

## Practice Guideline on Communication and Collaboration – Section 1

### See this section's applicable Code and Standards

This section promotes your knowledge of the following [Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice](#) (Code and Standards).

Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs):

- are knowledgeable about a range of strategies that support ongoing positive interactions (Standard I: B2).
- maintain professional boundaries with families, colleagues and community partners when using technology and social media (Standard V: C.4).
- are responsible for building and maintaining professional, responsive and collaborative relationships with families (Ethic B).
- are leaders, regardless of position or title (Standard IV: A).
- support the advancement of the profession in their workplace and the wider community. They are professionals who contribute to the public's trust in the profession (Ethic C).
- build effective relationships with colleagues using a variety of communication methods and strategies. These include using appropriate interpersonal skills, respecting privacy and confidentiality and establishing appropriate boundaries (Standard I: C.6).
- respect the confidentiality of information related to children and families, and follow all privacy laws (Standard VI: A).

### Overview

The relationships RECEs form with children, families and colleagues are fundamental to providing equitable, high-quality early learning programs.

Who you form relationships with, and who you communicate and collaborate with, [might look different](#) (see *infographic*) as each practice setting and role is unique. For example, an RECE working in a child care centre. This role would have the RECE building relationships with children and families to ensure the needs and interests of their child(ren) are supported. They also build relationships with their colleagues in order to collaborate with them and co-create responsive learning environments, pedagogy and curriculum.

Consider who you work with on a regular basis and how you form relationships with them. How do those relationships support what you do in your role? And how can you build and continue to grow those professional relationships?

**Dr. Jean Clinton** (2014) describes responsive, nurturing and positive relationships as focusing on and prioritizing the quality of your interactions. You have a professional duty to communicate with others in the practice setting; even when communication or collaboration might seem challenging or easily avoidable, RECEs rely on these meaningful relationships to guide effective communication and collaboration to best meet the children's needs and interests.

**Wilson (2014)** defines collaboration as a “process through which people, groups and organizations work together to achieve desired results. Collaborations accomplish shared vision, achieve positive outcomes for the audiences they serve, and build an interdependent system to address issues and opportunities. Collaboration also involves sharing resources and responsibilities to jointly plan, implement and evaluate programs to achieve common goals.”

Clinton, J. (2014). Brain development: Quality of interactions. (Video recording). Ontario. Ministry of Education. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mx10YkEgxpA>

Wilson, L. (2014). *Partnerships: Families and communities in early childhood* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Nelson Education Ltd.

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## Elements of effective communication

Effective communication is:

- intentional, explicit and honest;
- a crucial aspect of practice to uphold professional standards, such as meeting the safety, needs and best interests of the children;
- the ability to maintain professionalism and boundaries; and
- an essential skill that will continue to develop and improve throughout your career.

Communicating with others in any form is a continuous professional learning process that requires time for reflection and improvement. Reflect on the following skills and consider how they influence your practice:

### INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines the term interpersonal as “relating to relationships or communication between people.”

- Verbal and non-verbal communication
- Listening and active listening
- Empathy, patience, sensitivity and understanding
- Ability to work effectively in teams
- Leadership
- Negotiation, persuasion and influence
- Dependability
- Responsibility
- Flexibility
- Conflict resolution
- Problem-solving and decision-making

Each interpersonal skill affects how you communicate with others. For example:

- A supervisor demonstrates empathy, understanding and flexibility towards an RECE who discloses they are struggling with personal issues that are impacting their professional practice.
- A child shows up in pajamas one day. You overhear two practicum students talking in the staff room. One says, “I can’t believe the family let their child show up in pajamas. I would never let my child do that.” You approach them and communicate that, as a professional, it’s important to avoid making negative assumptions and to demonstrate sensitivity and empathy instead. You explain that perhaps this was the best the family could do this morning, or maybe the child just wanted to wear pajamas.

- There has been some gossip going around a centre located in a remote community. Because there are many personal and familial relationships involved, the rumours are starting to affect the RECEs' abilities to work effectively as a team.
- An RECE living with a disability is constantly accused of ignoring others and being rude. The RECE's colleagues aren't using effective verbal communication to learn about their colleague's communication methods or problem-solving strategies. It's starting to affect staff collaboration.

## LISTENING

Part of being an effective communicator is the ability to effectively listen to others. Many times, communication can be misinterpreted or misunderstood due to a lack of understanding or attention. Listening actively to the speaker helps ensure you have a clear understanding of their perspective while also demonstrating respect. Listen to the complete message being communicated. This means you demonstrate active listening skills which can include:

### **Being present. Pay attention to how you're feeling.**

- Do you notice yourself getting distracted or your mind starts wandering?
- Do you feel anxious or impatient?
- Do you notice intruding thoughts from issues going on in your personal life?

If you notice any of the above, what strategies can you implement to try and focus on the conversation at hand?

### **Keeping an open mind. Everyone enters a conversation with previous beliefs or biases.**

- Do you consider them and try and ensure they don't hinder the conversation?
- Do you notice yourself mentally jumping to conclusions before the other person is finished speaking?
- Do you already have a response ready before the other person is finished speaking?

### **Refraining from interrupting and imposing your own ideas or solutions. When you interrupt, you send the message that your point is more important and you don't care, or have time, to listen to the other person's perspective.**

- Reflect on previous conversations you've had. Do you tend to interrupt?
- If so, why do you think this might be?
- How do you feel when you are interrupted?

### **Asking questions.**

- Do you ask questions when in conversation to ensure you fully understand the other person's perspective, idea, challenge or situation?
- Do you ask questions to clarify when something is unclear?
- Do you ask follow-up questions to ensure that you have communicated effectively?

## WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Strong written communication skills are also crucial to being an effective communicator. Remember, no matter the audience, the basis for communication should always be respectful and professional.

With colleagues, consider some of the following questions related to your professional communication:

### **How do you address the individual you're connecting with?**

- When do you use a formal salutation? (e.g., To whom it may concern, Dear, Hello)
- When are you less formal? (e.g., Hi, Hey, What's up?)

## **Do you check for spelling, grammar and punctuation before sending your communication?**

- For example, do you ensure you have the correct spelling of the individual's name?

## **Do you review your communication, either individually or with a colleague, to check for tone?**

- Remember, tone is tricky to read, especially over email. It can sometimes be perceived differently from what you intend.

## **Do you maintain a professional tone in your text message communication?**

- Do you use emojis? If so, reflect on your choices: with whom do you use them, and in what contexts?

## **BODY LANGUAGE OR NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Body language is the unspoken element of communication. It reveals aspects of an individual's feelings or emotions when in conversation. Understanding it can help improve communication.

Some common forms:

### **Body movement**

- Do you cross your arms or put them behind your back when talking?
- Do you tap your fingers? How would you react to someone who taps their fingers, fidgets or doodles when you're talking?
- What are your perceptions of people who talk with their hands (e.g., lots of hand movements)? Do you make judgments based on this?
- How do you perceive someone who jiggles their foot or swings their leg when seated?
- How close do you stand to others when in conversation? Why do you think it matters?

### **Posture**

- Do you notice if people are standing or sitting up straight? If you do, why does it matter to you?
- Do you think about your own posture and how it might be perceived? Why?

### **Eye contact**

- Do you try and maintain eye contact with others?
- Does eye contact make you uncomfortable? Do you think it can make others feel uncomfortable? Why?
- If someone isn't making eye contact with you, do you take it personally or consider other reasons?
- What other thoughts come to mind when someone looks at the ground when they're speaking? Or when you're speaking to them?

### **Facial expression**

- Do you always smile when in conversation with others? How would you perceive a smile during a serious conversation?
- What assumptions do you make about someone who is always smiling? Or someone who never smiles?
- If someone displays a facial expression overtly (e.g., rolls their eyes), do you engage them in conversation about it? Why or why not?

### **Silence**

- Are you comfortable with moments of silence, or do they make you uncomfortable?
- Do you try and fill the space by talking when there are long pauses in conversation?
- What are the benefits of pauses or silence in dialogue?

Body language can be a powerful and reliable aspect of communication. It's important to be aware of your body language and what messages it could be sending in a conversation.

While being mindful of your own body language, it's equally important to refrain from jumping to conclusions when trying to understand the body language of others. You could be interpreting someone's body language one way while someone else interprets it differently. There are many factors that affect the way in which individuals perceive or demonstrate body language. For example:

- Eye contact holds distinct differences across cultures. In some cultures, maintaining eye contact demonstrates the person is engaged. In other cultures, it's perceived as rude or aggressive. Eye contact will also be perceived and displayed differently by individuals with disabilities.
- Posture can be influenced by your upbringing; however, in some instances, an individual may not be able to sit up straight due to a visible or invisible disability.
- The distance in which you stand beside or across from others when in conversation can be interpreted differently. Consider your use of physical space, as some members of the learning community may feel uncomfortable if you stand too close, while others may want to move closer to you.

You're not expected to understand the reasoning behind everybody's body language or know all of their cultural or personal differences. But you are responsible for taking the time to critically reflect on your own body language and for making an effort to learn about the cues of others.

## Demonstrating professionalism and leadership



### The College of Early Childhood Educators' definitions of professionalism and leadership:

**Professionalism:** being grounded in ethical values and refers to the use of knowledge, skills and judgment in the best interest of children and families. RECEs demonstrate professionalism through their relationships with children, families and colleagues, and their accountability to the public and profession ([Practice Guideline on Professionalism](#), 2018).

**Leadership:** engaging with colleagues for collective knowledge and experiences to solve problems and improve outcomes. It involves taking and encouraging collective responsibility; contributing to an inclusive and collaborative work environment; and creating, coordinating and directing change through vision, inspiration, commitment and contribution ([Code and Standards Glossary](#)).

The quality and tone of your communications are important as they represent and reflect RECEs as professionals. This includes the way in which you present yourself on social media, both professionally and privately. Strengthening your communication and collaboration strategies, particularly with families and colleagues, is crucial, and RECEs are encouraged to keep building upon these strategies throughout their practice.

The Code and Standards highlights numerous ways to engage in leadership development, including in the following ways:

- Engaging in and supporting others in enhancing knowledge and skills about communication methods, strategies and interpersonal relationships;
- Engaging with the professional community, building connections and collaborating with partners or communities of practice;
- Advocating in the interest of children, families, community partners and other professionals;
- Supporting others in their communication and collaboration strategies with families, specifically RECEs new to the profession;
- Learning about the different families in your practice setting (e.g., families who are Indigenous, language learners, interracial, skip-generation, fostering, LGBTQ2, teenaged, separated, divorced, joint-custody and lone-parent or widowed) and making every effort to educate yourself on how to best support that specific family through communication and collaboration;
- Providing mentorship, support and guidance to colleagues, students and those new to the profession. RECEs support mentees and students by modelling appropriate communication and involving them in collaborative efforts; and
- Empowering others to lead by facilitating participation in communication strategies with families, collaborative inquiry with colleagues and policy development (e.g., privacy, confidentiality, use of communication tools and maintaining boundaries).

Leaders in supervisory roles support staff with communication and collaboration by:

- Setting the example for communication and promoting a culture of collaboration. Leaders are responsible for creating the organizational climate, which includes effective and respectful communication and collaboration efforts;
- Developing respectful and responsive relationships with staff so they feel comfortable communicating their challenges;
- Implementing pedagogical approaches that encourage self-reflection, discussion and ongoing collaboration and learning among RECEs;
- Supporting staff in building relationships with each other (e.g., implementing procedures that encourage staff to reflect with each other during everyday practice);
- Supporting and encouraging staff to engage in interprofessional collaboration;
- Ensuring policies and procedures reflect positive and equitable communication and collaboration practices between colleagues and families;
- Engaging in self- and collaborative-reflection helps to strengthen interpersonal communication skills and collaborative efforts. It can also lead to examining the nature of relationships with families, colleagues, other professionals and community partners; and
- Actively reflecting on their communication with staff to ensure they are respectful and equitable.

Engaging in self- and collaborative-reflection helps to strengthen interpersonal communication skills and collaborative efforts. It can also lead to examining the nature of relationships with families, colleagues, other professionals and community partners. Leaders actively reflect on their communication with staff to ensure they are respectful and equitable.

Leaders also actively engage with staff and support them in thinking about their communication and collaboration in practice. For example, if an RECE is struggling to communicate with families, leaders can support them by being present in a conversation with a family or by encouraging the RECE to explore effective communication in their continuous professional learning. When leaders discover communication or collaboration between other RECEs does not reflect inclusive, equitable and diverse practices, they speak up in constructive ways that support social justice.

RECEs are role models for the children in the learning environment, and so, demonstrating respectful and inclusive relationships, communication and collaboration is critical for providing all children and families with a sense of belonging, well-being, expression and engagement.

## A growing virtual world

RECEs recognize the many benefits of technology and are thinking more innovatively about how to use it to connect with others. For example, an RECE may do the following:

- Use an online meeting platform or teleconference to connect with a parent or community partner who is unable to attend an in-person meeting;
- Conduct staff meetings using an online meeting platform or teleconference so staff can participate from anywhere;
- Use devices and apps to communicate with educators in their practice environment;
- Engage in e-mentoring if their mentor or mentee lives in a different city;
- Text a parent with an update about their child who is feeling unwell;
- Create an online community of practice with colleagues to engage in collaborative inquiry, while increasing accessibility; and
- Collaborate virtually with an RECE at another post-secondary institution on a research project.

Remember, using technology to connect with families and colleagues is an area of practice that continues to evolve. RECEs will have different levels of experience, technological literacy and comfort. You are not expected to be an expert in the use of technology; however, as leaders and ongoing learners, you need to make an effort to increase your knowledge and skills in a way that best supports the children, families and your practice.

While technology can be useful in many ways, it's important to understand the potential risks, as well. With recent changes in how we stay connected, RECEs are relying more on teleconference, online meetings, email and smartphones in their practice and professional networks. As a professional, ensure that any communication online is consistent with the profession's ethical and professional standards.

Consider some of the following suggestions for safe and appropriate use of technology:

- Maintain your professionalism. Whether you are sending an email, text or using a digital platform or teleconference, use a professional tone.
- Consider maintaining separate accounts for your personal and professional use to help prevent the blurring of professional boundaries.
- Consider the time and place you choose to connect using technology. Are you constantly sending out digital documentation or sending emails while you're around the children and families?
- Respect the confidentiality of information related to children and families, and obey all laws pertaining to privacy and the sharing of information.
- If you are sharing content or resources with families, ensure you have assessed them and the reasons for sharing them. Do they support your ethical and professional practice?
- Consider your workplace policies and procedures regarding technology use to engage families and colleagues. If needed, collaborate with your employer, colleagues and families to refresh or develop policies.

## Additional resources to further support your learning

- One aspect of being a professional is communicating dual relationships to affected parties, the nature of the dual relationship and the steps taken to address related risks (Standard V: C.6). Sometimes a dual relationship is easily managed, but just like any relationship, it can change due to unforeseen factors or life events. Review the [Practice Guideline on Dual Relationships](#) for more information and how you can manage them.

- Consult the [Practice Guideline on Diversity and Culture](#). It provides detailed approaches on how to build relationships and communicate across differences. It also highlights the importance of reflecting on your own beliefs and biases when communicating and collaborating with others.
- RECEs use technology and social media in the context of their employment role and practice setting, or for professional networking and learning. Many use social media in their personal lives, too. Review the [Practice Note on Using Social Media](#) for information on exploring the benefits and managing the risks of social media.

## Pause and Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on the profession's core set of beliefs and values and your current communication strategies and skills:

- How do you demonstrate care, respect, trust and integrity when communicating with others?
- Are there some skills that you're better at demonstrating than others? Why do you think this might be?
- How might you be able to strengthen each ethical value in your communication?
- How do you support others in demonstrating care, respect, trust and integrity when communicating?
- Additional insights / reflections / comments?

[Pause and reflect on the profession's values and your communication strategies](#) (Word version)

[Pause and reflect on the profession's values and your communication strategies](#) (PDF version)

## Pause and Reflect

Consider the following scenario on demonstrating leadership in communication and collaboration:

Amelia is an RECE who practises at a child care centre. She has adjusted her continuous professional learning goals to focus more on promoting anti-racism and social justice in the early years sector, as she has been following the news and wants to do more in her community to support these efforts. She was incredibly inspired by her goals and read and listened to podcasts to learn as much as she could. Amelia wanted to share this new knowledge with her colleagues and asked her supervisor if she could share some of her learning with everyone at the next staff meeting. Normally very receptive to her leadership, her supervisor stopped and stared at Amelia and said "Why do we need to learn about anti-racism ...? There isn't a single non-white family here. We have more important topics to cover at staff meetings. Sorry, Amelia."

- What are your initial reactions to this scenario?
- Is the supervisor's decision problematic? Why or why not?
- What effects will the supervisor's decision have on the children and families? What about the community or other staff?
- What else could Amelia have done in this situation?
- What ethical or professional standards are reflected (or not) through this scenario?

[Pause and reflect on this scenario: demonstrating leadership in communication and collaboration](#) (Word version)

[Pause and reflect on this scenario: demonstrating leadership in communication and collaboration](#) (PDF version)