

Element 4: Professional Practice

Activity B: Ethical Practice

Ethics are standards of conduct that govern behaviour and once agreed, can support practitioners to respond appropriately while making quick decisions in action. Ethics impact on everyone and on all interactions, and are especially significant for those working with babies, toddlers and young children. Everyone working in an early childhood setting, regardless of their role, has ethical responsibilities and can meet these by demonstrating empathy, sensitivity and positive regard toward children, parents and colleagues.

Element 1 in Curriculum Foundations, *Developing your Curriculum and Curriculum Statement* and Element 2, *Using Aistear and Síolta's Principles*, introduced the concept of an agreed set of values and principles that guide practice. These values and principles can be expressed as a **code of ethics** that assist practitioners to set boundaries about what is acceptable professional behaviour.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

A code of ethics in early childhood education also considers the duty of care to children and to their families, to colleagues, the community and the early childhood sector. Importantly, it recognises the rights of children as laid out in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989).

Scenarios 1-4 below focus on particular ethical aspects of practice. Think about the scenarios and your responses to them, and consider why you would respond in this way. Complete this activity alone before sharing and discussing your responses with your team, manager or mentor.

Scenario 1

A young supervisor with a level 8 qualification is recruited as the leader of the room you work in. While she is better qualified, she has significantly less experience than you do. Although the children and parents seem to like her, you dislike the changes she makes in the room, and are unhappy about taking direction from her on aspects of your work with the children.

How would you respond ethically in this situation?

Scenario 2

A close friend informs you that a child from your setting has moved in next door to her. Your friend says the family are very private and avoid interaction with her and with her children. She asks you for your opinion on the family.

How would you respond ethically in this situation?

Scenario 3

Santa visits the setting in December each year to distribute presents to the children. A parent informs you that he does not want his daughter to take part in this event as he thinks it promotes consumerism and an incorrect understanding of Christmas.

How would you respond ethically in this situation?

Scenario 4

A student on placement in your setting has been given an assignment in which she must plan and carry out three varied learning experiences with the children. However, she has planned to carry out three similar experiences all involving template-based art activities.

How would you respond ethically in this situation?

The scenarios above support you to reflect on ethical practice under a number of headings:

- **Scenario 1 - Professional manner towards colleagues**
- **Scenario 2 - Confidentiality**
- **Scenario 3 - Unconditional positive regard for children, parents and families**
- **Scenario 4 - Supporting students/newly qualified practitioners to understand the nature and complexity of learning and development in early childhood**

Everyone working in an early childhood setting, regardless of their role, has a responsibility to uphold ethical standards and can demonstrate these by showing empathy, sensitivity and positive regard toward children, parents and colleagues.