

Early Childhood Educators are certified teachers¹ of full day early learning and care programs for 4 and 5 year olds

1. **Early Childhood Educators choose their profession because they want to make a difference in the lives of children.** A “deep and genuine enjoyment of children and a desire to be with them is a primary motivator for Early Childhood Educators”². Choosing to become an Early Childhood Educator means making a difference in the lives of children and their families, enjoying and celebrating the wonderment of childhood, being people oriented and working in a varied and stimulating environment.
2. **Early Childhood Educators value families as partners.** As stated in our professional Code of Ethics, families are of primary importance in children’s development. Because the family and the Early Childhood Educator have a common interest in the child’s welfare, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about collaboration between the home and early childhood program in ways that enhance the child’s development. Early Childhood Educators working with families are obligated to:
 - Develop relationships of mutual trust with families they serve.
 - Respect the dignity of each family.
 - Respect families’ child rearing values and their right to make decisions for their children.
 - Interpret each child’s progress to guardians within the framework of a developmental perspective and help families understand and appreciate the value of developmentally appropriate Early Childhood programs³.
3. **Early Childhood Educators undergo a lengthy dedicated preparatory program and are accountable to the public through a legislated regulatory body.** Early Childhood Educators, under the newly legislated Early Childhood Educators Act (2007)⁴, must be registered members of the College of Early Childhood Educators to use the professional title of “Early Childhood Educator” or “Registered Early Childhood Educator”. Members of the College will be held accountable to a complaints and disciplinary process and standards of practice. Under the Act, Early Childhood Educators have a mandated scope of practice to plan and deliver “inclusive play-based learning and care programs for children in order to promote the well-being and holistic development of children”⁵. All Early Childhood Educators, as defined in the regulations of the newly established College of Early Childhood Educators, require members to have extended post secondary education either based on government Early Childhood Education Program Standards or approved Canadian University degree programs “whose major course content, both academic and practical, is relevant to Early Childhood Education”⁶. Ontario Early Childhood Education programs require graduates to have an intimate knowledge of child development, family dynamics, parent engagement, extensive practical experience, programming based on observation and assessment, play-based learning philosophy, and an understanding of developmentally appropriate curriculum for children from birth to school-age. As the Education Act only mandates the schooling of children 6 years and up, Early Childhood Educators have been delivering quality full day learning programs for 4 and 5 year olds based on Kindergarten and/or early education curriculum for a number of years.
4. **Early Childhood Educators consider the developmental needs of children first and plan program outcomes accordingly.** The Day Nurseries Act (DNA) is a legislation that governs the regulation of early learning and care programs in Ontario. This act enforces a staff/child ratio of 1:10 or 2:20 for children 4 and 5 years of age, with a maximum of 20 children per room and a minimum of one staff with an Early Childhood Education credential or its equivalent. Early Childhood Educators understand a child’s learning begins at birth; a child’s first 5 years are critical to her/his development; and a child’s day begins at home and ends at home. Early Childhood Educators recognize that all 4 and 5 year olds are not alike and do not reach their developmental milestones at the same time. Observation and assessment are key and fundamental skills applied by Early Childhood Educators when planning their programs. As a result, Early Childhood Educators plan for the “whole child” (social, emotional, physical and cognitive), and accommodate the different learning, developmental stages and outdoor needs of the child as an individual and within a group.
5. **Early Childhood Educators are collaborative and subscribe to working across a multi-disciplinary team model.** Early Childhood Educators work in a variety of settings including child care centres, homes, community centres, early years centres, public schools, nursery schools, special needs, training institutions, family support and health services. In each of these settings Early Childhood Educators collaborate with other staff, professionals, support organizations and individuals. Through the course of their work Early Childhood Educators may work with parents, students, assistants, supervisors, resource teachers, child and youth workers, social workers, parks and recreation staff, speech therapists, public school teachers, home care providers and health practitioners. Integrated pilot programs with Early Childhood Educators and public school Kindergarten teachers in a setting that equally utilizes and values each staff’s expertise, resources and contribution have garnered positive results for children⁷. A philosophy of holistic development prepares the Early Childhood Educator to work as an equal partner in a multi-disciplinary team environment.
6. **Early Childhood Educators recognize the need to embrace a climate of growth and change in their field to better serve the children and families in their programs.** The field of Early Childhood Education in Ontario has evolved through the years from “minding” young children in a group setting that accommodated working mothers during the war to valuing the importance of brain development and strong family foundations that benefits all of society. The training, philosophy, and implementation of early learning and care programs by Early Childhood Educators have changed to accommodate this evolving social trend and awareness. Early Childhood Educators have access to continued and ongoing learning offered by post secondary training institutions and Early Childhood organizations in the form of workshops, certification, post diploma certificates, degrees, and post graduate programs. The newly established College of Early Childhood Educators, a self-regulated professional body, is another professional step that Early Childhood Educators take to make them certified to practice and accountable to the public. “Early Childhood Educators have a commitment to ensure their own continuing professional competence and to further the field of Early Childhood Education”⁸.
7. **Early Childhood Educators see their role as recognized specialists in a field that supports the needs of families and children.** Early Childhood Educators work in a variety of early learning programs that meet the different needs of children and their families - child care centres, home based care, parent drop in, early intervention programs, family resource programs, nursery schools, parent cooperative programs, children’s community programs, integrated programs and before and after school programs. The Early Childhood Educator’s job responsibilities are comparable to registered nurses and Kindergarten teachers, yet wages are substantially lower⁹. Studies have shown that Early Childhood Educators are capable of delivering the Kindergarten curriculum alongside Kindergarten teachers as partners in a public school setting¹⁰ or as lead teachers in regulated child care programs with equally successful outcomes for the children¹¹.

¹The words “certified teachers” in this sentence refers to the regulated professional role of an Early Childhood Educator in Ontario. ECEs working in regulated early learning and care programs in Ontario are mandated by early 2009 to register with their professional regulatory body, the College of Early Childhood Educators. As regulated professionals, anyone holding the title of Early Childhood Educator or Registered Early Childhood Educator is “certified” as he/she will be part of a public register and be accountable to the Standards of Practice of the College. Early Childhood Educators, as part of their scope of practice, incorporate learning in their programs when caring for children from infancy to school age and are in essence teachers of young children.

² Gestwicki, C., Bertrand, J. (2008). *Essentials of Early Childhood Education*. Third Canadian Edition. Toronto. Thomson Nelson. p. 130.

³ Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario. 2006. *Code of Ethics*. <<http://www.aeceo.ca>>

⁴ Government of Ontario. *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 Chapter 7, Sch 8*. (2007) <<http://www.search.e-laws.gov.on.ca/en/search/>>

⁵ Government of Ontario. *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 Chapter 7, Sch 8.s.2*

⁶ Government of Ontario. *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 Chapter 7, Sch 8 Reg. 221/08. s 7(1)*

⁷ Toronto First Duty. (2007). *Bruce Woodgreen Early Learning Centre: A day in an integrated child program*. Toronto. <http://www.toronto.ca/firstduty/integrated_day.pdf>

⁸ Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario. 2006. *Code of Ethics*. <<http://www.aeceo.ca>>

⁹ Doherty, G., Lero, D. S., Goelman, H., LaGrange, A. & Tougas, J. (2000). *You bet I care! A Canada-wide study on: Wages, working conditions, and practices in child care centres*. Guelph, ON: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph.

¹⁰ Toronto First Duty. (2007). *Bruce Woodgreen Early Learning Centre: A day in an integrated child program*. Toronto. <http://www.toronto.ca/firstduty/integrated_day.pdf>

¹¹ Coplan, R.J. (1999). *Ottawa-Carleton District School Board: Junior Kindergarten Differentiated-Staffing Pilot Project Evaluation Report of Findings – Year III*. Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.