

# 5

## Being a leader and an advocate

### Practice Guideline on Child Development

This section's applicable Code and Standards:

- RECEs provide and promote high-quality early years programs and services to support children and families. They build connections and collaborate with community partners to enhance programs and promote the integration of services. RECEs communicate the value and importance of early childhood education in their communities and to the broader public. They advocate for the well-being of children and families (Ethic D).
- 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. All registered early childhood educators, regardless of position or title, are leaders. (Standard IV, A).

RECEs:

- model professional values, beliefs and behaviours with children, families and colleagues. They understand their conduct reflects on them as professionals and on their profession at all times (Standard IV: C.4).
- advocate in the interest of children, families, early childhood educators and the early years sector (Standard IV: C.5).
- support and collaborate with colleagues, including early childhood education students and those who are new to the profession (Standard IV: C.6).

### Be a leader and an advocate

Margo Greenwood states that “effective programs are characterized by vision and leadership, holism, active community participation, strengths-based orientation, and reinvigoration and revitalization of Aboriginal cultures aimed at realizing self-determination” (2012, p. 383).

**All registered early childhood educators, regardless of title or position, are leaders** (Standard IV, A). RECEs in supervisory positions play an important role in supporting continuous professional learning (CPL) among staff. By challenging and adapting their own practice, supervisors encourage staff to do the same. Together, such as during a team meeting, the community can discuss their knowledge and experiences, and consider how they promote the learning and development of the children and families they serve.

## Leaders:

- Reflect on their knowledge, skills, strengths and interests;
- Identify any gaps or challenges to intentionally seek resources that strengthen their skills and knowledge;
- Put the interests of children and families at the core of their practice;
- Act as role models by recognizing the need to continue to grow and learn new things;
- Encourage discussions about beliefs and biases as part of the culture of the workplace;
- Share their own experiences with self-reflection, learning and action;
- Learn with and from others, and encourage self- and collaborative reflection among staff;
- Guide and mentor those who are new to the profession and provide meaningful opportunities for staff to discuss how they can grow professionally (Standard IV); and
- Address colonialism, racism and discrimination in all areas of practice, and support their teams to do the same.



Leaders consider power dynamics and structures that may hinder relationships among colleagues, and reciprocal partnerships with families and communities. There is a critical need to recognize and dismantle racism and discrimination in early childhood education. This is not an overnight task; it's an ongoing process requiring professionals and organizations to critically reflect on how their program benefits some and excludes others, and to make changes to eliminate inequities.

RECEs model professional values, beliefs and behaviours with children, families and colleagues. They understand their conduct reflects on them as professionals and on their profession at all times (Standard IV: C.4).

## Learning and advocating for change

RECEs are responsible for their learning and development. They're required to engage in CPL as a part of their responsibility to children, families, colleagues and the profession. It's fundamental to learn about and reflect on the complexities and nuances of child development and the factors that influence it.

RECEs talk about social justice issues and discrimination, and dismantle racism through policy and practice. They do this because they know it positively supports child development and overall health. They advocate in the interest of children, families, early childhood educators and the early years sector (Standard IV: C.5). RECEs have a responsibility to promote healthy child development by generating or adapting policies that uphold equity, advocacy and social justice.

### *Ethic D: Responsibilities to the Community and to the Public*

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Consider using the questions below to guide discussion about the ways you and colleagues demonstrate professionalism and leadership through your relationships with each other to advocate for change in support of healthy child development.

- How can we promote advocacy and social justice in our workplace and community?
- Discussions can create tension. How do we collaboratively create a culture where differing views are viewed as a positive force toward change?
  - How can I support my colleagues? What can we learn from each other?
- How do we support children to be advocates of social justice?
- In what ways do we:
  - promote discussions of diverse world-views and real-life issues such as diversity, poverty, race, religion, war, gender, discrimination and inequity?
  - help children recognize and respond to discrimination and inequity?
  - support children to develop friendships and relationships with peoples across cultures?

Questions adapted from the [Ministry of Education, British Columbia](#), 2019.

## Addressing racism and discrimination to support child development

Read the College's [Statement of Commitment to Anti-Racism](#) which outlines the importance of recognizing the historical and ongoing harm caused by racism, both systemic and overt, against those who identify as First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Black or a Person of Colour. Change is necessary to eliminate existing racial inequities, and education and ongoing learning play a critical role.

Freedom from discrimination is one of the **fundamental rights** in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. It's important for RECEs to recognize and respond to acts of discrimination so they can co-create environments that uphold this fundamental right. It's a professional responsibility to co-create responsive environments that value equity and celebrate the identities of each child and family. In these spaces, children can establish a strong sense of community and belonging, while also developing a positive self-concept.

**RECEs intentionally co-create environments infused with diverse and accurate representations of human differences.**

Systemic racism and discrimination have detrimental effects on children's health, well-being and cultural and identity development. Colonialism, racism and other forms of discrimination and oppression also have negative consequences for families, colleagues and society. It is essential for RECEs to be aware of and understand ways in which racism impacts racialized people in all areas of their lives – including in early learning and care spaces.

The profession's core values of care, trust, respect and integrity guide and inform your practice approaches and interactions with others in your practice setting. It is also important to understand, consider and address the influence of your beliefs and biases about individuals and members of diverse communities on your actions and decision-making approaches.



Supervisors can bring and share resources to prompt respectful, solution-focused discussions among staff. It is important to ‘get comfortable with being uncomfortable’ when talking about beliefs, biases, colonialism, racism and discrimination. Consider the following resources:

- The [Practice Note on Beliefs and Biases](#) (2022) and consider the questions in the [Reflection Guide on Beliefs and Biases](#) (2022).

As an example, members of the profession need to consider the beliefs and biases they hold about Black people and communities. Check out the Pause and Reflect on Dwayne’s experience for questions to support critical reflection on assumptions made about children.

- What action do you need to take to change your beliefs, biases and your practice today to ensure that Black children and their families feel a sense of belonging among an equitable community of co-learners?
- What information do you need to better understand the impact of anti-Black racism on Black children, their families and society overall?
- How can learning more about anti-Black racism support your practice – and members of the learning community?

Black Canadian scholars who address racism in society and institutions, such as:

- [Dr. George Dei](#), [Dr. Carl James](#), [Dr. Evelyn Kissi](#), [Dr. Fikile Nxumalo](#), [Dr. Njoki Wane](#), [Dr. Alana Butler](#), [Dr. Beverly-Jean Daniel](#) and [Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg](#) (now in USA).

When children are the target of surveillance, ridicule or being singled out in any way, their growing sense of identity can be hindered. With colleagues or in a community of practice, reflect on the following examples and discuss ways they may impact a child’s sense of identity, belonging and overall development:

An RECE makes a comment about a family because their child has pop in their lunch bag.

An RECE notices that a child is continually left out during group play experiences with their peers.

An RECE seems to continually reprimand one child for their behaviour; when the child’s peers are engaged in the same activities their behaviour is ignored.

During play, an RECE overhears a group of children talking about the smell of another child’s lunch.

A child who self identifies as Cree is asked by an RECE to explain their language and culture to all their friends.

An RECE hears a group of white children asking to touch and play with a Black child’s hair.

An RECE sees two women picking up a child after school and whispers to her colleague: “Oh my goodness, is Tracey’s mom gay?!”

A child is misgendered by an RECE who says, “oops, I forgot you’re pretending to be a boy today.” She later says to colleagues, “she’ll grow out of this soon.”

An RECE overhears two girls talking about another girl’s weight and height.

As an RECE, it's vital to think about the impact these examples may have on children. Engage in continuous professional learning and intentionally seek ways to dismantle systemic inequities and colonial perspectives of children, childhood, families, teaching and learning with a community of practice.



Consider exploring some of the following ideas as part of your Continuous Professional Learning (CPL):

- Learn about ways to advocate for children, families and colleagues to address colonialism, racism and discrimination in your practice setting. This includes learning about ways to support children to do the same.
- What do you know about the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action](#) related to education and other aspects impacting children?
- Seek ways to talk about social structures with children, families and colleagues. These structures include culture, disability, class, gender and race.
- Learn about the forms of racism, and how to recognize and disrupt them.
- Promote equity by advocating for, creating and modelling anti-bias, anti-colonial, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practices and policies.
- Find research and information developed and informed by First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples, Black Peoples and Peoples of Colour.
- Consider the growing idea that any definition of 'developmentally appropriate' needs to take into account social, historical and political contexts since little research has been conducted with children from racialized communities.
- Develop partnerships with families, colleagues and communities who have diverse knowledges and experiences.
- Learn about and consider the ways groups have and continue to be privileged and those who continue to be marginalized.

Find the Pause and Reflect on equitable policies and practices below to support reflection on and review of policies and practices related to child development.

You can add your thoughts and reflections in the space below.

Download the Pause and Reflect on:

- Equitable policies and practices ([Word](#) | [PDF](#))
- Dwayne's experience ([Word](#) | [PDF](#))