Preventing Suspension and Expulsion in Pennsylvania Early Childhood Programs

AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM LEADERS GUIDE

PENNSYLVANIA OFFICE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY LEARNING

PA pennsylvania
OFFICE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT
AND EARLY LEARNING

Contents

This guide is intended to support the efforts of Pennsylvania Early Childhood Program Leaders to eliminate suspension and expulsion for young children. Within this guide, find resources addressing program policies, procedures, and practices that promote the positive social emotional development of young children, and create a climate of support for early childhood personnel and stronger partnerships with families.

The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) is committed to supporting the implementation of appropriate and positive behavior support practices to reduce and eventually eliminate the occurrence of suspension and expulsion. For additional information, reference *OCDEL Announcement: Reduction of Expulsion and Suspension in ECE programs in Pennsylvania*.

The Pennsylvania Association for Infant Mental Health has also released a call to action for policymakers on the importance of systems and policies support for the early childhood field. *Addressing Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood Education Settings: An Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Informed Approach*

Foundation Setting

Establishing a culture of well-being within the work environment is imperative to fully engage early childhood professionals in the successful implementation of the guidance outlined in this document. Nurturing teacher-child relationships and intentional teaching strategies can promote young children's social-emotional competence (Whittaker & Harden, 2010). Teachers can help young children develop their understanding of emotions, social skills, and capacity for self-regulation. The strategies teachers use to help children acquire social-emotional competence include modeling how to cope with frustration and other negative feelings, responding with sensitivity to children's emotions, and teaching about emotions (Morris, Denham, Basset, & Curby, 2013). Teacher stress can interfere with positive teacher-child relationships and effective social-emotional teaching (Smith & Lawrence, 2019). Therefore, it is critical that both the leadership and the staff in childcare settings practice and model strategies shown to enhance well-being and strengthen resilience. This can establish a foundation where the workforce can feel healthy and prepared to provide the supports outlined in this guidance.

Several factors may contribute to a culture of well-being:

- Supportive and professional relationships with other teachers and leadership
- Teacher's autonomy and opportunities to contribute to decision making in the workplace
- Availability of classroom curriculum that promotes social-emotional learning (SEL)
- Access to Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMH)
- Access to and regular practice of mindfulness exercises
- Organizational leaders who understand the importance of mental health and can identify resources for staff
- Access to professional development for teachers and directors in areas relevant to staff well-being

Directions

Complete the self-assessment questionnaire to help prioritize recommended policies, procedures, and practices to implement in your program. The assessment takes approximately 5-7 minutes to complete.

[*NOTE: A Pennsylvania version of this self-assessment is under development.*]

After completing the assessment, return to this guide to discover Pennsylvania resources that can support your implementation of recommended policies and practices. Use coaching resources as appropriate or needed.

Pennsylvania supports a mixed delivery system of services for children birth through age five through the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS), and federal programs. Providers may hold multiple licenses and across multiple state Departments, and, in some cases, federal Head Start as well. Information and resources provided in this guide are to support these diverse programs. Each program should follow their licensure requirements as a baseline requirement.

Coaching Resources

Contact your local Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) or Quality Coach. Your Quality Coach can help you identify the challenge(s), review assessments, locate resources, work through next steps, and develop action plans. They can also connect you with other available support systems or technical assistance supports.

Find your **ELRC Quality Coach** at www.raiseyourstart.org

If you receive Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts (PKC) or Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) funding, you can reach out to your preschool program specialists. The preschool program specialist can provide similar supports as the Quality Coach.

Find your **preschool program specialist** at the Pennsylvania Key website.

What to do when you have a child with unique needs/challenging behavior?

Request assistance from OCDEL, complete the online form at www.surveymonkey.com/r/PAExpulsionHelp

If you have a pre-existing or established relationship with your local Early Learning Resource Center, please reach out to them directly to receive program support.

If the child is already receiving EI Services: With parent permission, reach out to the child's local EI program to request assistance. An IFSP/IEP meeting will be held within 10 Early Intervention Program calendar days of request. If behavior has not previously been identified as special consideration, it must be added to the IFSP/IEP. The IFSP/IEP team will work with the family and early learning program to review and potentially revise the child's plan.

If the child has not previously been evaluated and the family and/or Early Learning program believes (s)he might be eligible for EI: Work with the child's family to schedule an EI evaluation. To identify to whom the child should be referred, call the CONNECT line at 1-800-692-7288. If the child is eligible, the family is then encouraged to involve the early care provider in planning meetings. If the child is not eligible for services, the EI evaluator and the EC program should assist the family in accessing other services and/or provide some strategy suggestions.

If the child has previously been evaluated and does not qualify for EI: Request assistance from the Early Learning Resource Center to receive appropriate supports.

Developing Suspension and Expulsion Policies

It is *essential* all young children can both access and remain in a quality early learning program. In July 2017, Pennsylvania early learning programs were informed of the requirement to develop program specific policies to prevent, reduce and ultimately eliminate suspension and expulsion of young children from their programs.

Suspension and expulsion are actions adults take that greatly impact children. We can work together to make sure both children and teachers have the support they need to build great relationships and remain a part of their early learning community.

Suspension: An action that is administered in response to challenging behavior and requires that a child not be present in the classroom or the program for a specified period.

Expulsion: The complete and permanent removal of a child from an early learning program in response to challenging behavior or non-infectious health condition.

Developing Quality Suspension and Expulsion Policies

Fair and Appropriate Policies. It is essential all program's policies follow the law

Highly Skilled Work Force. Teachers need support through education and technical assistance

Strong Family Partnerships. Families and early learning programs are partners in supporting children

Setting Goals and Tracking Data. Understand the full picture in your program

Universal Screening. Ensure all children have the supports they need and deserve

Access to Consultation. Additional support for early learning programs is available

For help developing a policy:

- PreventExpulsion.org
- National Center for Pyramid Model Innovation
- Paths Training
- Second Step
- The Incredible Years

Tier 1: Support for Developing Program-wide Practices and Policies

1.1 Collect and examine data on challenging behavior incidents to ensure equitable practices for all children.

PA [Behavior Incident Report System](#) The Behavior Incident Report System (BIRS) provides early care and education programs and classrooms with a system to collect and analyze behavior incidents in their program. The system provides an efficient mechanism for gathering information on elements related to behavior incidents that can be used analytically to make decisions about providing supports to teachers and children within the program.

- [Barriers and Solutions](#) to collecting and examining data on behavior incidents.

1.2 Implement processes for developing family-program/school partnerships

PA [Pennsylvania Family Engagement Framework](#) A tool to guide the implementation of effective practices, use of shared language, and a family engagement continuum for families across their child's educational lifespan.
  - o [Introductory course](#) to the PA Family Engagement Framework:

PA [Early Intervention Technical Assistance Professional Development Courses](#) Search for the following courses:
  - o *Foundations: Family Centered Services*
  - o *Foundations: Partnering to Build Family Capacity*
- [Barriers and Solutions](#) to developing family-program/school partnerships.

PA Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning resources are denoted by this symbol.

1.3 Integrate developmental screening and assessment into the program/school

Utilize screening results to inform need for referral to additional services such as Early Intervention.

- **PA** Early Learning Outcomes Reporting Assessment is a critical piece in high-quality standards-aligned programs. Parents, teachers and caregivers are the most qualified to assess young children because they observe children in authentic environments and are most familiar with each child's development and learning expectations.

- **PA** Developmental Milestones This interactive tool is designed to help Early Intervention professionals, families, and other early childhood professionals to explore developmental milestones for children ages birth to five by domain or by age.

- **PA** Ages & Stages Questionnaire This tool is a quick and easy to administer and score. The ASQ was designed to be completed by parents.

- Birth to 5: Watch me Thrive! Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! is a coordinated federal effort to encourage healthy child development, universal developmental and behavioral screening for children, and support for the families and providers who care for them.

- CDC Developmental Milestones As an early childhood educator, you are a valuable resource to parents! They look to you for information about their child, and they trust you. CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early." (LTSAE) has FREE research-based, parent-friendly resources on child development to help you boost family engagement and your own professional development.

- Barriers and Solutions to integrating developmental screening and assessments.

1.5 Provide reasonable provider/teacher work hours with breaks

- In the Joint Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policy in Early Childhood Settings, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services recommend that childhood programs "promote teacher health and wellness and ensure that teachers work reasonable hours with breaks." By allowing providers/teachers to have breaks and time away from the children, teachers may be able to better manage their stress and strengthen the quality of their relationships with their children.

- Barriers and Solutions for providing reasonable work hours with breaks.

1.6 Create a culture of support and collaboration among staff

Coaching supports can be requested to support the leadership in identifying and developing their desired culture.

- Barriers and Solutions for creating a culture of support and collaboration among staff.

PA Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning resources are denoted by this symbol.

1.7 Train staff on Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EIB), focusing specifically on bias based on race, gender, and mental and physical ability

- **PA** [Professional Development Registry](#) Ensure all program staff have accounts in the PD Registry and a professional development plan. Search the PD Registry to identify and register for PD events that align with your needs/focus.

- **PA** [PQAS Professional Development – Supporting Culturally Competent Communities of Practice Webinar Series](#)
  This series is designed to help you develop strategies to demonstrate cultural competence when providing professional development and build an environment that supports and encourages discussion about cultural and linguistic similarities and differences
  - *[Webinar 1: The Beginning: Supporting Cultural Competence Community of Practice](#)*
  - *[Webinar 2: Supporting Cultural Competence Community of Practice](#)*
  - *[Webinar 3: Cultural Competence- The Team: Building a Community of Learners at the Programmatic Level](#)*
  - *[Webinar 4: Cultural Competence – Tackling the Hard Part, Getting Started](#)*

- **PA** [Early Intervention Technical Assistance Professional Development Courses](#) Search for the following courses:
  - *Cultural Humility*
  - *Toward Cultural Competence*
  - *Young Children and their Families Experiencing Homelessness Webinar*
  - *Cultural Diversity Podcast Series*
- [Barriers and Solutions](#) to staff training on cultural awareness and implicit biases.

1.8 Consider implementing a program- or school-wide multi-tiered system of support to promote positive behavior interventions and support

- **PA** [Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support (PAPBS)](#) Program-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PW-PBIS) is a conceptual framework for addressing challenging behaviors in early childhood.
- [Barriers and Solutions](#) to implementing a program- of school-wide multireed system of support.

PA Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning resources are denoted by this symbol.

Tier 2: Support for Classroom Practices and Policies

2.1 Integrate infant/early childhood mental health consultation into program/school.

PA [Infant Early Childhood Mental Health](#) The Infant Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultation Program is a free resource that supports children's social- emotional development from birth through age 5 within early learning programs participating in Keystone STARS.

PA [IECMH Virtual Office Hours](#) IECMHC Virtual Office Hours is a short-term, collaborative, problem-solving conversation to help you find next steps for: Child Social-Emotional Concerns; Child Behavioral or Developmental Concerns; Emotional Well-being of Teachers and Caregivers; and Partnering with Families

PA [Child-Specific Consultation](#) Mental health consultation is not about fixing kids. Nor is it therapy. Mental health consultants partner with adults to facilitate healthy growth and development for infants and young children. Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health consultation provides support for parents and child care professionals who work with children experiencing persistent or puzzling challenges.

- *Head Start/Early Head Start/Migrant Head Start programs can reach out to your program's Mental Health Consultant.*
- [Barriers and Solutions](#) to integrating IECMHC into your program/school.

2.2 Support teachers/providers to modify the classroom environment to prevent challenging behaviors

- [Pyramid Model](#) provides resources with a focus on promoting the social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children birth to five and reducing the use of inappropriate discipline practices.

  PA [Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) for Preschool](#) The TPOT focuses on the implementation of teaching and behavior support practices associated with the Pyramid Model.

  PA [Teaching Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS)](#) The TPITOS focuses on the implementation of classroom practices related to developing responsive, nurturing relationships, and promoting young children's social – emotional development

- [Pyramid Model Implementation Checklists](#)

PA [Program Quality Assessment Program](#) Observation is a way of gathering information about a program's practices. Program observation helps support early childhood and school-age professionals and program leadership by looking at the current quality of different early learning and school-age program components: classroom practices, teacher-child interactions, instructional support, and program management and leadership.

  PA [Understanding and Reducing Behavioral Challenges Webinar](#) This webinar provides simple strategies for environmental changes to make in a classroom for reducing challenging behaviors.

PA [Early Intervention Technical Assistance Professional Development Courses](#) Search for the following course:
  - *Responsive Routines and Environments*
- [Barriers and Solutions](#) to modifying classroom environments to prevent challenging behaviors.

PA Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning resources are denoted by this symbol.

2.3 Support providers/teacher to implement evidence-based practices for supporting positive social-emotional development

- Pyramid Model provides resources with a focus on promoting the social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children birth to five and reducing the use of inappropriate discipline practices.
- Conscious Discipline provides an array of behavior management strategies and classroom structures that teachers can use to turn everyday situations into learning opportunities
- Zones of Regulation is a curriculum that uses a cognitive behavioral approach to foster self-regulation and emotional control.
- Second Step is a curriculum that provides a holistic approach to social-emotional learning.
- PATHS Curriculum is a social emotional learning program where children acquire a wide variety of social-emotional skills such as increasing self-control and building an extensive vocabulary for empathy.
- Barriers and Solutions for providing professional development support.

PA Early Intervention Technical Assistance Professional Development Courses Search for the following course:
  o *Social Emotional Development within the Context of Relationships*

PA EITA Social Emotional Page is a curated set of timely and important resources.

2.4 Work with providers/teachers and staff to create a culturally inclusive, positive school and classroom climate

- PA Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP) The ICP focuses on the quality of provisions and daily practices that support the developmental needs of children with disabilities in center-based preschool classrooms.
- Barriers and Solutions for working with staff to create a culturally inclusive, positive school and classroom climate.

PA Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning resources are denoted by this symbol.

Tier 3: Supports for Working with Individual Children & Families

3.1 Establish and implement a process for providing children who exhibit persistent challenging behavior with an assessment-based behavior support plan.

PA If the child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) a team meeting must be requested before considering exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension and/or expulsion. Contact the child's Early Intervention program or CONNECT Helpline: 1-800-692-7288 or email help@connectpa.net

PA Strengthen referral pathways with community supports, such as Early Intervention, Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, and Behavioral Health, for children, families, and program staff.
  - o Become familiar with the process and timeline families/staff may encounter when accessing these services.
  - o Invite community speakers to present their services and process to staff and families to increase awareness.

PA Early Intervention Technical Assistance Professional Development Courses Search for the following courses:
  - o *Social Emotional Evaluation for Early Intervention*
  - o *The Meaning of Behavior and Appropriate Responding*

PA Prevent, Teach, and Reinforce training – Check PATTAN for training opportunities
- Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning training
  - o Module 3a – *Individualized Intensive Interventions: Determining the Meaning of Challenging Behavior*
  - o Module 3b – *Individualized Intensive Interventions: Developing a Behavior Support Plan*
- Barriers and solutions for establishing and implementing a process for providing children who exhibit persistent challenging behavior an assessment-based behavior support plan.

PA Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning resources are denoted by this symbol.

Definitions and Program Descriptions

Behavioral Health - The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services System (OMHSAS) Children's Bureau, in conjunction with local Children's Behavioral Health office, is responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive plan for serving children with behavioral health needs in the Commonwealth.

Early Intervention (EI) - Children from birth to age five who have special needs due to developmental delays and disabilities are eligible to receive Early Intervention services. This includes children with persistent challenging behaviors who have not responded to Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports.

Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) - An ELRC is a partner with the PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning. The ELRC provides quality supports for early learning programs and helps families access high quality early learning programs.

Expulsion - Expulsion is the complete and permanent removal of a child from an early childhood program because of challenging behavior or non-infectious health condition.

Head Start - Head Start is primarily a federally funded program that provides education, health and social services to families with children aged 3, 4 and 5. The Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) is the expansion of Head Start with state funding. Head Start/HSSAP programs cannot expel or unenroll a child because of a child's behavior. Head Start programs must prohibit or severely limit the use of suspension due to a child's behavior.

Home Visiting - Home Visiting in Pennsylvania is voluntary, family-focused services for pregnant and parenting families with new babies and young children. There are multiple statewide programs available including: Early Head Start, Family Check-Up, Healthy Families America, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers.

Early Intervention Technical Assistance (EITA) – EITA is an OCDEL business partner supporting professional development and technical assistance related to early intervention and home visiting. www.eita-pa.org

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) - An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is a plan that identifies services and supports so that family members and early education programs are actively engaged in promoting the child's (ages 0-2) learning and development.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) - The Individualized Education Program is a plan that identifies services and supports so family members and early education programs are actively engaged in promoting the child's (ages 3-5) learning and development.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) – IECMHC is a free resource that supports children's social-emotional development from birth through age 5 within early learning programs participating in Keystone STARS.

Keystone STARS - Keystone STARS is Pennsylvania's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Keystone STARS is a responsive system to improve, support, and recognize the continuous quality improvement efforts of early learning programs in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania Key - The Pennsylvania Key is an OCDEL business partners supporting implementation of PA PKC, HSSAP, coaching, quality building activities, the Professional Development Registry, and IECMH. www.pakeys.org

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts - PA Pre-K Counts provides quality half-day and full-day prekindergarten. PA Pre-K Counts is designed for children who: Are between age 3 and until the entry age for kindergarten; Are at risk of school failure and living in families earning up to 300 percent of the federal income poverty level; who may also be English language learners or have special needs.

Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) - The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) is a collaborative effort between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, focused on creating opportunities for the commonwealth's youngest citizens to develop and learn to their fullest potential.

Suspension - Suspension is an action that is administered as a consequence of a child's inappropriate behavior and requires that a child not be present in the classroom or the program for a specified period of time.

References

Morris, C. A., Denham, S. A., Bassett, H. H., & Curby, T. W. (2013). Relations among teachers' emotion socialization beliefs and practices and preschoolers' emotional competence. *Early Education & Development*, *24*(7), 979-999.

Smith, S., & Lawrence, S. M. (2019). Early care and education teacher well-being: Associations with children's experience, outcomes, and workplace conditions: A research-to-policy brief.

Whittaker, J. E., & Harden, B. J. (2010). Beyond ABCs and 123s: Enhancing Teacher–Child Relationship Quality to Promote Children's Behavioral Development. NHSA Dialog, 13(3), 185-191.