Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Professionals in Malaysia

Second Edition

Early Childhood Care and Education Council Malaysia

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Preface

Early Childhood Care and Education, like any profession, needs a code of ethics to safeguard quality service by establishing a universal standard of integrity for the delivery of early childhood care and education, ensure accountability and protect young children from harm or malpractice. The ECCE Council is mandated by the Government to raise the professionalism and quality of early childhood care and education in the private sector (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, p. 7-5). In fulfilment of this mandate, the Council developed the Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Professionals in Malaysia in 2019.

The need to review this Code of Ethics (CoE), for the purpose of updating, refining and revising, arose from two factors:

Firstly, MQA recognises the importance of ethics in the Programme Standards: Early Childhood Education (PS: ECE) 2025 Second Edition, which currently references the Code of Ethics of Professional Early Childhood Education on p. 3 of Appendix 3. As Malaysia has its own Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Professionals, the ECCE Council recommends that this reference in PS: ECE 2025 Second Edition be updated specifically to the Malaysian Code.

Secondly, a child's brain develops faster in the first five years of life than at any other stage, forming 1 million neural connections every second. During this critical window, children are especially sensitive to the quality of care and experience they receive. With delivery of poor-quality child care and education or malpractices, a bully or victim mentality can be sown in these formative years. Amid rising levels of violence in schools, training centres, universities and workplaces today, it is increasingly essential that every early childhood professional delivers a high standard of care and education that includes ethical practices.

To achieve this purpose, a roundtable discussion (RTD) was held on 8 April 2026 at the Boardroom, Taylor's University. Participants included representatives from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Department of Social Welfare, NGOs, Colleges/Universities, TASKA and TADIKA. They agreed that the CoE was comprehensive, with only minor amendments suggested.

This was followed by a workshop to study the CoE in greater depth and to propose further changes if needed. Held on 7 June 2026, the Workshop on Reviewing and Refining the CoE brought together three groups: Policymakers and Academia, TASKA and TADIKA. The groups proposed few changes, none of them major.

The Refining and Revising Committee then met several times to study these proposals and make the necessary changes, before submitting the CoE for translation into the National Language (BM) by experts in the field.

The ECCE Council would like to express its gratitude to everyone who participated in the review, revision, refinement and translation of the Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Professionals in Malaysia for their commitment and collaboration.

Datuk Dr Chiam Heng Keng
Chairman
Code of Ethics Committee

Introduction

The Early Childhood Care and Education Council (ECCE Council) Malaysia acknowledges that early childhood educators – childcare providers and preschool teachers – make decisions all the time while caring for and educating children. These decisions affect all aspects of children's growth and learning – physical, intellectual, linguistic, social, emotional, moral and spiritual. This Code of Ethics has been developed to provide a framework for ethical responsibility, guide early childhood educators towards responsible behaviour and serve as a basis for resolving ethical dilemmas encountered during their work. It also communicates to those outside early childhood care and education what they can expect from early childhood educators.

This Code of Ethics articulates the principles and universal standards of early childhood care and education practices. Early childhood professionals are urged to adopt the Code into their practice for the development and wellbeing of the young children under their care.

This Code of Ethics is based on the following principles:

1. Every child is unique; all children have the capacity to learn and develop;

2. Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates; all areas of development are interconnected and are equally important;

3. The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's growth, development and learning;

4. Loving, responsive and secure relationships provide the foundation for children's development, particularly in fostering confidence, independence and resilience.

5. Shared responsibility through partnership with families and support from communities enhances children's learning, development and wellbeing.

This Code identifies eight areas of professional responsibility for early childhood educators: (1) Children; (2) Families; (3) Community; (4) Colleagues; (5) Employers; (6) Myself as a Professional; (7) Practicum Students; and (8) Conduct of Research.

This Code of Ethics is intended to guide responsible and ethical behaviour. To make the most of this guidance, early childhood educators are encouraged to begin by reading the Definition of Terms and familiarising themselves with the key concepts used in the Code.

For each of the eight areas of responsibility, early childhood educators should review and reflect on each item to understand its meaning and implications for professional behaviour and interactions with others. The Glossary can help clarify unfamiliar terms, although it cannot cover every possible concept. Therefore, centres are encouraged to organise regular discussions to deepen understanding of the Code, explore ethical dilemmas, and identify appropriate courses of action. Such collaborative reflection supports ethical decision-making in everyday practice, even for staff who have already received training on the Code of Ethics.

Definition of Terms

Ethics are moral principles based on what is considered morally right and wrong. They guide the decisions we make and how we relate to others.

Code of ethics outlines the shared values and principles that guide professional behaviour. It helps educators decide what to do, especially when faced with difficult situations or competing responsibilities. The Code helps educators create safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments where every child feels valued, supported and secure.

Early childhood educator is a professional who has attained the required minimum qualification to work with young children. Their role is to care for, nurture, educate and support children's holistic development.

Children in early childhood are those in the early years of life who attend a childcare centre, preschool/kindergarten.

Families are people who have significant caregiving responsibilities for a child, or who have kinship with the child.

Community refers to a group of people who live in the same area or who share common characteristics, interests, values or experiences.

Colleagues refer to people with whom a person works, directly or indirectly, and may include employers.

Collaborative relationship is a dynamic partnership between two or more colleagues, built on respect, trust and transparency, to achieve shared goals in the best interests of the child.

Employer is an individual or organisation that employs early childhood educators.

Practicum students are students enrolled in early childhood education programmes who undertake supervised on-site work placements to apply, practise and demonstrate their acquired knowledge and developing skills.

Conduct of research refers to the collection of information or data in any form by an organisation's staff, practicum students, practicum supervisors, or other researchers for research purposes.

Organisation refers to the childcare centre and preschool/kindergarten in which the early childhood educator works.

Institution refers to the institution where the practicum student is pursuing an early childhood education programme.

Code of Ethics

1 CHILDREN

With respect to children, I will

1. Act in the best interests of all children.
2. Respect and advocate for the rights of children as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
3. Recognise that all children are unique and have potential.
4. Acknowledge that children are competent learners, and engage them in all aspects of their learning.
5. Recognise that every child has the potential to be an active participant in all settings.
6. Respect the child's right to play.
7. Acknowledge children's cultural and linguistic rights in teaching and learning.
8. Observe children's learning and development, using appropriate assessment strategies and information for effective teaching and learning across all settings.
9. Create and maintain physically and mentally safe and healthy environments to support and enhance children's learning and holistic development.
10. Ensure young children are not discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, religion, language, gender, age, ability, economic status, family structure, lifestyle, culture or national origin.

11. Respond to children with special needs by providing an enabling and inclusive environment.

12. Respect the special relationship between children and their families and incorporate this perspective in all my interactions with children.

13. Advocate for the protection of all children from all forms of abuse and respond in compliance with the policies and laws of my country.

2 FAMILIES

With respect to families, I will

1. Respect the uniqueness of each family and understand their culture, lifestyle, customs, language, beliefs, values and kinship systems.

2. Acknowledge the right of families to make decisions about their children where appropriate.

3. Be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of children and families and respond in ways that maintain their dignity.

4. Share assessment practices of children's learning and development in ways that families understand.

5. Listen to families and acknowledge their strengths and competencies to support them in their role of nurturing children.

6. Develop mutual trust by using positive, open and honest communication.

7. Develop and support partnerships with families and engage in shared decision-making where appropriate.

8. Maintain confidentiality and respect the right of the family to privacy, except when the child's welfare is at risk.

9. Assist each family to develop a sense of belonging and be a part of the centre's community.

3 COMMUNITY

With respect to the community, I will

1. Learn about the communities in which I work and utilise this knowledge in my work with children.
2. Advocate for child- and family-friendly communities.
3. Promote community understanding of how young children develop and learn.
4. Promote developmentally and culturally appropriate programmes for young children.
5. Use knowledge and research findings to advocate for access to quality early childhood programmes for all children.
6. Connect with the services and agencies within the community that support children and their families.

4 COLLEAGUES

With respect to colleagues, I will

1. Encourage my colleagues to accept and adhere to this Code and take appropriate actions if any aspect of it is violated.
2. Respect all colleagues regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender, age, qualifications, ability, language, economic status, marital status, lifestyle, culture and national origin.
3. Respect and support the personal strengths, professional experience and diversity of my colleagues.
4. Build collaborative relationships based on trust, respect and integrity.

5. Use constructive approaches to manage differences and conflicts in the workplace.

6. Share knowledge, experiences and resources with my colleagues to support continuous professional development.

5 EMPLOYER

With respect to my employer, I will

1. Uphold the reputation of the organisation unless it violates the laws and regulations designed to protect children and staff, or this Code of Ethics.

2. Support workplace policies, standards and working conditions that are fair and non-discriminatory.

3. Adhere to the centre's policies and procedures, and when conflicts arise, attempt to resolve them through constructive action.

4. Support and promote ongoing professional development of all staff.

5. Foster positive and collaborative relationships within the organisation.

6 MYSELF AS A PROFESSIONAL

With respect to myself as a professional, I will

1. Base my work on theories, content knowledge, values, skills, evidence-based practices, policies and my understanding of children and their families.

2. Uphold professional and ethical practices and act in ways that advance the interest and standing of my profession.

3. Engage in critical reflection, evidence-based early childhood practices and ongoing professional development.

4. Keep abreast of current research and evidence-based early childhood practices.

5. Seek and build collaborative professional relationships.

6. Mentor new early childhood professionals.

7. Respect confidential information relating to children, families, staff and management.

8. Maintain professional relationships with families, without exploiting the relationships for personal gain.

9. Share my professional values, knowledge and practices with society and contribute to the ECCE community.

10. Recognise that my ability to provide quality care and education for children depends on my physical, psychological, social and emotional wellbeing.

11. Respect the proprietary rights of the organisation.

12. Truthfully present my professional qualifications, experiences and affiliations at all times.

7 PRACTICUM STUDENTS

With respect to practicum students, I will

1. Understand the requirements of the practicum students' institutions and communicate openly with the institutional representatives and its practicum supervisors.

2. Acknowledge and support the diversity, personal strengths, professional knowledge and experiences which practicum students bring to the placement.

3. Provide opportunities and resources for practicum students to demonstrate their competencies.

4. Provide ongoing constructive feedback and fair and equitable assessments.

5. Be a mentor and model professional practice to practicum students.

6. Engage and empower practicum students to make positive contributions to their placement.

7. Maintain confidentiality in relation to practicum students, their supervisors and institutional programmes.

8 CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

With respect to the conduct of research, I will

1. Recognise the potential effects of children's participation in research, such as safety, fatigue, privacy and their interests, regardless of whether the research projects are undertaken within the institution or by external bodies.

2. Endeavour to understand the purpose and value of proposed research projects and make informed decisions regarding my own participation and that of my colleagues.

3. Be responsive to children's participation in research and negotiate their involvement by taking into account matters such as their safety, fatigue, privacy and interests.

4. Ensure that any research in which I am involved meets standard ethical procedures, including informed consent, the right to withdraw and confidentiality.

5. Ensure that images of children and other data are only collected with informed consent and are stored and used in compliance with legislative and policy requirements.

6. Present the findings of all research accurately and objectively.

7. Support research that strengthens and expands the knowledge base of early childhood by initiating and contributing to such research where possible.

Glossary

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC is dedicated for the protection and promotion of children's rights everywhere and at all times. The Convention was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1989. As a member of the United Nations, Malaysia signed and ratified the UNCRC in 1995, committing to uphold and protect children's rights.

This code is based on the rights of children in the UNCRC.

Best interests of the child

According to Article 3 of the UNCRC, everyone including the government, families and individuals, should make decisions and act in ways that are best for the child.

Children are unique

All children are unique in that they have individual qualities and potential.

They are unique in that they are not exactly the same, not even identical twins. Children differ in physical appearance, personality, ability and learning style. All children have the potential to grow and develop, though they do so at different rates and in different ways, shaped by their individual capabilities and experiences.

Children are competent learners and active participants

All children are competent learners. They have an innate desire to participate actively to acquire knowledge. They are capable of learning when the activities are developmentally appropriate. Mental involvement is essential to effective learning.

Enabling and inclusive environment

An environment that supports and enables children to participate, learn, grow and succeed is the right of children with special needs.

Families with vulnerabilities

Families with vulnerabilities are those who encounter difficulties and challenges such as financial setback, health issues, family structure and loss of a loved one. They are prone to suffer emotionally and may be subject to unfair judgement and stigmatisation. Treating them with ethical responsibility is to be respectful of their vulnerabilities.

Developing partnership with families for decision-making

Early childhood educators and families need to communicate openly with each other, especially on decisions relating to practices that affect the child's behaviour at the centre and at home.

Right to privacy

Families have the right to privacy. However, when there are concerns that a child may be at risk of harm, including abuse or neglect, the early childhood educator must report the matter to the appropriate authority.

Services and agencies in the community

Early childhood educators need to know the facilities and resources available in their community. These include medical and emergency services, professional support services, facilities (such as libraries, playgrounds and outdoor learning spaces) and human resources (such as guest speakers who can talk to children on specific topics).

Continuous professional development

Continuous professional development goes beyond an early childhood educator's initial qualification, helping them build, maintain and enhance the practical and professional competencies required by relevant authorities.

Employee's ethics and loyalty

Employees should be loyal to their organisation, particularly in upholding its reputation, provided that the organisation operates in accordance with laws, regulations and ethical standards.

Proprietary rights of the organisation

The organisation owns the copyright to its programmes, materials and resources. These may not be used, reproduced or distributed without appropriate authorisation.

Understand practicum requirements

Organisations should require institutions that intend to send practicum students to them to provide all specifications for the practicum. With this information, organisations can make decisions such as accepting or rejecting the practicum students or negotiating the requirements.

Acknowledge and support practicum students' diversity and strengths

Practicum students bring diverse backgrounds, strengths, knowledge and experiences. Organisations should recognise and support these differences to help students develop professionally and contribute meaningfully to its programmes and services.

Provide opportunities and resources

The organisation should give practicum students opportunities to plan and carry out activities for children, allowing them to practise their acquired knowledge and skills. Providing assistance, materials and other resources will help students carry out these activities effectively.

Maintain confidentiality on practicum matters

The organisation must keep information about practicum students, supervisors and institutional programmes confidential. It must not disclose such information to third parties without appropriate authorisation or a legitimate professional reason.

Recognise the potential effects of children's participation in research

The organisation should understand the potential impact that children's participation in research can have on their development and wellbeing whether the research is conducted within the organisation or by external bodies.

Be responsive to children's participation in research

The organisation should assess the effects of children's participation in research on their development and wellbeing before agreeing to their involvement, and continue to monitor these effects on the children throughout the research, taking action where necessary.

Meeting ethical standards in the conduct of research

Researchers must comply with ethical standards when conducting research, particularly when children are involved. They must:

1. Inform parents, in a way they can clearly understand, about the purpose and value of the research, its demands on their child and any potential risks;

2. Obtain informed consent from parents before involving their children in the research;

3. Respect the right of children and parents to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation;

4. Maintain the confidentiality of participants' information and data; and

5. Report findings in a way that does not identify individual participants.

Protection of children's privacy

Article 16 of the UNCRC, the Child Act 2001 and the Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (PDPA) protect every child's privacy. Early childhood educators must respect the privacy, dignity and confidentiality of every child in their care.

Privacy includes personal data, images and any information that could identify the child, including data collected with parents' or legal guardians' informed consent. Educators and organisations may only share, publish or upload this information on social media or other electronic platforms with the parents' or legal guardians' informed, written consent. Without this consent, they may only show images if the child's face is covered to prevent identification.

Present the findings of all research accurately and objectively

All the findings of the research should be based on the collected data, and interpretations of the findings should be factual.

Support research to strengthen and expand the knowledge base of early childhood

Research findings are important to the body of knowledge in early childhood care and education. By supporting and engaging in research, early childhood educators can help uncover new insights into children's development or new pedagogical approaches. In doing so, they strengthen and expand the knowledge base of early childhood care and education.

Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organisations have contributed to the development of the Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Professionals in Malaysia 2019 and the Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Professionals in Malaysia, Second Edition 2026.

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- Puan Illy Nadia binti Barudin, Deputy Director, Private Education Division.

Ministry of Women, Early Childhood and Community Wellbeing Development Sarawak

- Puan Salina Bujang, Head of Early Childhood Development Division.

Individual Contributors

- Professor Dr Nordin bin Mamat, Director, Centre of Pedagogical Research and Innovation, Faculty of Human Development, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.
- Professor Dr Loh Sau Cheong, Faculty of Education, University Malaya & Deputy President, National Association of Special Education.

Government Departments, Divisions and Agencies

- Department of Children's Development, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development
- Department of Community Development, Ministry of Rural & Regional Development
- Department of National Unity and Integration, Ministry of National Unity
- Family Health Development Division, Ministry of Health
- Curriculum Development Division, Ministry of Education
- Daily School Management Division, Ministry of Education
- Private Education Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia
- Teacher Professionalism Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia
- Institute for Teacher Education Malaysia, Ministry of Education Malaysia

Institutions of Higher Learning

- Open University Malaysia
- University of Malaya
- Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
- HELP University
- Management and Science University
- SEGI College
- SEGi University
- Southern University College
- Taylor's University
- UCSI College

Professional Associations and Civil Society Organisations

- Association of Professional Early Childhood Educators, Malaysia (MAPECE)
- Montessori Association of Malaysia
- Persatuan Guru-Guru Tadika Malaysia
- Persatuan Pengasuh Berdaftar Malaysia
- Persatuan Tadika Malaysia

Early Childhood Education and Care Providers and Organisations

- Busy Bees Malaysia Sdn. Bhd.
- Childcare Centre My Playpen
- Cutie Cottage Child Care Centre
- HANKIDZ Leadership Preschool
- Melody Kindyland Malaysia
- Pink Tower Childcare Centre
- REAL Kids
- Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Tamil) Jalan Fletcher
- TASKA Seri Mawar Indah
- TASKA Bayu Mewah

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Notes