

Legal and Ethical Responsibilities for Early Childhood Education

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When working with a population as vulnerable as children, as in the case with early childhood educators, it is imperative to adhere to legal responsibilities and provide ethical care for children, families, and the community. While organizations may express their perspectives on the legal and ethical responsibilities of early childhood educators differently, they collectively present a universal message. Across the board, child-centric organizations focus on upholding ideals related to communication, an ever-expanding knowledge base, inclusion, diversity appreciation, and so on. For example, I-1.8 by NAEYC (2005, p. 2) states that it is the responsibility of educators “to support the right of each child to play and learn in an inclusive environment”. Comparably, the article provided by the Division for Early Childhood (2007, p.7) emphasizes the idea of a universal learning design, where “all aspects of the curriculum (i.e., the environment, the goals, the content, the instructional methods and interactions, the assessments, and the toys/materials) invite active participation of all children, regardless of disability or special needs”.

Both NAEYC and DEC emphasize the importance of inclusivity through the legal and ethical framework they provide. From a legal standpoint, inclusion must be prioritized in the early childhood setting and failure to do so would be in violation of anti-discrimination laws. Laws related specifically to education similarly emphasize and ensure equal and inclusive learning environments for every child. One example being the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Even access to play itself, for instance, is recognized by the United Nations Human Rights Treaty as a right of all children (Robertson & Riek, 2022). Lack of accessibility and exclusion of certain individuals within an educational setting, with disabilities or without, would breach legally recognized standards and children’s rights.

From an ethical perspective, inclusion is not only necessary but vital to the enrichment of the learning environment overall. By having a classroom that caters to the unique needs of every child, early childhood educators are supporting developmentally appropriate practices. Children spend the greater part of their time under the care of teachers at school, and parents trust that they are properly supporting their children throughout their educational journey. Inclusive classrooms also celebrate individual backgrounds and approach diversity with compassion and awareness. This not only allows children to recognize and appreciate differences between themselves and others, but lays the foundation for the development of empathy, understanding, respect, and diversity appreciation.

The ideals and standards from NAEYC and DEC exemplify the universal expectations in the realm of early childhood education that correspond with both legal and ethical guidelines. The process of comparing both professional organizations has allowed me to recognize the distinct difference between legal and ethical responsibilities, both being crucial to the position of an educator. Lastly, the position statements have reiterated to me the weight of responsibility that educators bear, and the trust that is placed upon them by children, families, and society at large.

References

NAEYC. (2005, April; 2011, May). *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment*.

The Division for Early Childhood (2007, March) *Position Statement: Promoting Positive*

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