

Reducing Exclusionary Discipline & Increasing Behavioral Supports

Early Childhood Resource Guide: Evidence-Based Practices to Eliminate the Use of Exclusionary Discipline

Overview

Early childhood is a critical time for development and learning. However, many young children experience exclusionary discipline practices that hinder their early learning opportunities. Data show that young children, age birth to five, experience exclusionary discipline at the same or higher rates than children kindergarten – 12th grade.¹ Data also show that black children, boys, and children with disabilities are more likely to experience suspensions and expulsions from early care and education programs.² The resources included in this guide can help professionals at the State and local early childhood program levels prevent exclusionary discipline in early care and education settings and consider the impact of these practices on families. These resources focus on the equitable implementation of evidence-based and inclusive practices.

In July 2022, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), published the guide [*Positive, Proactive Approaches to Supporting the Needs of Children with Disabilities: A Guide for Stakeholders*](#), which provides actions state educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, early childhood programs, and educators can take to implement positive, proactive, and preventative practices that seek to better address a child's behavioral needs while decreasing the use of exclusionary discipline. These practices reinforce core pillars of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including: (a) how addressing the behavioral needs of children with disabilities is part of IDEA's requirement to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and (b) the IEP as the vehicle for fulfilling this obligation. When implementing practices associated with these positive and proactive approaches, children with disabilities can access an educational environment that is nondiscriminatory, supportive, positive, and nurturing for both their academic and behavioral development.

OSEP Technical Assistance Center Resources

The resources listed in the following tables can support schools and early childhood programs in reducing exclusionary discipline and responding to children's behavioral needs more effectively.

¹ Zinsser, K. M., Silver, H. C., Shenberger, E. R., & Jackson, V. (2022). A Systematic Review of Early Childhood Exclusionary Discipline. *Review of Educational Research*, 92(5), 743–785. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543211070047>

² U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (2021). *Discipline Practices in Preschool: 2017-18 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)*.

ACTIVITIES AND STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Resource Type	Resource Title	Audience	Description	Link
Research Product, Technical Assistance Product, Training	Understanding and Eliminating Expulsion in Early Childhood Programs	Educators, School Administrators, Local and District Agencies, State and Regional Agencies	Research tells us that high-quality, supportive early childhood programs have a positive effect on the lives of infants, young children, and families. Recent data show a troubling number of children are expelled or kicked out of early childhood settings, impacting their ability to receive the benefits that early childhood programs provide. This fact sheet offers data on early childhood expulsion and suspension, resources, and ways early educators and systems can help.	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/understanding-eliminating-expulsion-early-childhood-programs
Webinar, Video, Training	Trauma-Attuned Practices	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies, Health-Related Services Providers	Trauma-attuned care services integrate an understanding of trauma within all aspects of a program's organizational cultures, policies, and practices. This webinar showcases practices and principles of trauma-attuned care and stories from early childhood programs about implementing and innovating these core principles within their early childhood settings.	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/trauma-attuned-practices-showcase
Technical Assistance Product, Training	Head Start Heals: Podcast Series	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies, Health-Related Services Providers	The Head Start Heals campaign aims to increase awareness of how early childhood programming, including Head Start and Early Head Start, can address trauma and promote resiliency and healing for young children and families. This podcast series elevates the voices of subject matter experts in the field on topics such as trauma and resiliency, talking to young children about race, coping with loss and grief, sensitive conversations with families, and our role in equity.	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/mental-health/article/head-start-heals-podcast-series
Technical Assistance Product, Training	Cultivating Wellness: 8 Dimensions of Staff Well-Being	Educators, Local and District Agencies, State and Regional Agencies, School Administrators, Parent and Families	Adult and organizational well-being is critical to the well-being of young children. When adults and systems implement wellness in a meaningful way, they are better equipped to build nurturing and responsive relationships with children and manage a wide array of behaviors. These eight dimensions of staff well-being were adapted from SAMHSA's step-by-step guide to wellness.	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/cultivating-wellness-8-dimensions-staff-well-being

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Resource Type	Resource Title	Audience	Description	Link
Policy or Guidance, Toolkit	Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	This practice guide is a research-based tool aimed at helping early childhood programs eliminate suspensions and expulsions by addressing the underlying root causes. The guide provides information, recommended policies and practices, resources, and tools targeted at three levels or tiers of support to help program leaders.	https://preventexpulsion.org/
Website	Teaching Practices: Social and Emotional Learning	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	Positive social and emotional development and learning in the early years provides an important foundation for lifelong learning and development, including mental health. This webpage aims to provide equal access to resources and supports that can lead to positive social and emotional outcomes for all children and families.	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/article/social-emotional-learning
Website	Mental Health: Understanding and Eliminating Preschool Suspension and Expulsion	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	Preschool expulsion denies comprehensive services that nurture social and emotional development to children in need of the services. This website provides a collection of resources (policies, program guides, webinars) that can help programs eliminate preschool suspension and expulsion.	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/mental-health/article/understanding-eliminating-preschool-suspension-expulsion
Webinar, Video	What Works in Reducing Suspensions and Disproportionality: The Pyramid Model	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	In this webinar, panelists their experiences as a Pyramid Equity Program site, discussing what worked, challenges, and overall success in implementing the Pyramid Model, with a specific focus on addressing equity. They share their experiences using equity tools, such as the Behavior Incident Reporting System and the Pyramid Model Equity Coaching Guide.	https://challengingbehavior.org/webinar/what-works-in-reducing-suspensions-and-disproportionality-the-pyramid-model/
Webinar, Video	Having Conversations About Race, Bias, and Equity	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	This webinar addresses race and implicit bias in early childhood programs. Participants will discuss the impact of racial bias on teaching, learning, perceptions of behaviors, and decision making in early childhood environments.	https://challengingbehavior.org/webinar/having-conversations-about-race-bias-and-equity/

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Resource Type	Resource Title	Audience	Description	Link
Training	Modules and Kits for Trainers: Promoting Social and Emotional Competence in the Preschool Classroom	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	These modules provide training on practices for promoting social, emotional, and behavioral skills and addressing challenging behavior in the preschool classroom. Modules include scripts, PowerPoint presentations, training activities, and handouts.	https://challengingbehavior.org/training/for-trainers/modules/#preschool
Technical Assistance Product	Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	The Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist is a tool designed to be used by practitioners to identify training and/or classroom implementation needs in four areas: responsive relationships; high-quality, supportive environments; teaching social and emotional skills; and addressing challenging behavior. The checklist encourages individual self-reflection and discussion between classroom teachers and practitioner coaches.	https://challengingbehavior.org/document/pyramid-model-practices-implementation-checklist/
Toolkit	Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	The Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion are made up of four sets of indicators: (1) State Indicators, (2) Community Indicators, (3) Local Program Indicators, and (4) Early Care and Education Environment Indicators. The indicators were designed by a group of national partners to support state leaders, local administrators, and front-line personnel in the early care and education system providing programs and services to children, birth through age 5, and their families. The indicators are aimed at supporting early care and education systems to enhance their infrastructure to support the implementation and scale-up of high-quality inclusion and to support early care and education practitioners with using practices that increase engagement and belonging for young children with disabilities.	https://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/indicators.asp
Technical Assistance Product	Practice Improvement Tools: Using the DEC Recommended Practices	Parents and Families	The Practice Improvement Tools help practitioners implement evidence-based practices. The tools are based on the DEC Recommended Practices. These tools and resources guide practitioners and families in supporting young children who have disabilities across a variety of early childhood settings.	https://ectacenter.org/decrp/

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Resource Type	Resource Title	Audience	Description	Link
Website, Webinar, Video	In Pursuit of Equity	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	In this webinar series, DEC and ECTA host various experts in the field of early childhood special education and early intervention in disrupting the pervasive inequities of our systems. Topics include troubling notions of <i>at risk</i> , challenging biases about families in home-based services, suspension and expulsion in early childhood settings, counteracting racism and ableism in early childhood systems, and engaging in systems change in pursuit of equity.	https://www.dec-spед.org/equity-series
Website	STEM Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education (STEM ² E ²)	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	The STEM ² E ² webpage provides early care and education systems and programs with resources to effectively engage young learners with disabilities in STEM exploration and learning. These resources can support early care and education programs with including each and every young child.	https://stemie.fgg.unc.edu/resources-landing-page
Technical Assistance Product	Pyramid Model Program Leadership Team Guidance for Preventing the Use of Suspension and Expulsion and Promoting Equitable, Inclusive, and Culturally Responsive Practice	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	This document provides program leadership teams with guidance to support their efforts to eliminate suspension and expulsion and promote equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive practice in all early childhood settings, including public and private schools and child care centers.	https://challengingbehavior.org/document/pyramid-model-program-leadership-team-guidance-for-preventing-the-use-of-suspension-and-expulsion-and-promoting-equitable-inclusive-and-culturally-responsive-practice/
Technical Assistance Product	Pyramid Model Equity Coaching Guide	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	This guide provides the classroom coach with a reflection tool to examine the implementation of Pyramid Model practices through the lens of culturally responsive practices and identification of implicit bias. The guide is used within the collaborative coaching partnership and ongoing coaching activities to identify when there are equity concerns related to practice implementation.	https://challengingbehavior.org/document/pyramid-model-equity-coaching-guide/

Note. DEC = Division for Early Childhood; ECTA = Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center; SAMHSA = Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; STEM²E² (STEM²E²) = STEM Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education.

ACTIVITIES AND STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STATE AGENCIES

Resource Type	Resource Title	Audience	Description	Link
Technical Assistance Product	Pyramid Model State Leadership Team Guidance for Preventing the Use of Suspension and Expulsion and Promoting Equitable, Inclusive, and Culturally Responsive Practice	State and Regional Agencies	This document provides state leadership teams with guidance on how to prevent suspension and expulsion by integrating with existing efforts, including Pyramid Model, MTSS, QRIS, inclusion, and SSIP efforts. This resource is organized around the Guiding Principles and Recommendations from the federal joint <i>Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings</i> . ^a	https://challengingbehavior.org/document/pyramid-model-state-leadership-team-guidance-for-preventing-the-use-of-suspension-and-expulsion-and-promoting-equitable-inclusive-and-culturally-responsive-practice/
Webinar, Video	Preschool Suspensions: This Is What We Know	State and Regional Agencies	This webinar provides panel discussions related to equity, inappropriate discipline practices, effective strategies, and preschool suspensions.	https://challengingbehavior.org/webinar/lets-talk-preschool-suspensions-this-is-what-we-know/

Note. MTSS = multi-tiered system of supports; QRIS = Quality Rating Improvement System; SSIP = State Systemic Improvement Plan

^a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education. (2014). *Policy statement on expulsion and suspension policies in early childhood settings*.

<https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/07/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

SUPPORTING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Resource Type	Resource Title	Audience	Description	Link
Webinar, Video	Early Childhood Suspensions: The Impact on Families	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	A child's suspension from school impacts not only the child but the entire family. Many parents worry about the impact of the suspension on the child's future, losing their job to care for the child during the suspension period, their child being targeted, and their child's ability to develop and maintain positive relationships with teachers and peers. During this webinar, parents share the impact of their child's suspension(s) on the family.	https://challengingbehavior.org/document/early-childhood-suspensions-the-impact-on-families/
Website	Early Childhood Behavioral Health	Educators, Local and District Agencies, School Administrators, State and Regional Agencies	This Office of Early Childhood Development webpage provides resources to support early childhood mental health and social and emotional development. Resources are organized for parents and caregivers, early care and education program staff and administrators, state and territory leaders, and tribal leaders and programs.	https://www.acf.hhs.gov/eecd/initiatives/behavioral-health

OSEP Technical Assistance Centers & Other Federal Resources

The following are descriptions of additional information that OSEP Technical Assistance Centers can provide to support early childhood programs in implementing practices to reduce exclusionary discipline and respond to children's behavioral needs.

- **National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI)** | The goals of the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI) are to assist states and programs in their implementation of sustainable systems for the implementation of the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Pyramid Model) within early intervention and early education programs with a focus on promoting the social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children birth to five, reducing the use of inappropriate discipline practices, promoting family engagement, using data for decision-making, integrating early childhood and infant mental health consultation and fostering inclusion.
<https://challengingbehavior.org/>
- **Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA)** | The ECTA Center supports state IDEA Part C and Part B, Section 619 programs in developing more equitable, effective, and sustainable state and local systems, that support access and full participation for each and every young child with a disability, and their family.
<https://ectacenter.org/>
- **Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems (DaSy Center)** | The DaSy Center is a national technical assistance center that works with states to support IDEA early intervention and early childhood special education state programs in building high quality data systems and using data to improve results for young children with disabilities and their families.
<https://dasycenter.org/>
- **STEM Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education (STEMI²E² Center)** | The STEM Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education (STEMI²E²) Center aims to:
 - Develop and enhance the knowledge base on engagement in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) learning opportunities for young children with disabilities (0-5);
 - Implement high-quality technical assistance and professional development to increase engagement for young children with disabilities in STEM opportunities; and
 - Engage partners and stakeholders from diverse disciplines and industry in work to increase the inclusion of young children with disabilities in early high-quality STEM.<https://stemie.fpg.unc.edu>
- **Child Care Technical Assistance Network** | The Child Care Technical Assistance Network (CCTAN) and its partners promote excellence through high-quality, practical resources and approaches. They are designed to build early childhood program capacity and promote consistent practices across communities, states, territories, and Tribes. These centers bring together the knowledge and skills from Head Start, child care, and health partners across the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).
<https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/>
- **Head Start Early Childhood Knowledge and Learning Center** | The Office of Head Start Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) System improves the knowledge, skills, and practices of grant recipient staff to implement programs which, in turn, improve the outcomes of children and families. The 2020–2025 OHS TTA System has three components that have distinct and complementary function: national centers, regional TTA network, and grant recipient funding.
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>

- **Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)** | The CPIR provides universal technical assistance to the network of Parent Centers funded by OSEP. The CPIR's priorities include (1) providing Parent Centers with products and materials to support their work with families; (2) increasing Parent Centers' knowledge and capacity in specific domains; and (3) increasing the coordination of parent training efforts throughout the network. Among the products and services the CPIR provides to the Parent Center network are its information-rich website in English and Spanish (called the Parent Center Hub); a twice-monthly e-newsletter called the Buzz from the Hub; the eLearning Hub, which features online, self-paced learning modules for all Parent Center staff as part of capacity building; frequent webinars about high-priority topics; national Parent Center capacity-building conferences; private communication spaces where Parent Centers can share resources and collaborate with their colleagues (CentersConnect); and coordination of annual data collection and reporting of Parent Center activities, training contacts, and services provided to families, professionals, and youth with disabilities.
<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/>

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