

Preface

As an early childhood educator, your actions and words impact children, their families, your colleagues, the community, and society. A knowledge of ethics and of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct provides the guidance all early childhood educators need to be caring, competent professionals.

The Code of Ethical Conduct offers a framework for understanding the moral commitments that are part of your professional relationships. It helps you to know and act upon the values and ideals that guide early childhood educators in their work. It can help you understand your ethical responsibilities and provide guidance for addressing ethical dilemmas you face (an *ethical dilemma* is a predicament that involves conflicting responsibilities and requires a choice between two alternatives that can each be justified).

Ethics and the Early Childhood Educator is written for you—an early childhood teacher or administrator who works with, or is learning to work with, young children, families, and staff in early childhood settings. It introduces the NAEYC Code and explains how to use it. This book will help you

- Learn about the core values and ideals that provide the foundation for practice in the early childhood field
- Appreciate early childhood educators' primary commitment to the welfare of children
- Understand your ethical responsibilities
- Learn to use the Code to formulate well-reasoned resolutions to ethical dilemmas
- Become adept at talking about ethical issues and justifying your positions

The first two editions of *Ethics and the Early Childhood Educator* considered ethical practice from the standpoint of the teacher or caregiver who provides direct service to children in an early childhood education program. This third edition has been expanded to include information for program administrators and those learning to become administrators.

Program administrators (Head Start and other early childhood directors, curriculum specialists, elementary school principals, and others with program oversight responsibilities) encounter many of the same ethical issues as teachers and others who work with children, but they also face unique responsibilities and ethical challenges as they engage in administrative activities. In response to these distinctive challenges, NAEYC developed a supplement to be used with the Code to meet administrators'

particular needs. The Supplement for Early Childhood Program Administrators, first adopted by the NAEYC Governing Board in 2006, provides guidance to support administrators in their work and is addressed in various sections throughout this book. The supplement appears in its entirety in Appendix C.

Other revisions to the third edition of *Ethics and the Early Childhood Educator* include updated descriptions of ethical situations, new cases and issues, and updated references.

This book contains

- An introduction to the study of morality and ethics
- The history and rationale for the development of the NAEYC Code and its two supplements
- Strategies for identifying and addressing ethical dilemmas
- Specific chapters that address each of the four sections of the Code
- Approaches for promoting awareness and use of the Code
- The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment (see Appendix B) and the Supplement for Early Childhood Program Administrators (see Appendix C)

Our many years of experience in the field and studying ethics as it applies to early childhood education have convinced us that it is important for all early childhood educators to make a commitment to ethical behavior. This latest edition is especially timely because NAEYC is leading an initiative to define the early childhood field and raise its professional status. Understanding your ethical obligations as outlined in the NAEYC Code and applying it to real-life situations are essential aspects of your professional practice.

We hope that reflecting on and practicing the ideas in this book will help you recognize the ethical dimensions of your work, support your efforts to shoulder your professional responsibilities, and guide you as you seek to do what is right for young children and their families. We hope it will be a valuable resource for helping you to confidently answer the question “What should an ethical early childhood educator do?”

—Stephanie Feeney and Nancy K. Freeman