


# The Early Childhood Education Teacher's Professional Ethics Guidelines



VARHAISKASVATUKSEN OPETTAJIEN LIITTO  
SMÅBARNSPEDAGOGIKENS LÄRARFÖRBUND



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# Introduction

The early childhood education teacher's professional ethics are primarily defined by understanding the value of childhood. The teacher's responsibility and obligation is to maintain practices which respect every child and to provide all children with equal opportunity to ECEC. The early childhood education teacher should simultaneously ensure the completion of the central functions of ECEC, namely the children's comprehensive growth and development and the promotion of their learning. Professional ethics also include understanding and promoting the social significance of ECEC in the spirit of educational equality.

The perception of a child is a central part of professional ethics, as a shared perception of a child and the value of childhood should be the basis of common basic values and ethical behaviour. The National Core Curriculum for ECEC provides guidelines for the substance of ECEC. Although professional activities are controlled through legislation, regulations and other rules, professional ethics are not primarily based on compulsion or external control. The central basis of the early childhood education teacher's professional ethics are the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and

basic rights in the Finnish Constitution. The UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child defines children's rights to protection and inclusion. In the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as an active agent and childhood itself as an important phase of life. The child and childhood are considered to have their own recognised place in society. Early childhood education teachers should recognise that the perception of a child is tied to the world situation, one's view of the world and perception of human beings, but a commonly shared professional perception of a child should be based on legislation, regulations and scientific research.

The purpose of the early childhood education teacher's professional ethics is to function as a guideline for professionals working in different jobs in ECEC. Common basic values in ECEC and descriptions of good practices are highlighted in professional ethics. Good professional ethics require that the teacher's relationship with the children is the most central part of their work. The results of a teacher's work are visible both instantly and in the future, which is a part of the profession's specific nature. The teacher must recognise that values are present in all activities and also influence all interactions. The accountability of professional activities are

based on recent research in the field, teachers' expertise and the value and norm base of the work. It is important for teachers to develop and maintain their own professional skills. Teachers are pedagogical leaders in their work communities, and it is their ethical responsibility and obligation to be acquainted with the teacher's professional ethics and to actively support the entire work community in complying with it.

The early childhood education teacher is an expert in ECEC. They are an expert in childhood, a child's growth process and early childhood pedagogics. The primary goal of ECEC is to promote comprehensive good health among children. Good education and learning experiences also promote lifelong learning. The early childhood education teacher plays a central role in the child having positive learning experiences and in strengthening their healthy self-esteem. The dismantling and reducing effect of education and teaching on social inequality is also highlighted in ECEC. The teacher should be aware of their role in supporting the self-esteem and identity of all children, belonging to either a majority or a minority.

A high-level academic teachers' education provides the early childhood education teacher with information, skills and an understanding of the positive fruition of children's growth and development. The teacher has a right and also a responsibility to demand that

the child's interest is taken into account primarily in all social decision-making and resource distribution. For instance, this is manifested as a question of how power is exercised, which is a relevant part of a child's education. It is important that an ethical understanding guides the teacher to use their position in an appropriate and acceptable manner. The teacher respects the child's human dignity and liberty, acts fairly and equally.

Interaction is a central part of an early childhood education teacher's work. The teacher has a greater responsibility and role in the work community. The teacher bears the overall responsibility for planning the child groups' activities, for making sure the activities are well-planned and ambitious and for evaluating and developing the activities. It is also central to recognise the teacher's role in building and maintaining a culture which reinforces multi-professional activities. Strong professional ethics guide the teacher's professional interaction relationships and their relationship with their own work and responsibility. The work always includes contemplating and critically evaluating one's own motives and goals in an ethical sense. The purpose of the early childhood education teacher's professional ethics is to make the value-based decisions, which are always part of the teacher's work, apparent and recognised. Working on an ethically high level to the benefit of the child supports the reinforcement of equality in all of society.

# The values underlying the early childhood education teacher's ethical principles

## Human dignity

The basis for professional ethics is a humanist perception of human beings and respecting human dignity. Respecting human dignity requires recognising the gender, religion, views, ethnicity, language, nationality, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background and diversity of potential and respecting the individuality of all people.

## Fairness

Fairness is central when interacting with a single child or a group and in the activities of the rest of the work community. Fairness especially includes equality, preventing discrimination and favouritism and supporting that all children are heard.

## Veracity – Scientific information

Justifiable and scientific information is a central value in the early childhood education teacher's fundamental role. A scientific approach requires open interaction and knowledge of legislation and current scientific information. The teacher's expertise also includes justifying the activities and evaluation. Being critical and collegial, multi-professional and conscious reflection on one's personal, but also the common, work is a requirement for developing oneself in this profession.

## Accountability

The early childhood education teacher has the right and responsibility to contemplate their own values relative to their professional fundamental role and the set of norms which define it. The teacher occupies an autonomous position in their education and teaching work, which makes independent thinking and ethical agency possible. However, this autonomy requires a strong knowledge of ECEC goals and orientations related to the

comprehension of the work's substance and understanding that the teacher is always bound by legislation and guiding documents. Being a teacher should be focused on society, including social and ecological sustainable development. This requires recognising and taking into account the worldwide, regional and local changes affecting mankind.



# The early childhood education teacher's ethical principles and practices

## Equality as the basis of interaction

The early childhood education teacher's relationship with the children is the most important aspect of their work. The early childhood education teacher considers every child valuable and treats the child equally and respectfully as an individual. The teacher takes the fact that sensitivity guides all interaction and listening into account. Promoting equality is part of the early childhood education teacher's responsibilities. Thus, the teacher should make sure that every child's right to not being discriminated against in the ECEC environment is respected. The teacher works to prevent racism and discrimination in their work community.

## Safe learning environments which take individual needs into account

The early childhood education teacher is responsible for creating a safe growth and learning environment which takes individual needs into account. The teacher's expertise includes a versatile understanding of factors creating a mentally and physically safe learning environment. The learning environments take growth and development into account on individual and group level and make versatile learning and playing possible.

## Enabling children's inclusion

The early childhood education teacher observes and considers the child and gives the child the opportunity to influence matters which concern them in accordance with their development. The teacher possesses the know-how and knowledge to plan, carry out and evaluate their work while taking the child's and child group's development level and needs into account, while also considering the children's individual needs. However, public ECEC is always group education and it is the child's right to practice social skills in a functional and safe group under the guidance of a teacher and other ECEC personnel. The teacher supports the inclusion of each child in the group and as a member of the community.

## Cooperation with the parents

Cooperating with the children's parents is an essential part of professional ECEC, as the teacher as an expert supports the child's growth, development and learning. The early childhood education teacher supports a positive development of the relationship between the child and their parents. The teacher also

facilitates and ensures that all parents are included in the cooperation concerning their child.

## The early childhood education teacher is a pedagogical leader in their work community

The early childhood education teacher is mainly responsible for planning and carrying out education and learning in accordance with the National Core Curriculum. As a pedagogical leader the teacher builds and reinforces a functional cooperation within the work community. They support and encourage other members of the work community in their work and development. In the teacher's work pedagogical leadership also entails caring for the wellbeing of oneself and the work community. The early childhood education teacher is also responsible for their own professional development. Thus, the early childhood education teacher should recognise their view on education and evaluate their own work in order to develop in it.

## The early childhood education teacher influences society

The early childhood education teacher recognises the essential importance of education and teaching work in our society. The teacher makes the voice of the child and the ECEC expertise heard in social decision-making. The early childhood education teacher's professional ethics are guided by the essentiality of the child's benefit. The teacher emphasises the intrinsic value of the child and childhood and protects the child from instrumentation and abuse. The early childhood education teacher understands and takes social changes into account. They promote the belonging of all children and families to the surrounding community and society. As members of a professional group early childhood education teachers work in a manner which safeguards and promotes the child's right to a dignified childhood, a good life and future. This includes a coherent learning path starting from ECEC and continuing to basic education.

## Early childhood education and care is a basic cultural right

The social basis of ECEC, like all upbringing and education, is culture. Equal ECEC plays a significant role in reinforcing the children's and families' social capital as well as their connection and belonging to society.



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# The Early Childhood Education Teacher's Professional Ethics Guidelines

The purpose of ***The Early Childhood Education Teacher's Professional Ethics Guidelines*** is to function as a guide for early childhood education teachers. Common basic values in ECEC and descriptions of good practices are highlighted in the guidelines. Values are present in all of the teacher's work, which is why professional accountability should be based on the most recent scientific research in the field, teachers' expertise and the value and norm base of the work. The professional ethics guidelines serve as a basis for early childhood education teachers to help them develop and maintain their professional skills.

***The Early Childhood Education Teacher's Professional Ethics Guidelines*** publication is written by **Jaana Pesonen**, Doctor of Education. Pesonen works at the University of Helsinki as a university lecturer in the education orientation of ECEC. Pesonen has studied in the intercultural teacher training programme and e.g. worked as a special needs teacher. Pesonen became a Doctor of Education in 2015 at the University of Oulu. The subject of her dissertation was multi-culturalism as a part of literature and literature education. Later Pesonen has continued her research in diversity, anti-racism and e.g. supporting the critical literacy of small children. A new research field is examining the commercialism of education especially from the view of equality.