

Fostering Moral and Ethical Development

Accomplished early childhood generalists know that the field of ethics defines what is good for the individual and for the group and establishes the nature of what one should do in the interest of justice and fairness. Teachers understand the importance of young children's moral development and actively instruct children about ethics. Teachers help children develop a conscience, a sense of integrity, and the ability to delay gratification.

Accomplished early childhood teachers know that young children have varying abilities to comprehend ethical issues and moral dilemmas depending on their developmental stages. They also have differing abilities to regulate their behavior

Early Childhood Generalist Standards

USING KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT TO UNDERSTAND THE WHOLE CHILD

based on their cognitive, emotional and social development. Teachers use teachable moments to help children develop the capacity to reflect on their actions, generate age-appropriate solutions to ethical problems, and exert self-control. Teachers understand children's common misconceptions about ethics. For example, a three-year-old child might think that a person who breaks an object by accident is just as culpable as one who breaks something on purpose, whereas an eight-year-old would be more likely to comprehend that intent makes a difference. Teachers help children progressively move to more sophisticated ethical judgments without expecting more of them than is reasonable at a given stage.

Accomplished early childhood teachers realize that many factors affect young children's moral and ethical development. A child's temperament, home culture, family structure, and socioeconomic level can all affect the child's sense of right and wrong and ability to evaluate moral and ethical issues. Accomplished teachers are sensitive to differences between school policies and family viewpoints. For example, the school may have a policy of no hitting, but parents may disagree and encourage children to defend themselves physically in some situations. Accomplished teachers help children observe ethical norms in the school community without showing a lack of respect for the family's values.

Accomplished early childhood teachers approach classroom management as a means to self-discipline and self-awareness. They help children understand that behaving ethically is not just a matter of automatically conforming to a set of rules but rather the complex act of considering how best to treat others and behave in a group. Accomplished teachers enable children to develop the ethical behaviors that will eventually make them successful, responsible adults.