

# Who We Are and What We Do

Implementing Professional Identity  
for Vermont Early Childhood Educators



Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

# Professional Identity Implementation Toolkit

“Until we state categorically who we are, clarifying the deep significance and importance of quality input for babies, toddlers, and young children during the early years, and start claiming our professionalism, we cannot expect those not in the profession to truly value who we are and what we do.”

– *Vermont Early Childhood Educator, 2020*

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In 2020, Vermont early childhood educators learned about the **names, roles and responsibilities, and boundaries for an Early Childhood Education (ECE) Profession** as recommended by the national project Power to the Profession and its [Unifying Framework for an Early Childhood Education Profession](#).

**Taken together, these components make up an identity for early childhood education as a profession and early childhood educators as professionals.**

Vermont early childhood educators clearly [chose to align with the recommendations](#), adding an emphasis on play-based learning. Since 2020, these results have been reaffirmed by hundreds of early childhood educators.

This toolkit offers Vermont early childhood educators resources to help implement a professional identity as an **Early Childhood Educator / Early Childhood Education Program**:

- Social posts celebrating play-based learning
  - Social posts to encourage shift away from “daycare” language
  - Real examples of letters shared with families and communities
  - Practical steps for home-based programs changing a business identity
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## Social posts and resources to share:

Posts in these folders may be downloaded and shared freely. Post concepts and language may be repurposed to create new posts promoting and celebrating professional ECE identity.

[“I am a Vermont Early Childhood Educator”](#) social campaign

Social posts with photos of Vermont ECEs at work, featuring quotes from ECEs who attended Advancing as a Profession sessions.

[“Teaching and Learning Through Play”](#) social campaign

Social posts demonstrating professional competency: how ECEs structure learning through play around Vermont Early Learning Standards ([VELS](#)).

[“Instead of daycare, we say school!”](#) social post

Alternative language to “daycare” in an upbeat tone.

[“Early childhood education is education!”](#) video for Instagram, Tiktok, or FB reel

Alternative language to “daycare” in an upbeat tone.

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## Consistency checklist:

Sometimes old materials have outdated terms. Use your find/replace function to make sure you are using the terms you prefer (like early childhood educator, teacher, and your program’s specific name) and to eliminate terms that undermine professional identity (like daycare/day care or daycare provider).

Examples of materials:

- Family handbook
- Website
- Social media descriptions
- Professional platforms, like LinkedIn
- Forms
- Newsletter templates

Tip: If all your documents are stored in the same computer or internet folder (like a google drive), you may just need to search your desktop or internet folder.

What if daycare is in your program’s name? Scroll to page 5.

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## Sample communications from Vermont programs:

Asking families to understand and be intentional about the language they use is an important step in implementing our professional identity as early childhood educators.

Here are two real and different letters Vermont center-based programs sent their families. The first was co-written by the whole Pine Forest Children's Center teaching community and sent as a stand-alone letter. The second was included with a regular director's update to families from the Greater Burlington YMCA.

You can use these letters as templates to inspire your own.

### 1. Pine Forest Children's Center letter:

["Claiming our identity with love and courage"](#) Co-written by the Pine Forest Children's Center teaching community and sent to families in March 2022. The blog link contains an introduction by Executive Director Christina Goodwin.

Dear families,

Our teaching community has agreed that in 2022 we will work to advocate for the field of early childhood education. We feel that the first step in this process is to define who we are, what we do, and why we do it. This begins with redefining how we refer to the work that happens at Pine Forest Children's Center. We'd like to pivot in the language that we use to refer to our programming, from "daycare", to the more accurate and empowering term "school".

Historically, the work we do is referred to as **daycare**, which is defined as "daytime care for the needs of people who cannot be fully independent, such as children or elderly people." The word 'daycare' can mean many things, from your 14 year-old neighbor babysitting your child, to grandma and grandpa taking the children for a weekend, or having a nanny.

**Early Childhood Education**, on the other hand, consists of activities and/or experiences that are intended to effect developmental changes in children prior to their entry into elementary school. While care is certainly involved, there are distinct roles and responsibilities that define early childhood education. The term "daycare" undervalues our hard-working, professionally skilled, and knowledgeable teachers.

While some individuals may choose to define us as daycare providers, this woefully undermines the early childhood education field in Vermont. Early childhood educators statewide have strict regulations, guidelines and educational requirements in order to ensure

that we are well prepared for the work we do every day with children. At Pine Forest Children's Center, we strive to push ourselves above and beyond those guidelines, working as a teaching community to provide children with opportunities and experiences that will scaffold their learning, growth, and development. As such, we are making the move to change the vernacular around how we are referred to.

Here's where you come in, as an integral part of our school community. Over the coming weeks you will start to notice us altering the language we use to refer to our school community. Please join us; we'll be more successful if we all work together at this!

**First**, let's refer to our teaching community as a **school**.

Why? Children are learning here every day, through diverse learning opportunities provided by well prepared early childhood educators. Our work does differ from the work happening in K-12 settings, but **it is not less important**. In fact, our work is laying the foundation for brain development and neuroplasticity. Through play children engage and interact with the world around them, which prepares them to be global citizens.

*"Daycare" demeans my career that I feel so passionately about. It makes me feel like I am regarded as a babysitter, and that I am not seen as a teacher. It takes away from the effort I put into two years of a Master's degree and the knowledge I have that it takes to be an early educator."*

**Second**, classroom teachers can be referred to as **early childhood educators**.

We have specific requirements for the roles we fill at PFCC, for the contributions we make in our classrooms, and the responsibilities we hold in ensuring children have the right opportunities for growth and development. Our field is defining who we are and therefore we are asking you all to join the movement.

*"When people use the term day care it undermines the work that early childhood educators are doing and the work that people in the field are trying to elevate. Daycare for me equates to babysitting and completely ignores all of the education, professional development, and training I have completed, so when people say it to my face it stings."*

**Third**, our field of work can be referred to as **early childhood education**.

We are working to illustrate how children's individual and shared experiences at PFCC lead to learning as we help people outside our field understand that play is learning. You will see this in our social media posts, our newsletters and more. Our hope is that this effort will show all the amazing learning and skills that happen throughout each opportunity at PFCC.

Thank you for your partnership. Please let us know if you have any questions or suggestions. Changing to a more professionalized language will help ensure that our

teaching staff feel valued and empowered, and that our center is recognized for the skills-based work we do with kids every day!

## 2. Greater Burlington YMCA letter:

*A section from a regular family update from Danielle Harris, Greater Burlington YMCA Director of Infant/Toddler/Preschool Programs, sent to families in June 2022.*

...I also wanted to share a statement about day care vs childcare. Early Childhood professionals prefer the terms School, Early Childhood Program or Child Care over "Daycare" and that we call ourselves 'teachers' or 'educators'. The first five years of a child's life are so important, and we want to highlight the fact that we are teaching and supporting our youngest learners so that they have the best possible start. We hope that with increased recognition and respect for our field will come government support for Early Childhood Programs, the families they serve and the educators that give their heart and knowledge to young children every day.

We are so lucky to have such supportive families who are always asking how they can support their teachers. I ask that you share this information and educate those in the community who refer to childcare as day care! Thank you.

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## A home-based program rebrand

20 years ago, Tammie Hazlett of Thetford launched her home-based early childhood education program under the name "Tammie's Day Care." In the years since, the "day care" part of her name posed a dilemma: "I have wanted to change the name of my business for quite some time now. The dilemma here is how much work would it be to change my business name," she said: how expensive? What are the steps? Does she need to replace her custom sign? And she's planning to retire in a few years – is it worth it?

For home-based ECEs facing a similar question – how to rebrand if "daycare" is in your program name? – here is the process Tammie used:

1. Decide whether she wants to change her program name formally (re-register) or informally (just ask families to call the program something else).
2. Choose a new name and communicate it to families.
3. Identify where her program name is registered and the steps to change it in each place.
4. Identify other places her program name is listed and request a change.

Tammie decided to formally and completely change her name. It was simpler and less expensive than she anticipated. Here's what she learned:

1. The CDD recognizes home-based programs by the educator-owner's personal name only. It does not recognize other program names. There is nothing to change with the CDD.
2. Educators who took the optional step of registering a home-based program under a separate business name with the State of Vermont can file an amendment to change their business name. You will need to have your new name ready to register, and it will need to meet name availability rules. [This simple process is done through the Secretary of State's office.](#)

Note: there are [fees](#) associated with [filing an amendment](#) and [registering under an assumed business name](#) (as well as annual fees).

3. To [submit a business name change to the IRS](#), write to the [address where your return is filed](#). If your program is a sole proprietorship, you do not need to change your EIN (Employer Identification Number).

In Tammie's case, the only formal change she needed to make was to send a note to the IRS.

Here's a short list of other places to update a business name:

- **Social media:** You should be able to make changes through your profile settings. Here are directions for [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).
- **Search results:** If you have a business profile on Google, [learn how to edit it here](#). If you would like to register a new profile, [you can do that here](#).

When it came to letting her families know about her name change, Tammie decided to let them in on the process and have a name selection contest – while offering them some education around her decision. In the meantime, she is pricing out changes to her custom sign.

Tammie's letter:

It's time for a new name! I am changing the name of my early childhood education program and am excited to invite families to be part of the process. The family that comes up with the winning name will receive a prize!

When I registered my program 20 years ago, I called it Tammie's Day Care, which was similar to what a lot of programs were called. I am now in the process of officially changing the name. For years now I have not felt as though "Day Care" accurately reflects what children experience at my home. I am a trained early childhood educator, and I am proud that children receive high-quality, play-based early childhood education here. Families expect their children to be safe and loved here, and I hope you also expect that they will

learn important skills, social development, and an appreciation for the natural world and healthy food.

So, I ask you to join me in moving away from calling my program “Day Care.” I look forward to discovering the new name! And, you can keep calling me Tammie, or your children’s teacher or their educator.

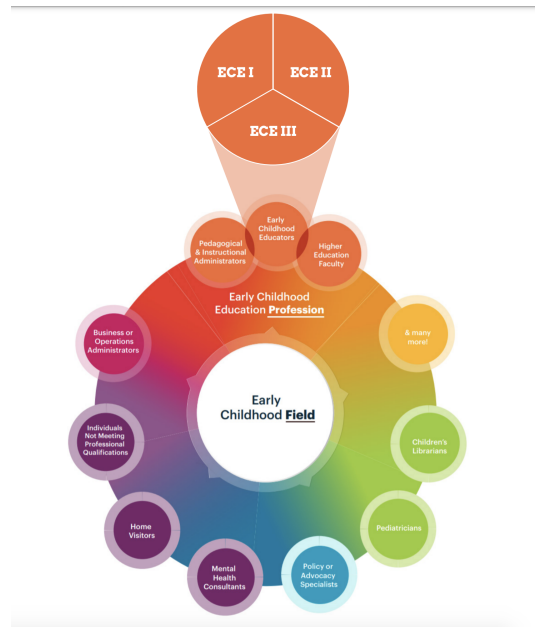
Thank you! I am grateful for your support and the gift of helping your wonderful children grow.

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## Deeper reading

For more information about Professional Identity as a component of the Early Childhood Education Profession:

- [Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession](#), pp. 10-13 (14-17 according to PDF thumbnails)
- [Power to the Profession Decision Cycles 345+6](#), especially Appendix A chart on p. 27 (30 according to PDF thumbnail)
- [NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct](#)
- Advancing as a Profession Consensus Document: Professional Identity ([full](#) / [brief](#))



# Thought Board: Who We Are and What We Do

## Accompaniment to the Implementing Professional Identity Toolkit

What I call my program:

What families call my program:

History behind my program name:

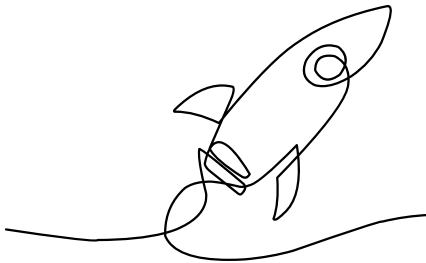
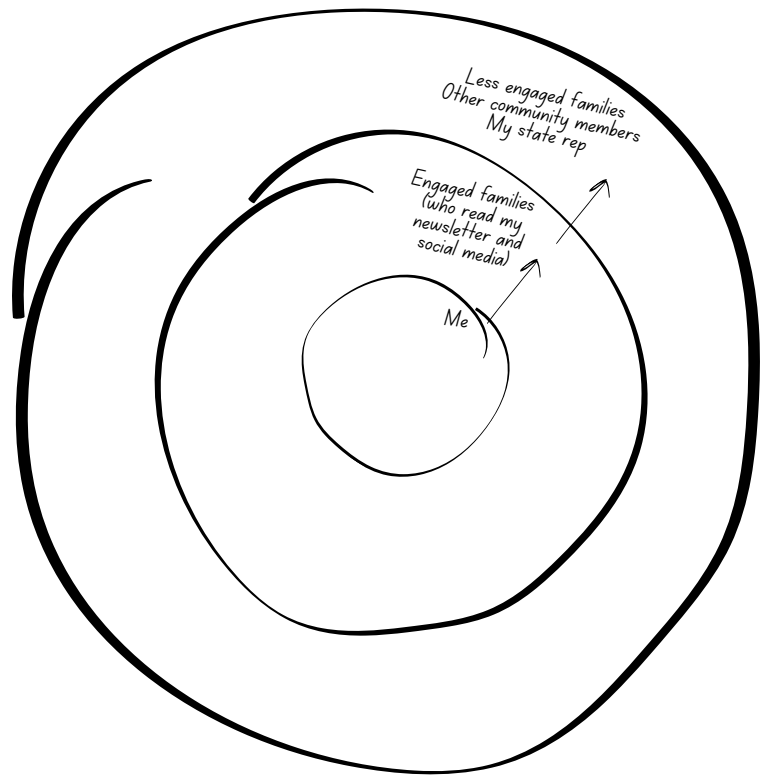
Does my program name reflect my professional identity?

At minimum, I want my families to understand this about my professional identity:

How does information flow through my program?  
Who do I talk to - and who do they talk to?  
See examples and fill in your own.

My dream is for my families to understand this about my professional identity:

How do I share who we are and what we do with my program's families?



Do my families value learning through play?

How do I tell them about it?

How can I engage families in valuing my professional identity?

*Hold a re-naming contest (Tammie)*

*Ask them to call us by our preferred terms in our newsletter (PFCC, YMCA)*

*Other ideas:*