

# Workforce Retention & Belonging



## Together we Grow

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### PERSPECTIVE OF AN EDUCATOR

“I feel incredibly fortunate to have such supportive co-workers around me. Their willingness to help me put my learning into practice, and the understanding they've shown, has been invaluable. I truly appreciate the open space they all create, where I can ask questions, seek help, and feel a sense of belonging. From warm greetings to motivating words, their support has made my journey here enriching and enjoyable.”

- Early Years Educator

### Workforce retention and belonging

#### Purpose:

This model is built on the belief that in order to grow a vibrant early learning community, that skilled educators are a key component of a high-quality early learning and childcare community. With this need always forward facing, we need educators to join our workforce, and we need educators to stay in our workforce.

One of the effective ways we can achieve this is through a focused mentoring program. This initiative aims to support the growth and development of our educators, especially those who are new to the profession. By participating in this program, we can ensure that all incoming educators feel a deep sense of belonging and community from the very start of their careers.

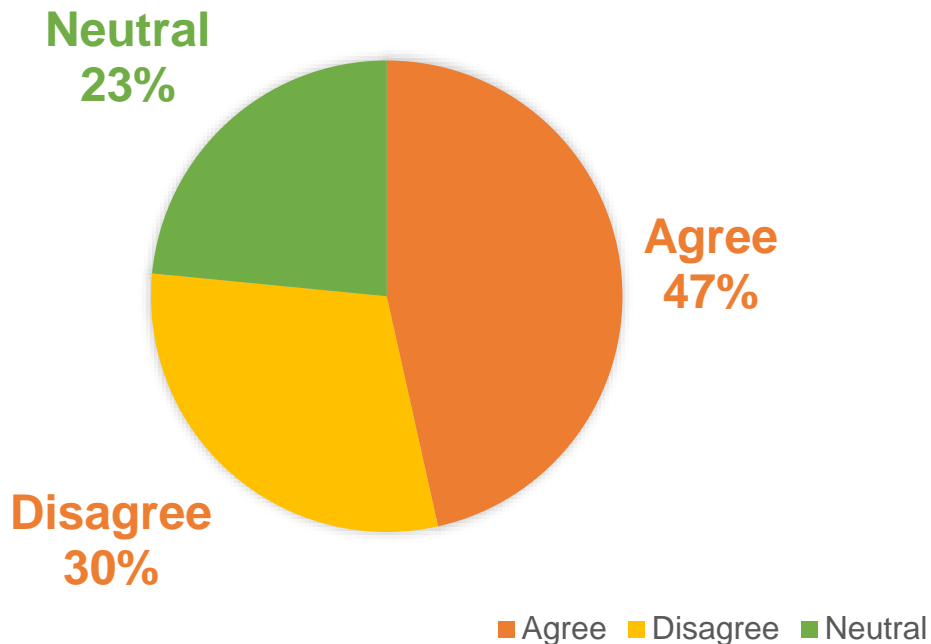
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# SYSTEM WIDE LONG-TERM PLANNING

30.1% of educators do not plan to continue working in the early years sector in 10 years.

## IN 10 YEARS, EDUCATORS PLAN TO CONTINUE WORKING IN THE EARLY YEARS SECTORS



Early Learning Professional Survey 2023



Recruitment and retention are a long-standing and well-documented challenge facing the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector.

Read

[2023 Children's Services Educator Survey](#)



Early Learning Environment is a critical stage in a child's development and retaining skilled and passionate staff is essential for providing quality care and education. While increasing capacity and space is a strategic priority of our community, work force retention is an important aspect of our early learning programs.

Our educators are our valuable resources, and they are rich in potential. As caring relationships are foundational to the experiences we provide in the early learning environment, when educators stay with us over the long term, it not only benefits the children but also enhances the overall trust and support within our educational community.

When we identify that 30% of our staff is planning to retire or stop working in the field, we are not only losing a workforce but with them a wealth of knowledge and experience would also leave the field. As a community, together we could strengthen the experience and learning opportunity to the professionals who enter our field.

The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice says that Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) “understand the value of reflective practice and leadership development and how continuous professional learning supports their professional growth and contributes to improving the quality of early childhood education for children, families and communities (Standard IV: B.3).”

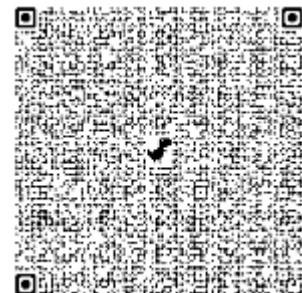
What is mentoring?

The College of Early Childhood Educators defines mentoring for educators in this way: “A reciprocal, relationship based and process-oriented professional learning experience between two individuals in the early learning and care sector.”

It is important to have an experienced professional who provides guidance, support, and knowledge-sharing to a new staff/placement student. This relationship fosters professional growth, enhances ethical practices, and ultimately improves the quality of care and education for young children.

## Watch & Reflect

[Mentors for Beginning Early Childhood Teachers](#)



How would you describe an ideal mentor?

What do you appreciate about your experiences and learning process as you entered the field of ECE?

What areas of growth you identify for your own learning when you mentor a new staff or a placement student?

### Role of a Mentor

Mentoring is typically about personal and professional development. A mentor works with a mentee, often fostering long-term relationships that support the mentee's goals, values, and self-improvement. Mentors focus on nurturing the mentee's potential rather than overseeing tasks or performance. It's more of a partnership and collaboration to co-construct the learning process.

Supervision, on the other hand, usually has a more direct focus on overseeing the mentee's work, ensuring that they meet certain standards or guidelines.

So, while mentoring involves empowering the mentee with knowledge and experience, supervision often comes with more responsibility for guiding or overseeing a particular aspect of the mentee's work or behavior. Mentors often find that, while they are providing guidance, they are also gaining valuable insights into their own practice and perspectives. Both the mentor and mentee benefit from Co-creation of Ideas, Trust & Vulnerability, & emotional Support and empathy. When mentors focus on guidance rather than evaluation, it removes a lot of the pressure from the mentorship relationship.

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## How Does Learning Happen? & Sense of Belonging:

### How Does Learning Happen?

It is the foundational pedagogy for early learning and care programs in Ontario. Based on the four foundations of Belonging, Well-Being, Engagement, and Expression and with inquiry-based play at its core, it offers a clear vision for Early Learning Environment. These foundations, or ways of being apply regardless of age, ability, culture, language, or setting. It sets out a shared understanding of children, families and educators.

According to How Does Learning Happen? Individuals feels the sense of belonging when they are connected to others and contributes to their world. A sense of belonging is supported when each person's unique spirit, contributions, and presence are valued.



What emotions, feeling and expressions are tied to belonging?

Think about your Home. What does belonging look like, and sounds like?

What does belonging look like, and sounds like for a new staff or a placement student, entering a new learning environment?

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## *Mentor's Role in setting the stage for a sense of Belonging*

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According to Code of Ethics, “RECEs build positive relationships with colleagues by demonstrating respect, trust and integrity. They support, mentor and collaborate with colleagues, including students aspiring to the profession.” Mentors play a vital role in creating a sense of belonging for their mentees. Their intentional actions and efforts can make individuals feel welcomed, valued, and supported, which significantly increases engagement and collaboration. This support ultimately allows mentees to reach their fullest potential. Here are a few steps that can contribute to building a positive and caring mentor-mentee relationship:

- Welcoming Orientation: A strong start can ease any feelings of anxiety and set the tone for a positive relationship.
- Building Trust and Open Communication: Encouraging honesty and openness fosters a safe space for dialogue.
- Encouragement and Clear Expectations: Providing guidance helps mentees understand their goals and the paths to achieve them.
- Role Modeling: Demonstrating desired behaviors inspires mentees to adopt similar attitudes and practices.
- Ongoing Feedback & Development Opportunities: Constructive feedback helps mentees grow while offering development opportunities encourages continuous learning.



### Orientation role in retention

Orientation is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that plays a significant role in retention. The concept of orientation, especially in the context of employee or student retention, should focus on continuous engagement and development rather than a mere checklist to be completed. Orientation is more effective when it evolves from a static checklist into a dynamic, reflective process that adapts over time to keep individuals engaged, supported, and growing within the community.

## PERSPECTIVE OF AN EDUCATOR

“I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for the incredible support you provided me on my first day. Your recognition of my feelings and the way you introduced me to the class made me feel welcomed and valued. During our lunch conversation, I appreciated how you took the time to ask about my likes, strengths, and overall feelings at the center. It truly opened the door for me to connect and ask questions in a safe space. I also want to thank you for introducing me to some families and allowing me the opportunity to speak with them. Your thoughtful approach really helped me feel more integrated. I am sincerely thankful for your mentorship and all the support you have provided.”

- A note from a ECE placement student to their mentor

When every individual feels welcomed and heard, it not only allows for personal comfort in engagement but also enhances our collaborative spirit. Each of us deserves to feel respected and valued for who we are. However, we must also recognize that all organizations carry unspoken rules—cultural norms that inform our behavior, performance, and communication without being explicitly stated. Acknowledging these hidden expectations is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive.

What are some of the hidden expectations of your learning environment?

What are some ways you could ensure a new member of the learning environment is aware of the hidden expectations/ rules and culture ?

Belonging is more than just being part of a group; it involves forming meaningful relationships and making contributions that enrich our collective experience. It speaks to our deep-seated need for connectedness to others and encompasses our experiences of feeling valued within a community. As we continue to navigate the challenges in the field of early learning and care, it's important to recognize that while some barriers to staff retention may be beyond our control, there are proactive steps we can take to foster a more supportive and nurturing environment for our team members.