

Practice Guideline on Communication and Collaboration – Section 3

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).

RECEs:

- build and maintain caring and responsive relationships with colleagues which is fundamental to their practice (Standard I: A).
- support, encourage and work collaboratively with colleagues, and make the well-being and care of children in the learning environment their foremost responsibility (Standard I: C.6; Ethic A).
- engage regularly in critical reflection and collaborative inquiry (Standard IV: C.1).
- build positive relationships with colleagues by demonstrating care, respect, trust and integrity. They support, mentor and collaborate with colleagues, including students aspiring to the profession (Ethic C).

Overview

The Code and Standards states that building and maintaining caring and responsive relationships with colleagues is fundamental to your practice (Standard I: A). When you communicate and collaborate in respectful and responsive ways, you model these positive behaviours for children and create a welcoming atmosphere.

As an RECE, you have a professional duty to communicate with colleagues, even when it may seem challenging. Your comfort level with communication will vary based on your knowledge, skills, experience and practice setting. You also support, encourage and work collaboratively with colleagues, and make the well-being and care of children in the learning environment your foremost responsibility (Standard I: C.6; Ethic A). Communicating and collaborating with colleagues in an effective and timely manner is critical in ensuring you uphold this responsibility.

Communicating and collaborating often comes more naturally when you have a strong foundational relationship with a colleague. However, this might not always be the case. There will be times when you must work in partnership with someone who you might have just met. For example, if a colleague is sick and you're working with a supply staff member, or you're collaborating with a resource consultant to support a child in the program. No matter your practice setting or context, effective communication and collaboration between colleagues is critical to creating welcoming and inclusive learning environments.

Some RECEs work alone or in isolation from other staff. For example, an RECE providing home-based child care does not typically work alongside other colleagues, and an RECE working in a before- and after-school program may at times be the only staff person in the room. If you are an educator who works alone, you may feel more isolated without colleagues to share ideas, gain support in challenging times and provide a sense of community. As an RECE in these environments, you must think differently about communication and collaboration to support your professional practice, learning and identity. This could include having a plan of who to contact for support when challenging situations or emergencies arise.

Using critical reflection and collaborative inquiry

When educators engage in critical reflection together, they discover multiple perspectives and deeper understandings (*How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014*).

The Code and Standards reminds us that RECEs regularly engage in critical reflection and collaborative inquiry (Standard IV: C.1). The College of Early Childhood Educators (College) defines collaborative inquiry as the practice of engaging with others (i.e., colleagues, children and families) in critical reflection to question theory and practice, discuss ideas, test theories and share learning.

As an RECE, you use collaborative inquiry and critical reflection to examine your professional practice. This includes relationships as well as communication and collaboration efforts with families, colleagues, supervisors, supervisees, other professionals and community partners. As a researcher and ongoing learner, you recognize the importance of co-constructing knowledge and coming together to critically reflect on the practice challenges you face related to communication and collaboration.

As an educator, you understand there's no prescribed way to engage in collaborative inquiry. Rather, the process is about your curiosity, reflection and continuous learning. Researchers have learned from educators that the process is a "professional way of being" rather than a project or initiative. Collaborative inquiry enables you to work together to determine the purpose and focus of your learning so it can contribute to action and a deeper understanding (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b).

Through collaborative inquiry, you create change in all aspects of your practice. However, maintaining effective communication and collaboration throughout the process is critical.

Challenges to communication and collaboration with colleagues

As an RECE, you are in a unique position of trust and understand the severity of the consequences in situations where there is ineffective communication or a lack of collaboration among colleagues. Ineffective communication puts children and families at risk, can lead to professional misconduct and has a negative impact on the credibility of your profession. With colleagues, consider the following challenges related to communicating and collaborating in practice:

- **Needing to communicate in a timely fashion.** Certain situations will require immediate communication with other educators and/or professionals. Your professional judgment can help you evaluate and report a situation with an accurate sense of urgency.
- **Making assumptions.** Always be sure to ask, verify and follow up about important facts, even if doing so seems repetitive or unnecessary. This will help you avoid making assumptions about the behaviours, actions or communications of others. For example, refrain from assuming your colleague conducted a head count or filled in an incident report just because they typically do.
- **Failing to communicate or ineffectively communicating with colleagues.** To avoid the risk of unsupervised children, communicate with colleagues during all transitions. Examples include when you're leaving the area, or children, during a shift or staffing change, as well as when you're arriving or leaving the play area with a child or group of children. It's also critical to communicate changes of information related to the children, program or environment, such as a child who isn't feeling well or a play area that is closed.
- **Asking for support when needed.** Part of being a professional means being accountable for your actions and decisions. Asking for support when you feel overwhelmed or stressed – before a situation gets out of hand – demonstrates professionalism and accountability.

- **Accepting help when it's offered.** You are part of a collective that supports the accountability of other RECEs. If a colleague offers help during a stressful situation, accept the support and understand it does not make you less capable, but rather accountable.
- **Speaking up, even when an issue may be challenging to address.** If you have a concern regarding a practice, procedure or actions of others, especially ones that put children's or a colleague's safety at risk, you have a responsibility to address the situation and report it. This includes discriminatory remarks or behaviours. It can be difficult to know how to respond to potentially harmful behaviour. Take thoughtful and constructive action. Learn about how to support a colleague by asking them what they would like you to do ([Practice Guideline on Diversity and Culture, 2020](#)).
- **Maintaining privacy and confidentiality.** There will be times when communicating with a colleague or family will be prohibited, such as during a pending or ongoing Children's Aid Society (CAS) investigation, or when someone outside of the family or learning environment asks for information about a child or another family.

Sources of conflict in communication with colleagues and resolution strategies

The Code and Standards reminds us that RECEs build positive relationships with colleagues by demonstrating care, respect, trust and integrity. They support, mentor and collaborate with colleagues, including students aspiring to the profession (Ethic C). RECEs also ensure that, in their relationships with colleagues, the needs and best interests of children are their highest priority. However, as in any other profession, there will be times when as an RECE, you will view practice approaches, issues or situations from a different perspective from your colleagues. These differences can lead to conflict. It's important to address that conflict. In many cases, a lack of clarification, information or understanding between RECEs is at the root of the issue. Other factors that can contribute to conflict between colleagues are:

- **Differences in practice perspectives** enhanced by factors such as number of years of experience, educational level or experience in different practice settings.
- **Creating barriers and marginalizing others**, such as including or excluding someone based on their culture, race, religion, age, sexuality, gender identity or socio-economic status.
- **Conscious or unconscious power imbalances.** Relationships and communication may be influenced by power dynamics related to professional role, education, gender, race or other factors.
- **Failing to think and pause before speaking, or not considering how the other person will perceive what you are saying or doing.** For example:
 - An RECE snapped at a colleague when they felt unsupported, without first thinking about how their reaction would make their colleague feel.
- **Refusing to support and work collaboratively with a colleague for personal reasons.** For example:
 - An RECE and their colleague had an argument at an event outside of working hours, and the RECE is letting this personal issue affect their ability to work collaboratively and effectively.
- **Refusing to support and work collaboratively with a colleague because of the way they communicate.** For example:
 - An RECE continuously avoids meeting a colleague because she can't understand their accent.
 - A part-time RECE often turns down working in the toddler room because the RECE assigned to that room has a hearing disability.
- **Any type of bullying between colleagues and fear of reporting this type of behaviour.** For example:
 - An RECE starts a rumour about a new colleague and shares it with the entire staff.
 - An RECE posts a negative comment about an unnamed colleague in a social media group.

Bullying is seen as acts or verbal comments that could psychologically or ‘mentally’ hurt or isolate a person and can involve negative physical contact. Bullying involves repeated incidents or a pattern of behaviour that is intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or group of people ([Government of Canada, 2021](#)). Bullying can also be considered as workplace harassment which workers, supervisors and employers have rights and duties to prevent and address under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act \(Government of Ontario, 2016\)](#)

If not managed effectively, conflict between colleagues, including supervisees and supervisors, can indirectly or directly affect the care you provide for children and families. It can also lead to impaired professional judgment or professional misconduct. Remember, co-creating supportive and welcoming environments influences all members of the learning community. Unresolved conflict hinders your communication and collaboration with colleagues and can negatively affect how you support children in the learning environment.

As an RECE, you’re capable and competent and can manage conflict in a professional manner. Remember, conflict does not always have to carry a negative connotation. While there is some behaviour that should not be tolerated, such as bullying, harassment or discrimination, generally, differences in opinions can be healthy and encourage you to grow as an ongoing learner, professional and leader. Consider some of the following approaches to dealing with conflict:

- Think about the most appropriate time for addressing the issue. Sometimes it’s best to address the matter when it occurs, but other times it makes more sense to think about the best time and setting for the conversation. For example, are you getting into a heated discussion in front of children and families?
- Seek support from a supervisor or other colleague as a mediator if you feel uncomfortable or unsure of how to approach the situation.
- Take time to reflect on your own beliefs, biases, attitudes, motivators or values that could have contributed to the conflict. It’s important to continuously question your assumptions and beliefs that might unconsciously lead to preconceived judgments about others.
- Identify the source of the conflict. For example, does the conflict stem from a miscommunication or misinterpretation?
- Take accountability. If you’ve acted inappropriately, offer a sincere and well-worded apology.
- Separate the person from the issue. Focus on the behaviours or words that led to the conflict.
- Keep an open mind. Focus on understanding each other’s concerns through open dialogue rather than taking a defensive stance.
- Work collaboratively to maintain a solution-focused perspective. Use your professional judgment and knowledge of ethical decision-making to work together on solutions.

Coming to a constructive conclusion and working together following a conflict demonstrates professionalism. It also upholds your professional responsibilities by having the best interest of children and families as your focus. Use your ethical values of care, respect, trust and integrity to guide your communication with colleagues, even more so when the conversation is challenging.

Duty to Report

As an RECE, you are in a unique position to recognize possible signs of child abuse, neglect and family violence. You have a particular duty to report your suspicions to the Children’s Aid Society (CAS). You understand your responsibilities around the duty to report a concern about the conduct of a colleague, which could pose a risk to the health or well-being of children.

Additional resources to support your learning

- Many RECEs are responsible for other adults in practice. For more information on building effective relationships and communicating with supervisees, review the [Practice Note on Professional Supervision of Supervisees](#) (2020).
- For RECEs who work alone, such as those in home-based child care, engaging in collaborative inquiry can be more challenging. Joining or developing a community of practice is a great way to connect with RECEs to engage in this process. For more information, review the [CPL Resource: Communities of Practice](#) (2018).
- For more information on using collaborative inquiry and reflective practice in your pedagogical approaches, including reflection questions, review the [Practice Guideline on Pedagogical Practice](#) (2020).
- [Scenario: Communication and Collaboration](#) highlights some challenges between colleagues relating to communication in a child care centre. With colleagues, critically reflect on this scenario and use the reflection questions to engage in collaborative inquiry.
- Professional judgment helps you manage complex or ambiguous practice situations, make tough decisions and communicate your decision-making processes to others. Using sound professional judgment is critical to appropriately manage conflict in the practice setting. For more information, review the [Practice Note on Professional Judgment](#) (2018).
- For more information on using ethical decision-making to resolve ambiguous practice decisions or ethical dilemmas, such as conflict with a colleague or family, review the [Practice Note on Ethical Decision-Making](#) (2019).
- Review the [Professional Advisory: Duty to Report](#) (2019) for more information on the roles and responsibilities of RECEs, the expectations of supervisors and communication between RECEs and families related to your duty to report.

Pause and Reflect

Consider some of the following questions as they relate to your current communication and collaboration efforts:

- How often throughout the day do you communicate with your colleagues?
 - In what ways does communication take place?
 - Are there some methods that work better than others?
- Is communication strictly about work, or do you try to get to know your colleagues?
 - Do you know about their past professional experiences?
 - Do you know their practice strengths and challenges?
- In what ways does collaboration take place in your practice setting?
 - Do you try to collaborate with colleagues you don't directly work with?
 - Are there strategies you find more effective for collaboration than others?
 - Are there aspects of the collaboration process that you enjoy more than others? Why might this be?
- Do you feel more comfortable communicating or collaborating with some colleagues as opposed to others? Why might this be?
- Do you try to set aside time to discuss accomplishments or challenges from the day?
- Do you feel comfortable providing constructive feedback to colleagues? If not, why do you think this might be?
 - How do you provide this feedback?

- Do you feel comfortable receiving constructive feedback from colleagues? If not, why do you think this might be?
 - How do you seek and receive this feedback?
- Are there any areas of your current communication strategies with colleagues that you would like to strengthen (e.g., interpersonal skills)?
- Are there areas of your overall collaboration strategies that you would like to strengthen?

[Pause and reflect on your communication and collaboration with colleagues](#) (Word version)

[Pause and reflect on your communication and collaboration with colleagues](#) (PDF version)

Pause and Reflect

If you tend to work by yourself, consider the following reflection questions about how you maintain your communication and collaboration with other educators:

- Who are the educators in your network that you connect with regularly or that you can reach out to if needed?
- What are your strengths in communicating and collaborating with other educators?
- What are some areas you would like to improve in?
- What resources do you have that support you in these practices? What resources could you seek out to support you?
- How can you support others in these areas?
- Are there systemic barriers preventing you from communicating and collaborating with other educators (For example, the facility is not set up accordingly or team meetings are infrequent)?
 - What are ways you can work around these barriers to ensure effective communication and collaboration with other educators?

[Pause and reflect on how you communicate and collaborate with other educators if you tend to work by yourself](#) (Word version)

[Pause and reflect on how you communicate and collaborate with other educators if you tend to work by yourself](#) (PDF version)

Pause and Reflect

With colleagues, consider the following scenario:

Aida, an RECE, and her teaching partner have been engaging in collaborative inquiry focused on emergent curriculum. Through their observations, they've noticed the children's recent interests in dramatic play and families. These interests inspired the educator team to design a dramatic play area focused on families. Excited about their pedagogical approach, the educators decided to implement their ideas in a couple of days. They did not take the time to collaboratively discuss the plan in detail. They did not consider what materials they were going to include, the children in their room and their views about family. Aida and her partner designed the dramatic play area with a heteronormative view of the family. There were new books in the book nook on moms and dads, and Aida was engaging with the children asking questions such as, "Is that what your mommy usually makes for dinner?" As the children began dressing up, Aida asked, "Can all the moms and dads follow me to the table, please?" One child paused and asked, "But where should I go? I have a mommy and an auntie." Aida was taken aback by the child's comment. Her colleague also stopped and stared blankly. Both educators scrambled for words but didn't know how to respond.

Consider the following reflection questions:

- What factors led to how the learning environment was set up?
- What aspects of the collaborative inquiry process were left out?
- What could Aida and her teaching partner have done differently to prevent the child from being singled out?
- What would you have done differently in planning and implementing the emergent curriculum and setting up the learning environment?
- What are some challenges related to communication and collaboration in this scenario?
- What are some communication and collaboration strategies Aida and her colleague could have implemented to ensure all children felt a sense of safety, engagement and belonging?
- How could each educator's respective ethical and professional standards have been used to support the collaborative inquiry process?

[Pause and reflect on the scenario about Aida and her teaching partner using collaborative inquiry in practice](#) (Word version)

[Pause and reflect on the scenario about Aida and her teaching partner using collaborative inquiry in practice](#) (PDF version)

Pause and Reflect

Consider the following scenario:

Noor, an RECE new to practice, and her colleague Francine, an RECE who has been practising for many years, work together in an after-school program. It's the end of September, and they have worked together for about a month. Their relationship is not the strongest. Noor feels Francine does not always trust and respect her due to her lack of practice experience. They've developed a daily routine of taking the children outdoors at around 4 p.m. Francine is typically responsible for conducting head counts, while Noor usually gathers any materials required. One day, Noor notices Francine seems to be in a rush to get the children outside. Noor suspects Francine forgot to conduct a head count. Noor knows she should follow up with Francine to make sure all the children are accounted for, but she feels too nervous and uncomfortable to say anything. It turns out that Francine did forget to conduct a head count that day, and two children were left inside the school.

- What were the communication and collaboration challenges in this scenario?
- What was it that directly led to the children being left inside the school?
- What would you have done differently in this situation?
- If you had colleagues facing similar struggles, how could you support them?

[Pause and reflect on the scenario about communication challenges between colleagues](#) (Word version)

[Pause and reflect on the scenario about communication challenges between colleagues](#) (PDF version)