

# Statement on Exclusionary Discipline

Early care and education (ECE) programs play an important role in the lives of young children and their families. ECE programs support learning and promote social-emotional development by providing enriching environments where children can build strong, supportive relationships with caregivers and other children. ECE programs also provide a safe place for children when family members work or attend school

Practices that remove a child from a classroom or group, send them home from their ECE program, or dis-enroll them, cause significant disruptions for everyone involved. These practices are often referred to as *exclusionary discipline* and include suspension, expulsion, and informal removals. These disruptions to care and routines can have a significant impact on a child's learning and development and on overall family well-being. Providers experience stress and frustration as they work to support young children who present with behavioral challenges, often without a system of support readily available to prevent and address challenging behaviors.

The 2016 [Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings](#) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education) highlights the prevalence of these practices, the disparities across race and gender, and the negative outcomes associated with the suspension and expulsion of young children. Removing children from an early care and education program disrupts relationships, deprives children of enriching experiences, and disrupts the care that families rely on for stability. Young children who experience suspension or expulsion are much more likely than other children to repeat a grade, drop out of high school, and face incarceration. Data has also shown a consistent trend of disproportionate numbers of African-American and Hispanic boys being suspended or expelled when compared to other children. This is a critical issue of equity, as children are excluded from the very services intended to support and meet their needs.

The OEC Statement on Exclusionary Discipline outlines existing policies and program standards that are related to the issue of exclusionary discipline. It also highlights the resources in place to support early care and education programs to prevent challenging behaviors and positively address the behaviors that do arise. The primary focus of this statement is to foster a collaborative approach to preventing the use of exclusionary guidance.

Exclusionary discipline is a multidimensional problem. It is associated with an array of negative outcomes for children. It places families, especially working families, in difficult situations and causes stress. And it causes stress to teachers, who did not enter the field with desires to exclude children.

From: The Children's Equity Project (2022). [A Holistic Approach to Ending Exclusionary Discipline for Young Learners](#)

## Definitions

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (USDOE, 2022) and the Office of Civil Rights (OCE, 2022) define exclusionary discipline as “the removal, whether on a short-term or long-term basis, of a student from a class, school, or other educational program or activity for violating a school rule or code of conduct.” This may include suspension, expulsion, or informal exclusion.

- *Suspension* refers to a child being excluded from the regular group setting in their early care and education program for a particular period of time. Suspensions may take place within the school setting (e.g., the child is removed from the group, but remains at the program), may involve the child going home for a period of time, and/or could be in the form of a reduced schedule. It is important to note that whether or not the term “suspension” is used, asking a child to be picked up due to behavior is still a suspension. Note that C.G.S. 10-233 which addresses suspension in public schools specifically defines this as being for no more than 10 consecutive school days.
- *Expulsion* refers to a child being excluded from attending a program or school on a more permanent basis. Note that C.G.S. 10-233 which addresses expulsion in public schools specifies that an any exclusion that lasts for more than 10 consecutive days is considered an expulsion.
- *Informal removals* may be temporary or permanent and are generally the same as suspension and expulsion, but may not be documented or referred to as a suspension or expulsion.

## Strategies to Reduce Exclusionary Discipline

State and local efforts can help to reduce or eliminate the use of exclusionary discipline. Because this is a multi-faceted issue, multiple strategies are needed to effectively address this issue. Below is a brief overview of some important strategies that communities and/or providers should consider.

- **Create proactive and supportive program policies:** Strong program policies focus on the prevention of challenging behaviors, lay out clear steps for addressing concerns about behavior, and include possible resources/services to access for support. A strong behavior policy outlines a positive and consistent approach to supporting teachers, children, and families.
- **Provide staff training:** When staff receive ongoing training and support to building positive relationships with children and families, structure the environment for success, and respond when challenging behaviors occur, you can reduce or eliminate the use of exclusionary discipline.
- **Strong community network:** Engaging with state and community resources and services can help your program, and the families and children you serve, connect to appropriate services and resources.

- **Build strong partnerships with families:** Building strong partnerships with families allows you to work together to address concerns and challenges as soon as they arise, and to come up with positive solutions.
- **Provide culturally competent care:** Being competent in working with families and children from a variety of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds helps providers understand behaviors, implement strengths-based strategies, and partner effectively with families.
- **Collect and review data related to behavior:** Data can help identify trends, target improvement efforts, and highlight any disparities.

### **A Special Note Regarding Support for Staff Well-being**

Early care and education is a field that is very rewarding, but is also challenging. Early care and education providers have their own personal challenges and are often working to support children and families who are also under stress. These factors can make it more difficult to find positive and proactive strategies to reduce exclusionary practices. In a [2019 Research-to-Policy Brief](#), Sheila Smith and Sharmila Lawrence outline the prevalence of stress and depression among early care and education providers and discuss conditions associated with lower levels of teacher stress. This brief also discusses promising practices for decreasing teaching stress including early childhood mental health consultation, opportunities for professional development related to positive interactions, and teamwork.

It is important that early care and education staff have access to a variety of supports so that they can in turn support the well-being of the children and families they work with. The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center of the Administration for Children and Families have a webpage focused on [Promoting Staff Well-being](#) with many helpful resources.

## **Prevention and Response Initiatives, Policies, and Program Quality Standards**

The charts on the following pages outline prevention and response supports available to early care and education providers in Connecticut, as well as policies and program quality standards that directly or indirectly address exclusionary discipline. These charts provide a brief overview of each service, policy, or quality standard and include the relevant audience or sector. For more details, please refer to the specific resources, policies, or standards document.

## Prevention and Response Initiatives

Resource	Who Can Access this Support/Service	Description
211 Child Development/Help Me Grow	All early care and education programs and families in CT	<p>211 Child Development supports children’s healthy growth and development, starting from pregnancy. Parents and providers can ask questions about child development or behavior by calling <b>1-800-505-7000</b> or <a href="#">sending a message</a>. Care coordinators support families or providers with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developmental monitoring by accessing the ASQ: 3 and ASQ: SE questionnaires via Sparkler mobile app, online, or paper format</li> <li>2. Information about children’s typical development and behavior</li> <li>3. Connections to local community-based programs and services</li> <li>4. Networking and training opportunities for providers</li> </ol>
Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP)	Early childhood programs working with children birth through preschool	<p>ECCP provides free early childhood mental health consultation throughout Connecticut. This service is funded by the CT Department of Children and Families, the OEC, and the CT State Department of Education. ECCP supports early childhood programs working with children birth through preschool through strengths-based education and consultation. Services can be requested by families or early care and education providers and can support individual children, classrooms, or programs. For more information about ECCP, visit their <a href="#">website</a>.</p>
Elevate Service Navigation	All early care and education programs in CT	<p>Elevate’s Service Navigators are guides who can talk to you about your program’s needs and connect you to resources. You can find the Service Navigator for your region using this <a href="#">interactive map</a>.</p>
Mobile Crisis Intervention/211	All early care and education programs and families in CT	<p>Mobile Crisis Intervention is a service for children and adolescents experiencing a behavioral or mental health crisis that you can access by calling 2-1-1. The program includes a team of nearly 150 trained mental health professionals who can respond within 45 minutes by phone or face to face when a child is experiencing an emotional or behavioral crisis. The purpose of the program is to serve children in their homes, schools, and communities. In addition, mental health professionals provide support, education, and consultation services to the early childhood program or school to assist with a student in crisis. For more information, visit the <a href="#">Mobile Crisis Intervention Services</a> webpage.</p>

## Prevention and Response Initiatives (continued)

Resource	Who Can Access this Support/Service	Description
Pyramid Model Practices and Program-Wide Implementation	General resources related to Pyramid Model Practices are available for all early care and education programs and providers. Program-wide implementation is supported in programs based on a periodic application process.	The Pyramid Model is a positive behavioral intervention and support framework. Early childhood providers, caregivers, and families can use Pyramid practices to promote young children's social and emotional development and prevent and address challenging behavior. There are also supports to implement the Pyramid Model across a program and make lasting changes that can prevent suspension and expulsion. For more information about Pyramid Model supports in CT, visit the <a href="#">Pyramid Model website</a> .
Sparkler mobile app	All early care and education programs and families in CT	<p><a href="#">Sparkler mobile app</a> provides access to free developmental screening using the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) and the Ages and Stages Questionnaires-Social Emotional (ASQ-SE). In addition, the Sparkler app provides off-screen play activities to spark early learning, parenting tips, action steps and summaries of the Learn the Signs milestones, and access to a 2-1-1 Child Development care coordinator to answer questions on children's learning, development, and behavior.</p> <p>Providers can sign into the dashboard to monitor and engage with families and download data &amp; reports. The data include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Child and parent registration</li> <li>(b) Screening results and family-facing reports</li> <li>(c) engagement with play/parent tips</li> <li>(d) Photos of play/learning</li> </ul>

## Policies

Policy	Who This Applies To	What the Policy(ies) State
Child Care Licensing Regulations	<a href="#">Child Care Centers and Group Child Care Homes</a>	<p>Providers are required to have a behavior policy and a written general operating policy, including, but not necessarily limited to the withdrawal and expulsion of children.</p>
		<p>The provider shall use only developmentally appropriate behavior management methods such as positive guidance, redirection, and setting clear limits that encourage children to develop self-control, self-discipline, and positive self esteem, while also protecting them from harm to themselves or others.</p>
		<p>The provider shall discuss behavior management methods used in the facility with the child's parents prior to enrollment and regularly during the period a child remains enrolled.</p>
		<p>While children are in attendance at the program the operator and staff shall not, engage in, nor allow, abusive, neglectful, physical, corporal, humiliating or frightening treatment or punishment, and shall not tie nor bind children and shall not physically restrain children except for the protection and safety of the child or others, using least restrictive methods, as appropriate.</p>
	<a href="#">Family Child Care Homes</a>	<p>Providers are required to use appropriate discipline practices. Licensing regulations state that, "The provider is responsible for the behavior management methods used in the family child care home and shall communicate them to staff. (1) The provider shall use only developmentally appropriate behavior management methods such as positive guidance, redirection, and setting clear limits that encourage children to develop self-control, self-discipline, and positive self-esteem, while also protecting them from harm to themselves or others. (2) The provider shall discuss behavior management methods used in the family child care home with the child's parent(s) prior to enrollment and regularly during the period a child remains enrolled".</p>

## Policies (continued)

Policy	Who This Applies To	What the Policy(ies) State
<p><b>Connecticut General Statutes, Section 10-233</b></p>	<p>Any local or regional board of education, state or local charter school or interdistrict magnet school that offers a preschool program</p>	<p>No local or regional board of education, state or local charter school or interdistrict magnet school that offers a preschool program may authorize a suspension of a child enrolled in such provider's preschool program, unless the suspension is an in-school suspension.</p> <p>Local or regional board of education, state or local charter schools or interdistrict magnet schools cannot expel any child enrolled their preschool program, except following an expulsion hearing held when there is reason to believe that a child was in possession of a firearm. The default period for an expulsion under these circumstances is one calendar year.</p>
<p><b>Federal civil rights laws</b></p>	<p>Public and private early care and education programs. The nature of the program and the funding they receive will directly impact which laws and provision apply</p>	<p>Several federal civil rights laws may also be relevant to the use of suspension and expulsion with young children, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is important to ensure that suspensions and expulsions are not implemented in a discriminatory manner and to address the provisions of the ADA as it relates to children with disabilities in child care programs.</p>

## Program Quality Standards

The OEC supports early care and education to meet certain program quality standards. The standards included below are examples from each of the accrediting/approval systems that OEC currently targets through its quality improvement supports. The examples below are not inclusive of all quality standards that are related to suspension and expulsion. Suspension, expulsion, behavior policies, positive guidance, social-emotional learning, and efforts to prevent challenging behaviors are often addressed across multiple standards and criteria. The standards/criteria most closely address suspension and expulsion are included.

Organization	Audience	Relevant Standards
<p>Head Start Performance Standards: 1302.17 Suspension and Expulsion</p>	<p>Head Start Programs</p>	<p>(a) limitations on suspension (1) A program must prohibit or severely limit the use of suspension due to a child's behavior. Such suspensions may only be temporary in nature.            (2) A temporary suspension must be used only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety threat that cannot be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications.            (3) Before a program determines whether a temporary suspension is necessary, a program must engage with a mental health consultant, collaborate with the parents, and utilize appropriate community resources—such as behavior coaches, psychologists, other appropriate specialists, or other resources—as needed, to determine no other reasonable option is appropriate.            4) If a temporary suspension is deemed necessary, a program must help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety</p> <p>(b) Prohibition on expulsion. (1) A program cannot expel or unenroll a child from Head Start because of a child's behavior.</p> <p>(2) When a child exhibits persistent and serious challenging behaviors, a program must explore all possible steps and document all steps taken to address such problems, and facilitate the child's safe participation in the program. Such steps must include, at a minimum, engaging a mental health consultant, considering the appropriateness of providing appropriate services and supports under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to ensure that the child who satisfies the definition of disability in 29 U.S.C. §705(9)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act is not excluded from the program on the basis of disability, and consulting with the parents and the child's teacher, and:</p> <p>(i) If the child has an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP), the program must consult with the agency responsible for the IFSP or IEP to ensure the child receives the needed support services; or,</p> <p>(ii) If the child does not have an IFSP or IEP, the program must collaborate, with parental consent, with the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA to determine the child's eligibility for services.</p>



## Program Quality Standards (continued)

Organization	Audience	Relevant Standards
Head Start Performance Standards: 1302.17 Suspension and Expulsion (continued)		<p>(ii) If the child does not have an IFSP or IEP, the program must collaborate, with parental consent, with the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA to determine the child's eligibility for services.</p> <p>(3) If, after a program has explored all possible steps and documented all steps taken as described in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, a program, in consultation with the parents, the child's teacher, the agency responsible for implementing IDEA (if applicable), and the mental health consultant, determines that the child's continued enrollment presents a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children and determines the program is not the most appropriate placement for the child, the program must work with such entities to directly facilitate the transition of the child to a more appropriate placement.</p>
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)	Center and school-based early learning programs	<p>Standard 1: Relationships Item 1.E.1</p> <p>"Show that your program's written guidance and discipline policy addresses the use of suspension, expulsion and other exclusionary measures, and includes ALL of the features listed below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy is communicated to families and staff.</li> <li>• Stated goal of policy is to limit or eliminate the use of suspension, expulsion and other exclusionary measures.</li> <li>• Policy states the circumstances under which types of exclusion may occur.</li> <li>• Policy states what steps are taken before a decision to exclude is considered.</li> <li>• Exclusionary measures are not considered until all other possible interventions have been exhausted, and there is agreement that exclusion is in the best interest of the child.</li> <li>• If exclusionary measures must be taken, the program offers assistance to the family in accessing services and an alternative placement.</li> </ul> <p>Policy acknowledges that it complies with federal and state civil rights laws."</p>

## Program Quality Standards (continued)

Organization	Audience	Relevant Standards
National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)	Family home child care	<p>NAFCC accreditation criteria address working with families, positive discipline, enrollment process, and program policies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific standards that address partnerships with families and using positive, proactive approaches with children include 1.13, 1.18, 2.2, and 3.29-3.35.</li> <li>• The category of Developmental Learning Activities includes sections related to Empathy, Belonging to a Group, Respecting Differences, and Self-Esteem and Self-Awareness.</li> <li>• The section on Professional and Business practices does not include any standards that specifically address behavior or discipline policies; however, relevant guidance is included:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Guidance related to standard 5.14 encourages providers to “discuss your views on child care including discipline, toilet training, feeding, sleeping, etc.”</li> <li>○ Standard 5.19 covers written policies provided to families and mentions that areas covered may include guidance and discipline. The accompanying guidance includes the following statement, “they should include at a minimum the following information unless this information is included in your family child care contract: Your right to terminate care of a child who is not a good match for your program and reasons for terminating.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Resources

The following list is not a comprehensive list of resources related to suspension and expulsion in early childhood but includes many important and helpful resources. The resources are broken down into two categories: background/issue briefs and prevention and response resources.

### Background/Issue Briefs

[Addressing Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood Education Settings: An Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health-Informed Approach.](#) Background and policy and practice recommendations focused on how infant and early childhood mental health training and support can build strong practices and reduce suspension and expulsion. From Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health (n.d.).

[A Holistic Approach to Ending Exclusionary Discipline for Young Learners: A Review of the Data, Research, and Multidimensional Solutions.](#) A detailed overview of the issues related to exclusionary discipline. This document includes compelling data and research, as well as strategies appropriate for state agencies, higher education, communities, and providers. From: Children's Equity Project (2022).

[Early care and education teacher well-being.](#) Background on teacher stress and the impact on teaching practices and children's behavior, factors related to stress, and promising practices for reducing stress and promoting well-being. From: Smith, S. & Lawrence, S. (2019). Child care and Early Education Research Connections.

[National Center on Pyramid Model Innovations Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood webpage.](#) This website includes definitions, strategies for reducing suspensions and implicit bias, videos, and helpful resources related to establishing policies and procedures. For programs implementing the Pyramid Model, there is guidance for Program Leadership Teams.

[Suspension and Expulsion webpage](#) from the Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC): A wide range of resources including frequently asked questions, prevention strategies, information about implicit bias. This webpage includes a video specifically address the prevention of suspension and expulsion of children with disabilities or suspected delays. Note that some resources may reference Head Start requirements or regulations, but also include helpful strategies that are appropriate for all types of early care and education programs. If you are not a Head Start program, you can refer to the Policy chart above for information regarding what policies apply to your program.

[Understanding and Eliminating Expulsion in Early Childhood Programs](#). A guide for programs, outlining the issues and highlighting the role that teachers and caregivers can take in addressing this issue. From the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness (n.d.)

## Prevention and Response Resources

Pyramid Model: You can access free online training videos, newsletters, resources, and find opportunities for additional training by visiting the [OEC Pyramid Model webpage](#). In addition, you can access webinars and articles related to early childhood suspensions, disproportionality, and how Pyramid Model can help address these issues from the [National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations \(NCPMI\)'s Equity webpage](#).

[A Focus on Challenging Behaviors](#): This OEC webpage offers overviews of many of the supports and services mentioned in this document, as well as Tips Sheets on De-escalation and Understanding a Child's Behavior.

[Early Childhood Consultation Partnership \(ECCP\)](#): ECCP's early childhood mental health consultation are available for individual children, classrooms, and programs.

[2-1-1 Child Development](#): This free and confidential service is available to families and programs to support young children's healthy growth and development, starting from pregnancy. This is specialized unit of the United Way of Connecticut and support from a care coordinator can be accessed via the website by calling 1-800-505-7000. The [For Providers page for the Child Development Infoline](#) has information specifically geared toward early care and education providers.

The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center of the Administration for Children and families have a webpage focused on [Promoting Staff Well-being](#) with many helpful resources.

Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings: [An Administrator's Guide to Supporting All Children's Success](#): A web-based guide, with videos, a self-assessment, and recommended policies and practices for administrators. From: Schachner, A., Belodoff, K., Chen, W-B., Kutaka, T., Fikes, A., Ensign, K., Chow, K., Nguyen, J., & Hardy, J. (2016). SRI International: Menlo Park, CA.