build upon your existing knowledge, you are increasing your capacity to use your professional judgement effectively.

The College defines reflective practice in this way:

An approach used by RECEs to analyze and think critically about their professional practice with the intention to better understand and improve their practice. Reflective practice is thoughtful, action-oriented and often, a collaborative effort. RECEs use reflective practice to plan, evaluate their strengths and challenges, make decisions and create change, if necessary. Self-reflection, critical reflection and collaborative inquiry are all important elements of reflective practice (*Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, 2017*).

Review the [CPL Resource: Reflective Practice and Self-Directed Learning](#) on the College's website for more information on reflective practice.

## Being accountable

As a member of the College, you are accountable to the public, the children and families with whom you work and to the profession. Through the College, members of the profession hold each other accountable for behaviours that fall below the standards of the profession and constitute professional misconduct.

An accountable professional takes personal responsibility for their practice decisions, actions and interactions despite the behaviours of colleagues, environmental factors or workplace settings that may impact their practice. Regardless of your working environment and the actions of others, remember that you have an obligation to practise according to the Code and Standards. In some situations, you may find there is a conflict between your workplace policies and the ethical and professional standards, but you must ensure that despite such conflicts, you comply with the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* (Standard IV: B.6). Your ability to communicate effectively with system-leaders and influencers, employers, colleagues and families regarding your legal obligations is an important part of being accountable and demonstrating professionalism.

Not only are you required to take responsibility for yourself, but you must support the accountability of your colleagues and other RECEs.

Standard IV: C.11 says that RECEs must “report professional misconduct, incompetence and incapacity of colleagues which could create a risk to the health or well-being of children or others to the appropriate authorities.

This includes reporting to the College if the conduct is that of an RECE.”

Reporting the misconduct of others is a personal and professional responsibility not unlike your duty to report suspected child abuse (Standard VI: C.8).

This responsibility ensures that children are protected from harm and that the standards of the profession are maintained.

Taking responsibility and holding yourself accountable as an RECE means that you recognize your decisions and actions – in all areas of your life and at all times – reflect upon you as a professional. They also reflect upon the profession and could impact the public’s trust (Ethic C). You demonstrate accountability in your practice when you “model professional values, beliefs and behaviours with children, families and colleagues” (Standard IV: C.4) at all times.

Remember, you hold the designation of RECE and while you have both personal and professional lives, your behaviours in your personal life may reflect upon you as a professional and impact the profession.

# The Profession of Early Childhood Education

## Care and Relationship-Based Practice

The profession promotes the well-being and holistic development of children by developing caring and responsive relationships with children and families. Quality practice is compassionate and relationship-based.

## What Does it Mean to Be a Professional?



Protected title and public trust



Decision-making



Collective responsibility



Leadership

## What is Professionalism?

Professionalism is grounded in ethical values and refers to the use of knowledge, skills and judgement in the best interest of children and families. Professionalism is demonstrated through relationships with children, families and colleagues, and accountability to the public and the profession.



# Appendix: Scenarios and Reflection Questions

**The following scenarios highlight ethical dilemmas, ambiguous practice situations and complex working environments or relationships. They also highlight problematic decision-making and behaviours of RECEs as they relate to professionalism. Use the accompanying reflection questions to help you reflect upon, assess and discuss the scenarios with your colleagues.**

## Posting on social media

Allie is an RECE who has been working in a large child care centre since she graduated three years ago. In the last year or so, the centre has undergone significant change with high staff turnover, a new supervisor and a number of new families. She has felt that the relationships between staff and families are tense. Communication is unclear and at times, rude. Collaborative efforts are non-existent. Allie has observed that staff members appear to feel unappreciated and families appear to feel unsupported.

One evening after work, Allie spent some time reading and commenting on multiple Facebook groups that were devoted to the profession. She found many of the discussion themes inspiring and got some great ideas for curriculum and ongoing professional learning. She decided an online discussion group was just what she and her colleagues needed. That night Allie created a closed Facebook group for her colleagues to discuss some of the ongoing issues at work. She planned to discuss ideas to improve communication and collaboration efforts with families. She emailed her colleagues immediately to invite them to her new group.

The next day, Allie's colleagues were already starting threads about the families from their centre. Only the discussions were not what she expected. Some staff, while clearly frustrated and feeling undervalued, were speaking negatively of families – commenting on and judging their parenting approaches, cultural beliefs, socio-economic status or their education. Allie watched the discussions

and let the threads continue. She tried redirecting her colleagues by asking reflection questions in order to problem-solve and come up with ways to repair the relationships but the negative and disparaging comments continued. Comments even began to address staff that had chosen not to join the group as well as the new centre supervisor.

Weeks passed and the Facebook group continued. Comments were posted well into the night and during lunch breaks when staff would check social media. One day, the centre supervisor called Allie into her office and showed her a screenshot of a particularly critical and inappropriate thread about one family and fellow staff member.

“Allie, did you start a Facebook group for staff to publicly criticize the families, your colleagues and me?”, the supervisor asked.

Allie was shocked by the accusation. She thought:

*The group was private and yes, discussions had become a bit offensive but staff clearly needed to vent about their working relationships and everything was done in a closed group and on personal time!*

## Reflection Questions

- Consider why Allie started the Facebook group for her colleagues. What led to this decision?
- What role did relationships, communication and collaboration with others play in Allie's situation?
- What was the dilemma or ambiguous practice situation? How did the situation change over time?
- In what ways did Allie and her colleagues demonstrate or fail to demonstrate aspects of professionalism? Reflect on how ethical values, knowledge and skills, professional judgement, accountability, and continuous professional learning were upheld or ignored.
- Reflect on Allie's statement about the posts being part of a closed social media group and done on personal time. Consider whether closed groups on a public platform like Facebook can in fact, be private.
- How might their behaviours in their personal lives impact their professional lives?
- How might their behaviours impact their workplace, their relationships with families, colleagues, the supervisor, the entire profession and public trust?
- In what ways could Allie have taken a leadership role and demonstrated professionalism or encouraged professionalism from others?
- How could the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* been used to support decision-making, actions and interactions with others?



## Supporting a child or following workplace policies

Andrea is an RECE working in a school board in the Kindergarten Program. While she's been working in the program for five years, she recently moved to a new school in a different school board. The working environment and culture is different at this school. The interactions among RECEs, teachers, educational assistants, other professionals and the principal seem respectful but there is little communication and collaboration among staff.

One day, a child from Andrea's kindergarten room came to her with soiled clothing. The child had a toileting accident and was visibly upset. Andrea consoled the child by offering a hug and some understanding words before looking for her teaching partner to let her know she would help the child to change in the washroom.

Andrea's teaching partner looked at her with surprise and quickly explained she was not allowed to help the child and that it was highly inappropriate. Andrea was taken aback. The child clearly needed help. The teacher said it was a school and board policy and that it was also likely that her union would advise her not to physically assist the child. She explained they would call another school staff person to help if the child could not help themselves or, they could send the child to the office and the parents would be called to come and change their child.

Andrea felt trapped. This was not the policy in her previous school. She didn't know what to do but didn't want to get into trouble with her new principal or create further tension with her teaching partner and the other RECEs in the school. She let the teacher handle the situation and retreated back into the classroom.

Later that day, Andrea talked with other RECEs in the school. One reiterated: "We are not allowed to physically help children with personal care routines or with toileting accidents". "Anyway," one said, "it's not professional to do that work. It's not our job anymore."

Andrea thought:

*Really?! Is that what professionalism means at this school? This doesn't feel right. My ethical and professional standards don't seem to align with these policies but what am I supposed to do?*

The next morning Andrea found out the child had sat in the office with soiled pants for an hour waiting for her parent to come and help her. The parents approached Andrea that day. They told her how shocked, sad and angry they were that no one helped their child.

## Reflection Questions

- Reflect on the system issues in this scenario. What was the dilemma or ambiguous practice situation?
- How did the board policies, views about union advice, school culture, beliefs and practices from other RECEs and professionals impact Andrea and her decision-making?
- What role did relationships, communication and collaboration with others play in Andrea's situation?
- In what ways did Andrea and the other RECEs in the scenario demonstrate or fail to demonstrate aspects of professionalism? Reflect on how ethical values, knowledge and skills, professional judgement, accountability, and continuous professional learning were upheld or ignored.
- Reflect on Andrea's thoughts about the policies conflicting with the Code and Standards. What are the standards of practice that address this issue?
- How could Andrea have advocated in the interest of children and families in this scenario?
- What are some strategies for communication with her teaching partner, principal, colleagues, school board officials or union representatives?
- In what ways could Andrea have taken a leadership role and demonstrated professionalism or encouraged professionalism from other RECEs in her environment?
- What are the beliefs about professionalism and professional identity shared in this scenario?
- How could the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* been used to support decision-making, actions and interactions with others?



## Offering a diagnosis

Sidra is an RECE and has been the supervisor of a family support program, now an EarlyON site, for the past 15 years. She feels she knows the community and the families who attend the program and has built strong relationships with community partners and other professionals. She also believes she is a strong mentor and tries to provide support and guidance to her staff. Sidra is passionate about her work and confident in her expertise but she hasn't had much time for ongoing professional learning. She feels that she is always learning from her colleagues and she stays current through her work in the program.

One afternoon a family approached Sidra and expressed concerns about their child's behaviour and development. They asked Sidra for her thoughts and some strategies. Sidra had also observed some of the behaviours the family highlighted and quickly offered a possible diagnosis. The family appeared stunned and confused and left with their child immediately.

The next day, Sidra's colleague and resource consultant approached her to discuss this interaction because the family had reached out to express their concern and anger that Sidra had diagnosed their child without the proper training or experience. Sidra's colleague was equally unimpressed and said that she had crossed a line in her interactions with the family and asked her: "What knowledge or additional skills have you acquired to justify offering a quick diagnosis to this family? Offering a diagnosis was not what the family needed from you."

Sidra was surprised and thought:

*I have been in this role a long time, I know these families and children and I understand the work of the many professionals that support this program. I know challenging behaviour when I see it! I didn't want to waste the family's time and I was trying to help!*



## Reflection Questions

- Consider Sidra's actions with the family. Why do you think she offered them a diagnosis of their child?
- What was the dilemma facing Sidra?
- What role did Sidra's relationships and her communication and collaboration skills play?
- In what ways did Sidra demonstrate or fail to demonstrate aspects of professionalism? Reflect on how ethical values, knowledge and skills, professional judgement, accountability, continuous professional learning were upheld or ignored.
- Reflect on Sidra's knowledge, skills, experience? Did she practice outside the parameters of her profession as her colleague said?
- What is the role of reflective practice in this scenario? Consider Sidra's commitment to continuous professional learning. What did she need to learn?
- What are some strategies Sidra could have used to navigate the practice situation, better use her professional judgement and communicate more effectively with the family without using a diagnostic term?
- How could her behaviours impact the workplace, relationships with families, and her colleagues?
- How could her behaviours reflect upon the whole of the profession and impact public trust?
- In what ways could Sidra have taken a leadership role and demonstrated professionalism in her relationships?
- How could the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* have been used to support decision-making, actions and interactions with others?

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The following resources were consulted in the development of this practice guideline.

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