Child care center directors need broad shoulders, for they carry a heavy load. If you occupy the director's office, you know first hand that you are expected to make sure the cash flows and the toilets don't overflow. You handle swings that don't swing; find substitutes at 5:00 in the morning; comfort and counsel children, their families, and teachers; and deal with way too many four year olds named Ashley.

Directors are accountable for children's well being, care, and education day in and day out when they are away from their families. Responsibilities extend beyond the specifics of children's classrooms, however, for directors also oversee the facility indoors and out: assess staff performance; keep licensing and accreditation records up to date; make personnel, policy, and financial decisions; and serve as liaisons between their programs, the field of early care and education, and the community. It is the wide range of responsibilities assumed by directors that sets them apart from the staff and faculty they oversee. Directors must be "Jacks (or Jills) of all trades" if they are going to effectively lead their program and implement quality programming.

You, like us, have probably observed that most directors were offered their current positions because they excelled in the classroom, had been at the center for a long time, or had earned a degree in early childhood education or child development. While these credentials may demonstrate a person's expertise in working with young children and their families, they do not speak to her ability to wear with aplomb the many hats that an effective director wears in the course of a day.

In many communities little appropriate training is available for directors, either in institutions of higher education or through in-service programs. This means that those who administer, or hope to administer, infant, toddler, and preschool programs are, for the most part, on their own to find professional development opportunities that meet their specific needs. Not only are directors hard pressed to find appropriate course work, there are few organizations focusing on their niche in the profession. Additionally, there is little professional literature devoted to describing the best practices of the directorship and seldom do researchers examine their work. It is difficult for directors to find the tools they need to continually enhance their knowledge and skills.

The early childhood field has, of late, begun to acknowledge and appreciate the many dimensions of directors' work in determining a center's quality, and the scant resources devoted to meeting their needs for professional development (Cost,
Quality & Outcomes Study Team, 1995). We are also beginning to recognize the strains that inevitably come with being a program's sole administrator, isolated in the workplace, with limited opportunities for creating networks of peer support. All these factors highlight the importance of providing directors with much-needed advice and professional information. We as a profession, are coming to realize that more than ever directors should not be left to their own devices to answer the question, "What should a good director do?" when confronted with difficult situations in their workplace.

The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct

One place directors can turn to when they, or their teachers, need to make difficult decisions is to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct (Feeney & Kipnis, 1998). This code, like other statements of professional ethics, explores moral and ethical behavior and is based on the field's core values. It conveys the profession's unique mission and spells out its obligations to society.

You have probably thought about morals, ethics, and values in the context of your personal life, but may not have considered how to apply them to your professional responsibilities and relationships as leader of the program of a child care center. We find it is helpful to begin conversations about professional ethics with definitions, and to make explicit the links between personal morality and values on one hand, and professional values and ethics on the other.

Morality is people's views of what is good, right, or proper, their beliefs about their obligations, and their ideas about how they should behave. It concerns our duties and obligations to one another, and is usually characterized by words such as right, ought, just, and fair.

Ethics is the study of right and wrong, duties and obligations. It involves critical reflection on morality, the ability to make choices between values, and the examination of the moral dimensions of relationships.

Ethics and morality both involve the human ability to make choices among values and to make decisions about what is right and what is wrong. It is important to distinguish between individuals' personal values, morality, and ethics, that have their roots in their homes, communities, and religious traditions, and professional ethics that are expressions of what early childhood educators as a group believe about what they ought, should or must do (Feeney & Freeman, 1999).

While it is true that personal values are the foundation upon which professional ethics is built, by themselves they do not equip practitioners with the tools they need to speak with one voice formed by their profession's traditions and teachings. Personal values, morality, and ethics need to be supplemented with knowledge and skill in professional ethics, if directors are to lead their employees and programs toward increased levels of professionalism.
Recognition of the importance of developing a code of ethics for early childhood educators grew from four unique characteristics of the field. These include: 1) the imbalance of power between early childhood educators and the children with whom they work; 2) the multiple clients they serve - children, parents, employing agencies, and the community; 3) the still-developing definition of best practice in early care and education; and 4) the inevitable tensions that exist when caregivers and teachers sustain relationships with parents, children, and colleagues in the course of their intense and intimate work (Feeney & Freeman, 1999; Katz, 1991).

The development of the NAEYC Code, first adopted in 1989, was guided by the question, "What should the 'good early childhood educator' do when faced with this situation?" (Feeney & Freeman, 1999, p. 17). The Code was shaped by insights gained through survey results, meetings with focus groups, and other input from the organization's membership.

One of the Code's most helpful aspects is its clear affirmation of what is right. It defines our professional responsibilities to children, families, colleagues, and the community, and gives clear direction regarding what we must or must not do. When you come face to face with an ethical responsibility, you may find that the right thing is not the easiest or the most popular alternative, but, that you have no choice if you are to honor the responsibilities that come with your work. You encounter an ethical responsibility when you must say "no" to teachers who propose something that you believe may harm children, or when you resist the temptation to be swayed by special interests when you go to your waiting list to fill long-awaited vacancies.

The Code can also give you guidance in dealing with the many conflicting obligations you face in daily work with children and families. An ethical dilemma is a predicament for which there is more than one morally justifiable solution. A dilemma requires a person to choose between two alternatives, each of which has some benefits but also some costs. Hence the term "horns of a dilemma," which refers to the two-pronged nature of these situations. You may face a dilemma when you weigh the merits of similarly qualified applicants as you make hiring decisions or decide how to use hard-earned resources when both your facility and teachers' salaries are in need of repair.

When we think about how the Code applies to the real-life challenges of the workplace, it is worth noting that not only did NAEYC involve its members in the Code's development, but that it continues to work to keep ethics in professional conversations. NAEYC's efforts include a regular ethics feature in its journal, Young Children, and two recently published books which help practitioners use the Code (Feeney & Freeman, 1999), and teach others its content and application (Feeney, Freeman & Moravcik, 2000). It is important to remember, however, that the Code and its supporting literature do not, and are not meant to, provide answers for all the thorny dilemmas that emerge when you work with young children and their families. There are no cookbook formulas for finding the one best solution, nor is
there an exhaustive list of the problems you are likely to encounter with their best solutions. What the Code and the supporting literature do offer, however, are tools to help you approach difficult situations methodically and systematically. They help you reach resolutions that are fair and would be defensible, even if you were to find yourself in the glare of a news reporter's spotlight or the subject of your local newspapers' headlines.

Ethical Dimensions of the Directorship

Directors should turn to the Code when they face the responsibilities and resolve the dilemmas that are unique to their position of leadership. Even though the Code focuses on classroom practice and does not directly address all dimensions of a director's work, it is a useful place to start when you encounter a situation that requires you to take an unpopular, but principled stand, or choose between competing responsibilities and loyalties.

We have conducted ethics workshops for center directors over the last several years and have asked participants in them to share difficult decisions and dilemmas that they have encountered in their work. These directors have described a number of situations that are unique to their role. Most of them fit into one of three categories: enrollment issues; personnel issues; and issues that emerge when working with families.

Enrollment issues involve decisions and policies about who gets admitted to a program and under what circumstances. Examples of situations relating to the ethical dimensions of admission policies include:

- A director who was asked by a major program benefactor to enroll a relative, even though the child was not on the center's long waiting list;

- A director who had to choose whether or not to enroll a child whose family had in the past created serious problems in the center;

- A director who had to choose between a child who desperately needed the school experience but whose family could not afford to pay tuition, and the child of a stay-at-home mom who provided rich learning experiences for her child, could easily pay the center's tuition, and whose child was first on the waiting list.

Personnel issues directors face have to do with who gets hired, promoted, and fired:

- Whether to promote a not-very-competent but well-meaning old-timer, or the highly competent and creative recent graduate to a lead teacher position;

- Who should be hired when the best qualified candidate is a person the director dislikes and with whom she would not enjoy working.
Issues that involve family members are encountered frequently by both teachers and directors. Directors can often offer guidance to teachers who are dealing with situations involving families or they may need to handle them themselves:

- A parent who brought a large chocolate cake to celebrate her child's birthday even though the center has a strict no sugar policy;

- Family members who are abusive to their own children in the center or ask you to punish children in harsh ways.

While it is true that the NAEYC Code does not specifically address the ethical dimensions that are unique to directors, its core values, ideals, and principles guide directors' work just as they help classroom teachers and caregivers. Directors benefit from being reminded, for example, of the core value that requires them to: "Appreciate and support the close ties between the child and family"; the ideal that they, "Be familiar with the knowledge base of early childhood care and education . . . " (I-1.1); and, the principle that has precedence over all others in the Code, "Above all, we shall not harm children . . . " (P-1.1). Many other sections apply just as much to the work and responsibilities shouldered by the director as they do to the staff they oversee. The Code can make an important contribution to the effectiveness and professionalism of all early childhood educators.

The Director's Role
Promoting Professional Ethics

There are two important ways that center directors can promote NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct. First, they can model the tenets of the Code in their daily interactions with children, families, staff, and other professionals. Second, they can make the Code an integral part of their program practice and a tool that is regularly used to resolve difficult situations in the workplace.

We have asked participants in the directors' workshops we conducted to share some of their efforts to raise their staff's awareness of morality, ethics, and the NAEYC Code. Here are some of the things they reported that they do:

- Become familiar with the Code;

- Post the Statement of Commitment in the center and discuss it with their staff;

- Help staff members reflect on their personal values and see if they are congruent with the Code;

- Train staff to apply the Code;

- Explicitly model adherence to the Code in their professional relationships and activities;
- Guide and support staff when they face ethical dilemmas they need to resolve;

- Educate parents, the board, and sometimes the union, about the Code. Include it in program handbooks and policy manuals;

- Revise or develop center policies and procedures so that they reflect the Code and are consistent with its guidance.

Next Steps

We believe that the NAEYC Code is an invaluable resource for those of you who accept the challenges of directing child care centers. We hope that you are familiar with it and have integrated it into your professional repertoire and that of the teachers and caregivers in your center. We hope that it has been as helpful to you as it has been to the directors with whom we have worked.

But, as we said earlier, the particular issues and concerns of directors were not the primary consideration when the Code was written. While we see the Code as part of the bedrock of our profession, we do not believe its potential will be realized until it expands its focus to identify responsibilities, obligations, and recurring dilemmas of each segment of the profession including directors.

We'd like nothing better than for this article to be the beginning of an exploration of directors' professional obligations and responsibilities, in hopes that together we might be able to craft additional guidelines so that you won't have to be alone in struggling with the question, "What should a good program director do?"

Would you like to join this conversation? Do you have dilemmas to share with us or would you like to participate in the process of developing guidelines addressing the particular dimensions of directors' work? We invite you to contact Nancy Freeman at NKFUSC@aol.com.