



DEC Position Statement on Ethical Practice Executive Summary

Division for Early Childhood (DEC)

What is the Purpose of the Position Statement on Ethical Practice?

The Position Statement on Ethical Practice is a public statement of the principles and practice guidelines supported by the mission of DEC. The purpose of the statement is to support sound ethical reasoning and decision-making in early intervention/early childhood special education (EI/ECSE). The statement aims to promote the highest standards of personal integrity and honesty across a variety of EI/ECSE roles. Ultimately, the goal of the statement is to support young children (0-8 years) who have or are at risk for delays and disabilities and their families.

How was the Position Statement on Ethical Practice Developed?

First, a DEC committee was tasked with reviewing the previous DEC Member Code of Ethics (2009) to determine if and how it needed to be revised. The group decided a substantive edit was needed, including shifting from a “Code of Ethics” to a position statement that provided guidance on ethical practice. The committee reviewed relevant statements and policies from professional organizations for guidance as they developed the statement. Once the statement was drafted, the committee elicited and incorporated feedback from the field including practitioners, administrators, faculty, and researchers.

What are the Core Principles for Ethical Practice?

There are five core principles of ethical practice, defined below.

- 1. *Advancing Equity and Inclusion.*** All people have unique experiences, backgrounds, and abilities. Thus, EI/ECSE professionals must be intentionally responsive to all children and families’ unique cultures and identities. This includes acknowledging and addressing systemic inequities of marginalized groups (e.g., based on disability, race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, religion, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, family structure, and other identity markers or cultural considerations, including non-Western cultural perspectives).
- 2. *Using Best Available Evidence to Make Decisions.*** The best available evidence includes wisdom and experience from the field (e.g., research, evidence-based practices) as well as the wisdom and experience of families (e.g., priorities, family knowledge). EI/ECSE professionals need to consider both when making decisions.
- 3. *Collaborating with Families and Other Professionals.*** Collaboration is an integral part of EI/ECSE, involving multiple individuals, including family members and professionals.
- 4. *Following Relevant Policies.*** EI/ECSE professionals must adhere to local, regional, national, and international policies that guide EI/ECSE, as well as the code of ethics set forth by their specific discipline.
- 5. *Engage in Ongoing Learning and Reflection.*** EI/ECSE professionals must commit to lifelong learning and reflection to continually improve their practices.



Who is the Position Statement on Ethical Practice For?

- **EI/ECSE practitioners.** Professionals who provide direct and indirect services to children and families, including but not limited to:
 - educators in public schools, Head Start, and community-based centers
 - itinerant educators
 - early interventionists
 - therapists / related service providers
 - program leaders/administrators
- **Providers of preservice personnel preparation.** Professionals who facilitate the initial preparation of preservice EI/ECSE practitioners and other EI/ECSE professionals (e.g., researchers, professional development providers), including but not limited to:
 - faculty and staff at institutes of higher education
 - cooperating teachers within field experiences
 - mentors, coaches, or supervisors of pre-service practitioners
- **Providers of in-service professional development.** Professionals who facilitate continued learning opportunities for in-service EI/ECSE practitioners and other EI/ECSE professionals (e.g., researchers, administrative leaders), including but not limited to:
 - faculty and staff at institutes of higher education
 - district or state professional development providers
 - technical assistance providers
 - program leaders/administrators
 - mentors, coaches, or supervisors of in-service practitioners
- **Researchers.** Professionals who engage in systematic knowledge generation to contribute to the EI/ECSE field's evidence base and/or support EI/ECSE practice that impacts children, families, and EI/ECSE professionals, including but not limited to:
 - faculty and staff at institutes of higher education
 - employees at research centers
 - program evaluators

How do Individuals in these Roles Apply the Core Principles of Ethical Practice?

Regardless of their role or discipline, EI/ECSE professionals must advance equity and inclusion for all young children and their families, particularly those who have been subject to historical and ongoing marginalization; use the best available evidence, including family and professional wisdom; collaborate with young children, their families, and other professionals; understand and adhere to all relevant legislation, policies, and professional guidelines; and engage in ongoing learning and reflection. Through these actions, EI/ECSE professionals can more effectively serve all young children who have or are at-risk for developmental delays and disabilities and their families.

See the [full Position Statement on Ethical Practice here](#) for examples of how each role can implement the Core Principles for Ethical Practice.