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## T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® and Child Care WAGE\$® Ethical Guidelines

The Ethical Guidelines (Guidelines) for T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® and Child Care WAGE\$® programs were created as a roadmap for individuals working in T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$ programs across the country and designed to be used as a guide for best practice. The guidelines were created in recognition that from time to time, staff in these programs will be confronted with difficult issues requiring care be taken and integrity maintained when addressing them. They are not policies set in place by the Center. There are a number of ways that these guidelines can be used by T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$ program administrators. They can be read and shared with staff. Discussion sessions can be held during staff meetings on some of the ethical dilemmas contained in the document to help create best practice for the program. And they can be adopted as policy for your program.

### **Introduction**

Whether you are a counselor, an administrative assistant or a program director, you will, from time to time, be confronted with issues that require you to find your ethical compass and maneuver difficult situations with the most care and integrity. Some situations are very difficult; often they will not have an easy or clear answer. But hopefully if you use this code as a way to help you find a course of action, you will have acted in the best interest of the program and its many beneficiaries. Within each section are examples of ethical dilemmas that might be encountered as you work in a T.E.A.C.H. or WAGE\$ Program. They are good places to begin discussions within your team or organization. They are by no means exhaustive, but are designed to begin the dialogue. Solutions to the ethical dilemmas that are found at the end of each section can be guided by the content of that particular section, but solutions should not be limited by that part of the code of ethics. When looking at many ethical dilemmas they cross various areas and most often include personal integrity and responsibility as well as other dimensions of the code.

While you are not serving the field as an early childhood educator, you are part of the early childhood profession supporting in a mentoring role as you help individuals make their way through your state's higher education system. These guidelines should complement the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) [Code of Ethical Conduct](#).

## **Personal Integrity/Responsibility**

As T.E.A.C.H. or WAGE\$ staff members, we represent the program and our agency at all times – both during and outside of work time. Character and competence are needed each day as we do our work. These two components of personal integrity and responsibility mean that

- We do what we say we will do, in all of our dealings with co-workers, supervisors, subordinates, clients and the public,
- We are honest, seeking out the truth, telling the truth, and avoiding misrepresentations,
- We are precise in the information that we share, assuring that it is always accurate,
- We are good stewards of the resources given to us,
- We are respectful of the diversity of needs and conditions of people we serve and with whom we work,
- We are fair,
- We take ownership for the work that we do as individuals and teams, and
- We are compassionate and caring.

Each day we challenge ourselves and others to grow and improve. Sometimes ethical questions are not easily discernible. When we wonder about whether an ethical issue is involved in a situation with ourselves, our colleagues or our clients, we should raise questions about the possibility with our colleagues or supervisors, depending on the circumstance. Discussion of ethical questions should be a regular part of our workplace, with all staff feeling comfortable raising such issues. It is through dialogue and investigation that good decisions can be made that are best for each of us, the program and our clients.

### **Examples of Ethical Questions of Personal Integrity and Responsibility**

- *A fellow counselor is not carrying her weight. Every day she spends a significant amount of time on the phone with personal business. She often does not call her recipients back in a timely manner. She has asked you to help her catch up on her paperwork. What should you do?*
- *A counselor has been out on vacation for a week. You have been handling her caseload. You are finding lots of serious errors in her work as you work with her recipients. Some of these errors have resulted in incorrect payments. What should you do?*
- *A new scholarship recipient calls. She lives in an area where she could go to one of two community colleges. She asks for your recommendation. Both of the colleges are appropriately accredited and fees are the same. One of your recipients had a bad experience with an instructor at one of the community colleges. How should you handle this request for a recommendation?*

## **Conflicts of Interest**

There are some basic principles that should guide our thinking and behavior around real and/or perceived conflicts of interest. They are listed as follows.

- We shall not use our T.E.A.C.H. or WAGE\$ position for private gain.
- We shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any organization or individual inside or outside the program or our agency.
- We shall disclose any relationship, remove ourselves from the situation, and seek supervisory counsel if we cannot act impartially.
- We shall not be involved in an outside activity that conflicts with our official duties within our T.E.A.C.H. or WAGE\$ program.

In addition, we must strive to avoid any action that would violate or create the appearance that we are violating the law or code of ethics.

### Impartiality in Performing Official Duties

As T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$ employees we must consider whether our impartiality may be questioned whenever our involvement in a particular matter with specific parties might affect certain personal and business relationships. If such a matter would have an effect on the financial interest of a member of our household, or if we or a family member serve on a board of directors or in another special capacity with a program with which we work, then we must consider whether a reasonable person would question our impartiality in our work. If we conclude that there would be an appearance problem, then we must explore the appropriateness of participation or involvement with our supervisor.

### Misuse of Position

We shall not use our position for our own or another's private gain. We shall not use our position, title or any authority associated with our position to coerce or induce a benefit for others or ourselves.

When considering the issue of personal gain, the question of "What belongs to whom?" must be answered.

*Who owns the time?*

*Who owns the information?*

*Who owns the ideas?*

*Who owns the tools?*

*Who owns the data?*

When the answer to any or all of these questions is the program or agency, then it is not appropriate for an individual to accept additional compensation. As a representative of the T.E.A.C.H. or WAGE\$ programs we are already being paid by our agencies. Additional

compensation is anything offered to reward you for what you have done or been asked to do. Examples include: money, material gifts/gift certificates/discounts, favors or employment offers.

We also are not to use or allow the improper use of nonpublic information to further a private interest, either our own or another's. We should respect the property of our agency and not use it for anything other than authorized work. Agency property includes office supplies, telephones, computers, copiers and any other property purchased with agency or program funds. Be sure to check your agency's own policies about this. We should not misuse official time either. This includes our own time as well as the time of a subordinate or colleague.

#### Examples of Ethical Questions of Conflicts of Interest

- *You have been asked to teach a class at the area community college. You have a number of recipients attending the college. In all likelihood you would probably have one of the recipients on your caseload in your class. Should you teach the class?*
- *Your daughter is teaching at a local child care program. She wants to go to college and earn her associate degree on a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship. She has decided to apply. What should you do when her application arrives in the office?*
- *You have been asked to do a presentation on WAGE\$ at a conference on a Saturday. They have offered to pay you an honorarium and your travel. How should you handle this?*

#### **Confidentiality**

Individuals applying for scholarships or supplements provide personal information about their education, family, earnings and identification (social security numbers). They trust us to treat such information with care. Consistent with showing respect for clients and with having personal integrity, we should ensure that all non-public information about individuals or organizations acquired by T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$ staff in the course of our work is kept confidential and not disclosed inappropriately. This standard should apply whether or not the client has been given our written assurance of the confidentiality of such information and covers electronic as well as paper records of information.

#### Examples of Ethical Questions of Confidentiality

- *You are swamped. You have lots of applications sitting on your desk, file folders on the floor and it is time to leave. You lock your door when you leave. The cleaning crew come in every night. Have you adequately protected the confidentiality of your clients?*
- *One of your recipients has called to tell you that she and her family are planning to move out of state at the end of the semester. She has not told her employer yet because she is afraid she will stop her scholarship support. How should this confidential information be handled?*

- *A recipient calls to say that she is not getting her release time as required in her contract. She tells you this in confidence, as she is afraid she will get in trouble with her employer. How should you handle this information?*

### **Treatment of Clients**

Clients for purpose of these guidelines are primarily recipients of scholarships or supplements. They are the most direct beneficiary of our services and funds. However, as we do our work we know that the programs within which they work are also our clients, as well as the community educational institutions that they attend. And ultimately the children whom they care for and educate are our clients as well. One of our challenges as we try to provide appropriate and ethical services is the conflicts that may exist between the needs and rights of different client populations.

How we treat those who come to our doors seeking help, whether it is for a scholarship, counsel, a supplement or a referral to a community resource, is the measure of the quality and effectiveness of our work. Many people we serve do not understand the programs we operate. They have never had a scholarship, nor have they been to college. And a salary supplement is a completely foreign concept. They come looking for help, and it is how we give that help that often determines how successful they will be in using our services.

- We shall serve our clients expediently with competence, courtesy, dignity, patience and respect.
- We shall treat client information without judgment and with confidentiality and sensitivity and limit data collection to that which is necessary.
- We shall be familiar with and educate our clients about the variety of services, programs and resources available to them through our agency and other partnering agencies.
- We shall give accurate information to clients to help empower them to make good choices related to accessing professional development, scholarships, health insurance support and/or supplements and/or delivering quality child care.
- We shall listen to our clients with the intent of learning which of our services are beneficial to them as well as those that are not.
- We shall make every effort to see beyond stereotypes and our own biases, and we shall make every effort to appreciate the complexity in each individual.
- We shall not verbally or physically discriminate, harass, or deny opportunity towards any fellow employee or client on the basis of race, national origin, religion, age, affectional orientation, socioeconomic status, gender, disability, creed, marital status, veteran status or political affiliation.
- We shall not engage in conversation or physical acts that may harass, discriminate, intimidate, demean or personally offend others.
- We shall engage our clients in the evaluation process of our programs and services and inform them of outcomes achieved.

### **Examples of Ethical Questions of Treatment of Clients**

- *A supplement recipient calls and is very angry that her check is late. She uses inappropriate language. How should we handle this situation?*
- *A family child care provider who was receiving a scholarship called to say that a gay family wanted to enroll their child in her program. She did not want to do it as it was against her morals. She wanted to know if she had to accept the child. How should we handle this situation?*
- *The receptionist buzzes you. She says your “favorite” recipient is on the phone. She wants help filling out her Form B. You have helped each of the last 3 semesters. You really do not have time to do this again. How should you handle the call?*

## **Product Quality**

Product quality defines how well we do what we do. It speaks to everything from our outreach efforts and presentations, to our printed materials, to our customer service, to our accuracy and speed at making needed payments. It is a measure of what kind of steward we are with the resources that have been granted to us to operate our T.E.A.C.H. and WAGE\$ programs. We need to be sure that in policy, procedure and practice we are fair, equitable, consistent, accurate, truthful, user-friendly, responsive, flexible, efficient and cost effective. It takes the thoughtfulness and commitment of all of us in every action we undertake to ensure that our product quality meets the highest of expectations. As T.E.A.C.H. or WAGE\$ agencies we will periodically undergo a Competency Assessment Process. This exercise is designed for each program to really examine how well they are doing in overall product quality. But as individuals, we have that responsibility as well, for it is our individual efforts in each of the component pieces of our work that sets the standard for overall product quality for our recipients and our community.

### *Examples of Ethical Questions of Product Quality*

- *You are in the process of sending out the revised applications for scholarships. You find a number of typos in the document. What should you do?*
- *You have been asked to do a presentation on the various T.E.A.C.H. scholarships that your agency offers. You have never done this presentation before. How can you insure product quality?*
- *As a supervisor you have begun to realize that recipients are receiving different information on scholarship components and their expectation. You are not sure who is giving out incorrect information. How should this be handled?*

## **Treatment of Children**

We will not tolerate or ignore abusive or neglectful behavior to children. Above all, we shall not participate in practices that are disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, discriminatory, intimidating, psychologically damaging, or physically harmful to children.

We have a moral and legal obligation to report suspected abuse and neglect. If we are onsite at an early learning program and witness or suspect abuse or neglect, we will notify the director or family child care provider that we are obligated to report by law. The law requires everyone to report suspected child abuse, neglect or dependency.

We have a responsibility to be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse and neglect and know and follow community procedures and state laws that protect children against abuse and neglect. We shall follow up on reports of suspected abuse and neglect to ensure that appropriate action has been taken. It is our responsibility to be proactive about the prevention of abuse and neglect and to help others to understand and comply with the law.

When we become aware of a practice or situation that endangers the health or safety of children, but this practice or situation has not hurt a child in the past, we have an ethical responsibility to inform those who can remedy the situation and who can keep children from being harmed in the future.

#### *Examples of Ethical Questions of Treatment of Children*

- *You are talking on the phone with a family child care provider. A child is crying in the background. You hear her cover the phone and yell inappropriately at the child. What should you do?*
- *One of your recipients tells you that in order to provide release time her director is violating the state's policy on staff to child ratios. How should you handle this?*
- *When you look at the pay stub of a WAGE\$ recipient, you realize that she is not being paid minimum wage. She is a single parent with two small children. She has recently entered the country and speaks limited English. How should you address this?*