Professional Development

As an early childhood professional, your commitment to learning about the field does not end once you earn your degree! In fact, as a professional, you should be committed to continued professional development and lifelong learning for as long as you continue to serve children and families in the field.

Professional Development
What is meant by professional development? It’s a way to stay current in the field and to continue to develop your knowledge through professional training, attending conferences, reading professional journals and research and learning about current trends, issues and controversies within your field. Having conversations with your colleagues and learning from your peers as well as participating effectively in performance evaluations and recommendations is also an aspect of your professional development. In short, it’s continuing to do all you can to learn and grow in your knowledge and skills, even after you earn your degree.

CEUs

A Continuing Education Unit (CEU) is a way to document professional development in an accredited program in a uniform way. A CEU is a unit of credit equal to 10 hours of participation in an accredited program designed for professionals with certificates or licenses to practice various professions. While college and university programs measure study hours through “credits,” organizations that offer non-credit professional experience may measure learning through CEUs. CEUs were developed as universal guidelines for continuing education and training by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET). One CEU is identified as 10 contact hours and is a permanent record of non-credit educational experiences you may have. If you participate in any non-university professional experiences, be sure to document it through CEUs.

Advocacy

As a professional in the early childhood field, you may also choose to become involved in childhood advocacy issues—helping to support causes in defense of children such as ending child abuse or neglect, the movement for dental/health care coverage for children in poverty, or lobbying for better consumer protection laws that protect children. Whatever your interest, there’s sure to be a need for your help! Educating yourself about childhood issues is a first step in becoming a child advocate.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

As an early childhood professional, you must be aware of the importance of Developmentally Appropriate Practice or “DAP.” DAP refers to strategies and interactions with children that are based on research that helps us to determine what sort of expectations and methods are appropriate for children at different ages and stages. While DAP recognizes the individuality of each child, research also shows us that certain milestones and windows of opportunities exist for children. NAEYC has published a position statement on DAP that helps guide early childhood professionals in
providing developmentally appropriate practices at all ages and stages of development.

The core principles of DAP are as follows:

1. All areas of development and learning are important.
2. Learning and development follow sequences.
4. Development and learning result from an interaction of maturation and experience.
5. Early experiences have profound effects on development and learning.
6. Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.
7. Children develop best when they have secure relationships.
8. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.
9. Children learn in a variety of ways.
10. Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation and promoting language, cognition, and social competence.
11. Development and learning advance when children are challenged.
12. Children’s experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning.

Sources:


Ethics

As an early childhood educator, another aspect of professionalism is your commitment to ethical standards which include providing the best quality of childcare and instruction to the children, maintain a positive attitude and commitment to furthering your professional knowledge. Ethical standards are important in all careers of course, but when you have so much influence on the most vulnerable individuals in society, an ethical code of conduct becomes that much more important. NAEYC has published a position statement that identifies ethical responsibilities to children and their families as well as to coworkers and employers. The position statement also includes ethical responsibilities your employer has to you.

Source:

Professional Organizations

In some cases, your employer may offer or require you to attend a certain number of professional development activities or you may be responsible for finding your own professional development experiences. Regardless, there is no shortage of opportunities! Many professional or non-profit organizations like the following offer a variety of professional development or advocacy opportunities through their websites and conferences.

Check out a few of the following:

- NAEYC
- Association for Early Learning Leaders
- Center for Child Care Workforce (CCW)
- Children’s Defense Fund (CDF)
- Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
- Council for Exceptional Children
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
- National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)
- National Child Care Association (NCCA)
- National Head Start Association (NHSA)
- Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA)
- Stand for Children
- Zero to Three
- Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

Another great professional development resource is the Institute of Education Sciences Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). This government resource houses a huge supply of educational resources. This is a great resource for future research, so you might want to bookmark this site!