

AECEO Statement on Child Protection and the role of ECEs in Ontario

The AECEO's goal is to build the collective voice of early childhood educators who we trust to work creatively, collaboratively and responsively with children, families and communities. In doing this work, we understand educators, children, families and communities as inevitably dependent and inextricably interdependent whereby responsive care relations are the foundation of good practice and quality care environments. While our mandate has evolved over time, the primary focus of our organization today is to critically engage with sociopolitical forces that undermine the work, value and experiences of early childhood educators (and allied professionals) and advocate for change at the childcare program, system and public policy-level. We embrace our work as political, recognizing our responsibility to identify and challenge the chronic undervaluing of

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(highly gendered) early childhood professionals. But we also know we have much to learn. Reflecting on our predominantly white leadership, we are making explicit efforts to better engage with Black, Indigenous and other racialized educators, families and communities in an effort to honour the experiences of all members of our community.

In doing this work, we are reviewing the resources we make available to others. One of these resources, originally developed decades ago, is a manual titled *A Child In Need of Protection*. Up until recently this resource was available to ECE students through various colleges offering ECE diploma programs. The original purpose of the manual (developed prior to the establishment of the College of Early Childhood Educators) was to guide ECEs in upholding their legal responsibility to identify a child in need of protection and report this to child protection authorities.

Upon reflection and a thorough review of the document, we came to the following conclusions:

- 1) *A Child In Need of Protection* lacks a critical lens, failing to acknowledge the chronic overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous and other racialized and marginalized families within the existing child protection system. In fact, we feel (and fear) that this document may have inadvertently contributed to the ongoing systemic discrimination against the Black Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC) in its bias towards the decontextualization of information related to suspected child abuse.
- 2) The College of Early Childhood Educators, the regulatory body responsible for overseeing the professional practice of ECEs and protection of the public interest, is better positioned to offer guidance regarding ECEs legal responsibilities to report a child in need of protection. The CECE's resource, Reflection Guide Professional Advisory: Duty to Report, is available at no cost on their website.

3) The production of *A Child in Need of Protection* will be discontinued immediately. We wish to use the discontinuation of this manual as an opportunity for the AECEO to bring attention to the ongoing discrimination against BIPOC children and families in the child protection system. We also wish to acknowledge and honour the fact that upholding the professional and ethical responsibilities of ECEs is incredibly complex. We want to recognize a space where ethical values and responsibilities may conflict and work to support educators to critically think with these complex, high-stakes dilemmas.

We recognize that ECEs have a duty to report and encourage all of our members to take this responsibility very seriously. But we also recognize the systems currently in place are flawed, too often rooted in an ethnocentric and punitive, rather than culturally diverse, strengths-based, approaches. We recognize that all families experience different levels of adversity, and similarly, various strengths that existing systems do not always recognize. We want to call out systems that are enabling white supremacy and colonization, while remaining committed to ensure that all children and families are safe, feel heard and have access to the support they require. We want to support ECEs in thinking critically about conflicting professional responsibilities and ethical values in their work.

We want to express an ongoing commitment to finding and developing resources that can support ECEs and allied professionals in navigating their conflicting professional and ethical responsibilities to care for children and families. As a first step we provide some recommended resources, including resources that relate to the idea of “cultural safety” in social service practice.

We invite anyone with personal, professional and/or organizational experiences with child welfare institutions/services to engage in the AECEO’s ongoing conversation regarding the conflicting roles and responsibilities of ECE professionals in the context of existing child welfare systems. We present this document as a living a document, open to other thoughts, ideas and feedback from community partners and allies.

On a more practical note, we offer some points of reflections which we hope will deepen the thinking

of early childhood educators, students and allies to engage in relation to existing and potential child welfare systems.

The FACTS about BIPOC children in care:

- In Canada, 52.2% of children in foster care are Indigenous, but account for only 7.7% of the child population according to Census 2016. This means 14,970 out of 28,665 foster children in private homes under the age of 15 are Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2020)
- 38% of Indigenous children in Canada live in poverty, compared to 7% for non-Indigenous children (Statistics Canada, 2020).
- There are more Indigenous children in care today than there were in residential schools at the height of their use (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018)
- Black children referred to Children’s Aid Societies in Ontario were 28% more likely to be placed in care than White children investigated
- CAS of Toronto data indicates that children in Black-led families are in care longer than children with parents from other racial groups (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018)

Resources related to the idea of ‘cultural safety’:

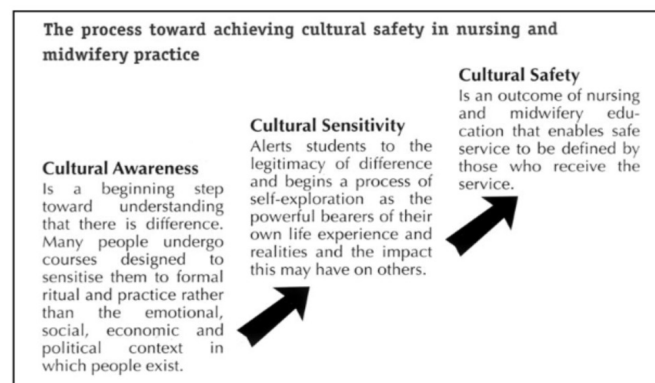


Figure. The process of cultural safety. Reprinted with permission from the Nursing Council of New Zealand (2002), p. 8.

Image above taken from Spence (2005).

Ball, J. (2008). Cultural safety in practice with children, families and communities. Presented at The Early Years Interprofessional Research and Practice Conference, Vancouver, February 1, 2008. Retrieved January 12, 2021 from <http://www.ecdip.org/docs/pdf/Cultural%20Safety%20Poster.pdf>

Smye, V. & Browne, A (2002). 'Cultural safety' and the analysis of health policy affecting Aboriginal people. *Nurse Researcher*, 9(3): 42-56.

Spence, D. (2005). Hermeneutic notions augment cultural safety education. *Journal of Nursing Education* 44(9):409-14. Retrieved January 12, 2021 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7544888_Hermenutic_notions_augment_cultural_safety_education

Books embracing a critical lens in child protection work

Badry, D. Montgomery, M, Kikulwe, D., Bennett, M. & Fuchs, D. (Eds). (2018). *Imagining child welfare in the spirit of reconciliation: Voices from the prairies*. Regina: SK: University of Regina Press

Connolly, M. (Ed). (2017). *Beyond the risk paradigm in child protection*. London, UK: Palgrave.

Featherstone, B., White, S. & Morris, K. (2014). *Re-Imagining child protection: Towards humane social work with families*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Kennedy, S. (2020). *Seeing the child in child protection social work*. London, UK: Macmillan International.

Organizations working in this area in Ontario

- Boost for kids: <https://boostforkids.org>
- The Caring Society: <https://fncaringsociety.com/about-us>
- Ontario Native Women's Association: <https://www.onwa.ca/about>

- The June Caldwell Centre for Young Women (Jessie's): <https://jessiescentre.org>

Points of reflection for educators/allied professionals

- 1) How does the concept of cultural safety or cultural competency intersect with your professional "duty to report" as defined through the CECE and provincial and federal law?
- 2) Child abuse is widely accepted as a major threat to children's well-being in Canada (Children First Canada, 2020). However, thinking about child abuse continues to position the "problem" of child abuse as an individual responsibility of parents and/or professionals, rather than a systemic issue in need of systemic solutions. How do you understand child abuse/neglect? How might your understanding interact with your professional practice?
- 3) As early childhood educators in Ontario, our standards of practice require us "to maintain responsive and collaborative relationships with families." How might you manage conflicting ethical values and the legal responsibility of "duty to report"? What supports are (or could be) available to you through this process?

References

- Children First Canada. (2020). Raising Canada: Top 10 threats to childhood in Canada. C. F. Canada. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5669d2da9cadb69fb2f8d32e/t/5f51503d5ceab254db134729/1599164484483/Raising+Canada+Report_Final_Sept.pdf
- Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2018). Interrupted childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare. http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ohrc-releases-report-its-inquiry-over-representation-indigenous-and-black-children-ontario%E2%80%99s-child
- Statistics Canada. (2020, December 23, 2020). Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care. Government of Canada. Retrieved January 12 from <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1541187352297/1541187392851>