

Ethical Decision-Making

As a Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE), Practice Notes support your understanding and application of the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* by examining a specific topic and providing practical guidance.

You can use this resource to:

- Resolve ambiguous practice situations or ethical dilemmas
- Examine past experiences to support future ethical decision-making
- Review and discuss the College's case studies and scenarios that cover a range of practice settings

RECEs and employers may find it helpful to keep this resource easily accessible in the workplace.

Professional Ethics and Relationship-Based Practice

The practice of early childhood education does not follow a strict set of rules where knowledge is applied in the same way every day; unexpected and ambiguous situations can arise. Relationships with children, families and colleagues are complex and change over time. In relationship-based practice, understanding and responding to competing values and differing perspectives plays a large role in your daily work.

The profession's core set of ethical values of *care*, *respect*, *trust* and *integrity* help you navigate and manage complex relationships and issues. The Code and Standards is a reminder of your responsibilities to children, families, colleagues, the profession and the public. When issues arise, the Code and Standards is the first place you should look to ensure you act in the best interest of children and families.



What is Ethical Decision-Making?

Ethical decision-making is a process by which RECEs choose a course of action to address an ambiguous practice situation or resolve an ethical dilemma. The process is informed by professional ethics and an examination of beliefs, perceptions and biases. It also includes consideration of alternatives and potential consequences.

Making ethical decisions is also an important part of what it means to be a professional who exercises good professional judgment. Following an ethical decision-making process enables you to:



Reflect on your practice



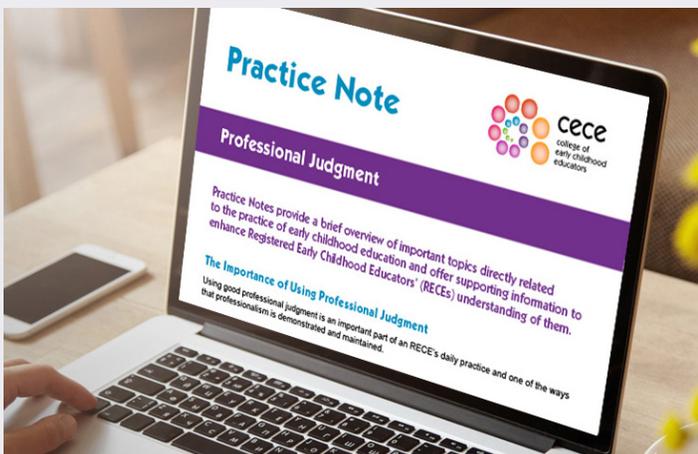
Recognize competing responsibilities and values



Act in the best interest of children and families



Communicate the reasons for your course of action



Helpful Resource!

It is recommended that you review the *Practice Note: Professional Judgment* for more information on the key areas that inform professional judgment and the factors that could influence your ethical decision-making.

Recommended Steps

We recommend following these steps to ensure you make the best decisions when it comes to children and families in your practice:

1 Identify and focus on the facts of your situation

- Avoid making assumptions about the motivations of others.
- Who, what, where, when and how did the situation arise?
- Is there more information you need before proceeding?
- Is this an isolated situation or a series of situations occurring over time?
- Are there multiple issues present in your situation?
- Are competing responsibilities or values central to your situation?



2 Examine your values, beliefs, perceptions and biases

- Reflect on your professional ethics: How can you demonstrate *care*, *respect*, *trust* and *integrity* in this situation?
- Reflect on whether your professional values are aligned with your personal ones.
- Identify your beliefs, perceptions or biases that may be contributing to this situation, including whether you are in a conflict of interest.
- Acknowledge and challenge the beliefs, perceptions and biases that may influence your decision-making.

3

Consult the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*, relevant legislation and your workplace policies

- Review your ethical and professional standards and identify the standards that apply to your situation that could guide your decision-making.
- Are there legal obligations, such as the duty to report, that provide direction on your course of action?
- Are there relevant workplace policies that could support your decision-making?
- Remember, if there is a conflict between the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* and your work environment or workplace policies, you have an obligation to comply with the Code and Standards.



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Generate a list of options for a course of action and identify the potential consequences of each

- Identify several courses of action you could take to address your situation.
- Reflect on the values, perspectives or biases that shape each option.
- Consider the potential outcomes for each option:
 - Assess the risks and benefits to everyone involved.
 - Ensure consistency with the Code and Standards.
 - Evaluate whether the best interest of children and families is prioritized.

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Seek guidance and additional information from your employer, colleagues or mentor

- Share your situation, reflections and ethical options with others who are not directly involved to assist with informing your decision. Remember to respect confidentiality.
- Reflect on their advice and guidance while also examining your own values and perspectives.

6

Make your decision and act in the best interest of children and families

- Consider all the information you have collected. Review your list of options and choose your course of action.
- Ensure you have support and resources in place before you proceed (e.g. notes to guide a conversation, relevant facts).
- Be ready to communicate the reasons behind your decision and understand that not everyone will agree with you.
- Act upon your decision with professionalism.

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Document your decision and the outcomes of the action

- Write down your decision-making process.
- Take note of the people you consulted with.
- Include the results of your actions.
- Remember to respect confidentiality.



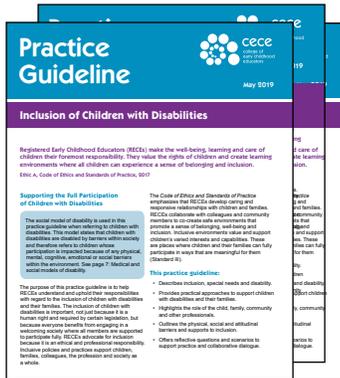
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Reflect and discuss

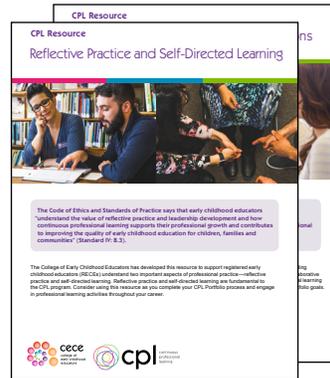
- Review your documentation: Consider how your values, perspectives or biases may have impacted your documentation of events.
- Whatever the outcomes of your action, reflect upon them and evaluate and assess what you would do the next time you are faced with a similar situation.
- Discuss next steps with your colleagues, employer or mentor, if required.

Additional Resources

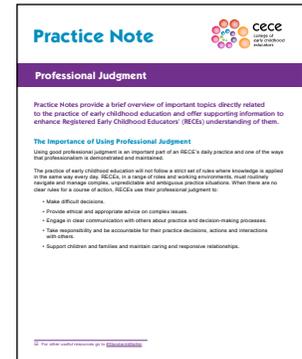
For further opportunities to reflect on your practice and help you make ethical decisions, review and discuss the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* along with the following College resources:



[Practice Guideline: Professionalism](#)
[Practice Guideline: Dual Relationships](#)
[Practice Guideline: Inclusion of Children with Disabilities](#)



[CPL Resource: Reflective Practice and Self-Directed Learning](#)
[CPL Resource: Leading Professional Practice Discussions](#)



[Practice Note: Professional Judgment](#)

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Cette publication est également disponible en français sous le titre : *Note de pratique – Guide sur la prise de décision éthique*

If you require an accessible format and/or communication support, please contact the College at 1 888 961-8558 / communications@college-ece.ca.

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