

Addressing Ethical Issues

Scenario 1: Parker is a 4-year-old who attends a community-based early education and care program in Los Angeles (LA). He is large for his age and tends to be aggressive. His behavior frightens and sometimes hurts the other children. His teacher, Rayna, has repeatedly discussed his behavior with the center director, who is sympathetic but has been unable to help. Parker's parents have heard Rayna's concerns but feel his behavior is typical for boys his age and therefore won't seek counseling. A preschool specialist from the LA County Department of Mental Health has observed the child and suggested some techniques to try, but none of her recommendations have helped. The other parents are starting to complain to Rayna because Parker's behavior intimidates their children. She is becoming stressed and her patience is wearing thin. Rayna and her co-teacher spend so much time trying to handle Parker's behavior that they are not able to give the other children the attention they need and deserve.

Scenario 2: Trina, a 5-year-old in Mr. Brown's class, shows classic signs of abuse: bruises, a black eye, and psychological withdrawal. Her mother, who is raising Trina without any family support, says that Trina falls often. However, Mr. Brown has not observed any clumsiness in Trina at school. Mr. Brown is well aware that, by law, teachers must report suspicions of abuse to their local child welfare agency. Yet he is reluctant to do so, knowing the ensuing investigation may end in Trina being removed from her home.

Scenario 3: Takisha and her co-teacher, Vanessa, work with a group of 20 4-year-olds, two of whom have disabilities, in an urban child development center. Their classroom is in a portable building, one of six units clustered around a small center courtyard. Several times over the past two weeks, Vanessa has stepped into the teachers' work area at the back of the room and turned away from the children for periods of up to 15 minutes to text on her cell phone.

Scenario 4: Theo teaches in a community-based child development center that is part of a national chain. Although the center has some wonderful teachers who are doing exciting things with the children, the program is out of compliance with several state licensing regulations. Playground equipment needs to be repaired, fire drills are held infrequently, some rooms are filled beyond the capacity allowed by licensing, and not all classrooms maintain required adult-to-child ratios. Theo is also aware that the director sometimes gives incomplete or misleading information to state licensing inspectors. He is struggling with what to do. Is he obligated to report the infractions to an inspector or the licensing agency, even though the center provides needed services to a struggling community?

Adapted from Stephanie Feeney and Nancy K. Freeman, "The Story of Ethics in Early Childhood." *Ethics and the Early Childhood Educator: Using the NAEYC Code 3rd Edition*. NAEYC, (2018) p.11.

