

**“Keeping Kids Connected:
What Families (and Professionals) Need to Know About
Exclusionary Discipline in Early Childhood Settings
(and What to Do When It Happens)”**

**Kristen Paul
Director of Early Childhood Programs
The Parents’ Place of Maryland**



Who's in the room?

Defining Exclusionary Discipline (ExD)

US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (USDOE OCR, 2022): 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.”

School Discipline Support Initiative: “Any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual educational setting.”

“Any practice that removes a child from their regular learning environment—physically or functionally—because of behavior that violates program rules or expectations.”

DaSy Center, NCPMI, & ECTA Center. (2024). Ensuring access and positive outcomes for all young children: Using data to understand and eliminate the use of exclusionary discipline practices. SRI International



Suspension/Expulsion in Public Preschool

Preschoolers are suspended at nearly three times the rate of children in K through 12th grade

During 2021-2021 school year, there were 1.4 million children enrolled in preschools

- Nearly 2,700 received one or more out-of-school suspensions
- 370 were expelled

US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights

<https://www.ed.gov/media/document/20211-22-crdc-first-look-report.pdf>



Disparities in Preschool ExD

Gender

Boys expelled over 4.5 times more often than girls



Race

Black preschoolers: 18% of enrollment, 38% of one or more out-of-school suspensions, 33% of expulsions

Disability

Preschoolers with disabilities served under IDEA: 23% of enrollment, 41% of one or more out-of-school suspensions, 74% of expulsions

Examples of Exclusionary Discipline

In-school suspension

Out of school suspension

Expulsion

But what about...

- The child being placed somewhere outside of the classroom for some portion of the day
- Asking a family to pick up the child early due to behavior
- Reducing the child's hours or days of attendance
- Suggesting a parent allow the child time out of the program to "rest and reset"
- Requiring a family member to attend or pay for additional support as a condition of the child attending
- A program counseling the family into removing the child
 - "We do not have the resources to meet your child's needs..."
 - Recommending transferring the child to a different program

These practices are exclusionary because they limit the child's access to the program

Potential Impacts of Exclusion

For the child:

- Loss of instructional time
- Loss of time to learn and practice social-emotional skills
- Reduced sense of belonging
- Stigma

- Negative feelings about school
- Continued suspensions
- Academic failure
- Reduced graduation rate
- Increased incarceration
- Substance abuse

For the family:

- Loss of child care
- Loss of employment/financial stability
- Family stress



Why do we care so much about inclusive practices?

- Society benefits from inclusion of children in their early years
 - Decades of research show that **all** children benefit from inclusive learning environments and are better equipped to learn, live, and work in inclusive communities
- A child's early experiences with education determine the degree to which they feel connected to their community
- Limiting early childhood experiences can diminish quality of life throughout a child's lifespan...

If we know it's bad, why do we keep doing it?

Biases

- Gilliam (2005): Three best predictors of preschool expulsion were the three B's: big, Black, or boy."
- Gilliam (2016): Eye-tracking study showed implicit bias based on race

Lack of Resources for Providers

- Provider well-being: Exclusion more frequent when providers depressed or stressed
- Availability and efficacy of resources: Managing behaviors, social emotional development tools, interventions for children with disabilities, and increased availability of mental health support (for children **and** providers)
 - When more supports are available, ExD decreases

Confusion about what practices are considered ExD

- Particularly "soft" and "informal" practices

The Data Problem

- Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) data includes the use of ExD in **public** school pre-K programs, but not other EC settings
- The Center for American Progress analysis of the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health was the first nationally representative survey of preschool discipline to include **private** preschools as well as public schools
- “Soft” or “Informal” suspensions are either not being considered ExD or not being documented (PEDS, 2020) - no formal system currently exists to monitor informal removal

How do we measure and address what we don't understand?

How do we measure and address what isn't being reported?

A recently-published (2026) study found that 47.7% of ECE educators reported asking a parent to pick up a child early due to behavioral issues within the past year

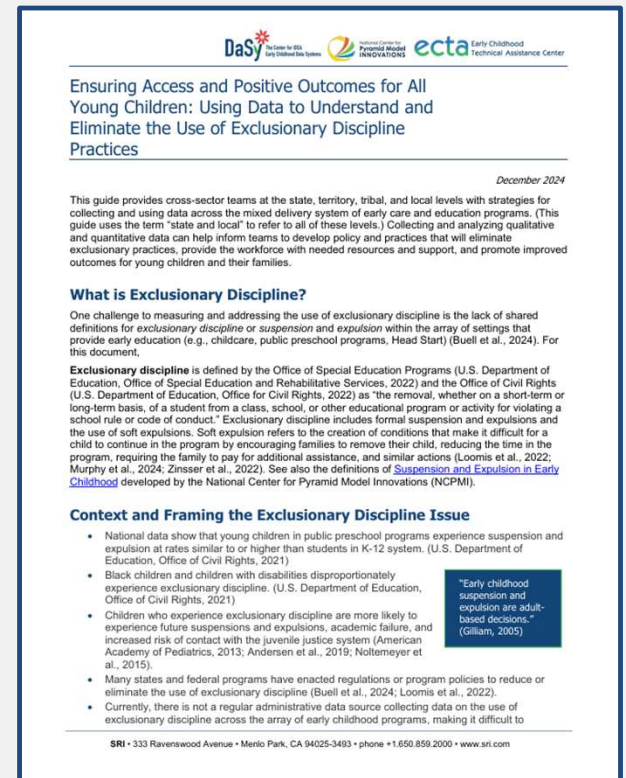
Gilliam's 2005 national study: 10.4%

Zeng, S., An, Z.G., Xu, F. *et al.* Under the Radar: Unpacking Center-based Program Providers' Use of Informal Removals for Children with Challenging Behaviors. *Early Childhood Educ J* (2026).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-026-02167-y>



Ensuring Access and Positive Outcomes for All Young Children: Using Data to Understand and Eliminate the Use of Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Guide from the DaSy Center, NCPMI, and ECTA that offers state, territory, tribal, and local teams strategies to collect and use data across early care and education settings to reduce exclusionary discipline and improve outcomes for young children and families.



The thumbnail shows the cover page of the report. At the top, there are logos for DaSy (Division for Early Childhood Data Systems), National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, and ecta (Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center). The title is "Ensuring Access and Positive Outcomes for All Young Children: Using Data to Understand and Eliminate the Use of Exclusionary Discipline Practices" with a date of "December 2024". The text below the title states: "This guide provides cross-sector teams at the state, territory, tribal, and local levels with strategies for collecting and using data across the mixed delivery system of early care and education programs. (This guide uses the term 'state and local' to refer to all of these levels.) Collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data can help inform teams to develop policy and practices that will eliminate exclusionary practices, provide the workforce with needed resources and support, and promote improved outcomes for young children and their families." It includes sections for "What is Exclusionary Discipline?", "Context and Framing the Exclusionary Discipline Issue", and a list of bullet points. A quote box on the right side of the list reads: "Early childhood suspension and expulsion are adult-based decisions." (Gilliam, 2005). At the bottom, contact information for SRI is provided: "SRI • 333 Ravenswood Avenue • Menlo Park, CA 94025-3493 • phone +1.650.859.2000 • www.sri.com".

DaSy Center, NCPMI, & ECTA Center. (2024). Ensuring access and positive outcomes for all young children: Using data to understand and eliminate the use of exclusionary discipline practices. SRI International <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED671316>



What's being done, and what we can do



Wide Variation in State Laws, Policies, and Guidance

- Laws or Policies (25 states): Explicit statewide bans or strict limits on suspension/expulsion in EC programs
- Guidance Only (10 states): Nonbinding guidance, technical assistance, or recommended practices
- No law, regulation, or statewide guidance specific to EC suspension/expulsion

Maryland

In 2017, the Maryland General Assembly enacted Senate Bill 651 (Chapter 843) Public Schools – Suspensions and Expulsions

C. Suspension and Expulsion.

(1) Prohibition.

- (a) Except as provided in §C(1)(b) of this regulation, a student enrolled in a public prekindergarten program, kindergarten, first grade, or second grade may not be suspended or expelled from school.
- (b) A student described under §C(1)(a) of this regulation may only be:
 - (i) Expelled from school if required by federal law; or
 - (ii) Suspended for not more than 5 school days per incident if the school administration, in consultation with a school psychologist or other mental health professional, determines that there is an imminent threat of serious harm to other students or staff that cannot be reduced or eliminated through interventions and supports.

[Guidance for Prohibition of Suspension or Expulsion for Students in Grades PreK to 2 COMAR 13A.08.01.11 \(marylandpublicschools.org\)](#)



Illinois

Public Act 100-0105 (HB2663) prohibits early care and education (ECE) providers from expelling children aged 0–5 solely because of the child’s behavior. Applies to school- and community-based programs receiving Early Childhood Block Grant funds and licensed childcare providers serving children ages 0–5.

Providers must document:

- Initial observations of challenging behaviors
- Communication with the family
- Plans to address the child’s needs
- Transition process if necessary

Programs must report transition-related data to state agencies

University of Illinois at Chicago’s 2019 evaluation found that while many programs understood the law, implementation varied, and disparities in expulsion rates persisted

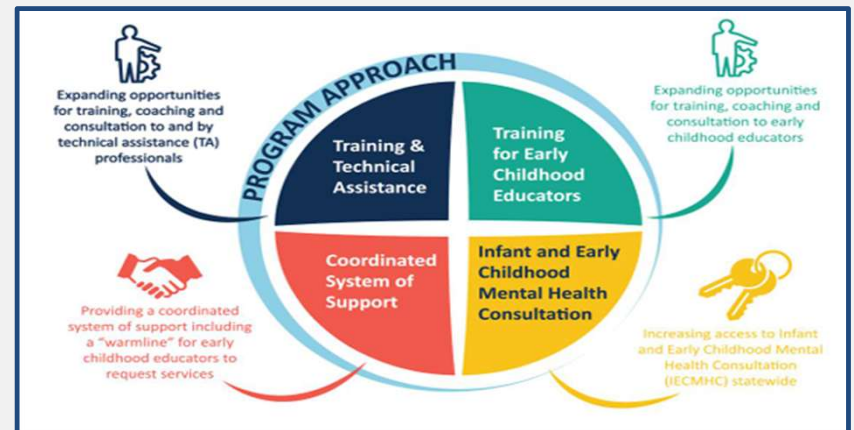
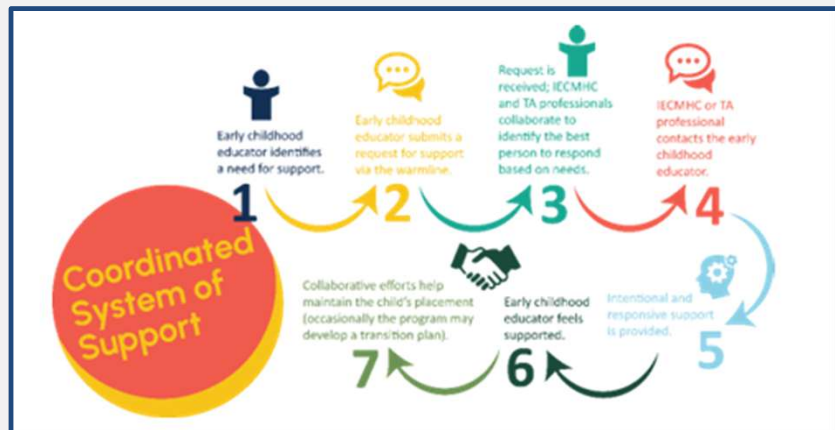
<https://seiumetc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/UIC-100-0105-Implementation-Evaluation-Report-En.pdf>



Oregon

HB 2166 (2021) established the Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion Prevention Program (ECSEPP).

It was paired with Senate Bill 236, which will ban suspension and expulsion in all early learning and care programs receiving DELC funding starting July 1, 2026.



https://www.oregon.gov/delc/Documents/ECSEPP%20Legislative%20Report_Jan2024.pdf

Alternatives to ExD

Teach skills rather than punishing small children with still-developing brains for not having them yet

Social-Emotional Learning

Many behavior issues come from skill gaps, not defiance. SEL gives children the tools they need to be able to behave differently.

Trauma-Informed Practices

A lot of challenging behavior is rooted in stress or trauma; this approach reduces power struggles and helps students feel secure and connected.

In-Class Interventions

Strategies that keep children learning while addressing issues and keeping them from escalating.

Family Partnership

When we collaborate with families and establish consistent expectations between home and school, families feel respected and children feel supported.

Restorative Practices

Approaches that focus on repairing harm and building accountability rather than removing the child.

Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans

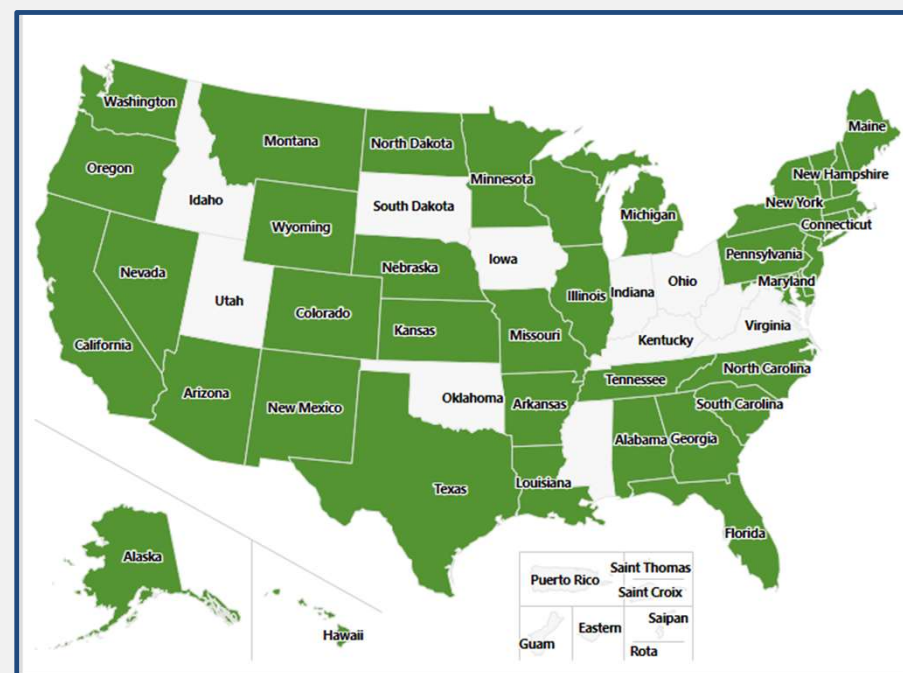
Understanding the why of behaviors can help us understand how to support the child.

Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Most states have some form of an Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program

National scan identified state-level programs or services in at least 35 states and territories

Programs vary widely between states



Center of Excellence for IECMHC state profiles map <https://www.iecmhc.org/state-profiles/>

Pyramid Model

Framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children’s healthy social and emotional development.



Practical Strategies

The Pyramid Model is comprised of practices that are implemented by teachers and families. Below are ideas, resources, and illustrations of strategies that might be used to implement Pyramid Model practices and promote young children’s social and emotional competence in a classroom setting.

Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

Social-emotional skills can be categorized into four types: behavior regulation, friendship skills, emotional literacy, and problem-solving skills.

- Behavior Regulation
- Friendship Skills
- Emotional Literacy
- Problem-Solving Skills
- Social-Emotional Skills – General
- Scripted Stories for Social Situations
- Book Nook

<https://challengingbehavior.org/implementation/classroom/practical-strategies/>

What do exclusionary discipline practices look like in early childhood settings?

Examples of exclusionary practices in early childhood



In-School Suspension could look like...

Disciplining a child by sending the child out of the classroom, such as to the director's office.



Out-of-School Suspension could look like...

Asking a family to pick up their child early because of behavioral issues (e.g., biting, hitting, not following directions).



Expulsion could look like...

Telling a family that they will need to find another care arrangement/center because the child is not a "good fit" for the program or that the program can 'no longer support' their toddler or preschooler.



'Soft' Expulsion could look like...

Asking the family repeatedly to pick their child up early because of behavior issues, requiring them to leave or miss work frequently.

What Can You Do About Exclusionary Discipline?

- If you are asked to pick your child up early, request a copy of the suspension paperwork
- If your child is in second grade or below*, know what the law says about suspension/expulsion
- If your child is a child with a disability, know there are additional protections given to children with disabilities
- Know that there are ways to support your child in early childhood settings

*In Maryland

Reducing Exclusionary Practices



What are Exclusionary Practices?

Exclusionary practices (often called Exclusionary Discipline) remove children from school, daycare, or other programs.

These practices include:

- ❖ Suspending or expelling a child from school, daycare, or program.
- ❖ Requiring parents to attend with their child.
- ❖ “Soft”/Informal exclusions, including:
 - Calling parents to pick up a child.
 - Shortening a child’s day at school, daycare, or program.
 - Sending a child to another location within the setting.

What schools and programs must do

Schools and early childhood programs must ensure behaviors are understood. This includes:

- ❖ Using *positive* behavior supports designed to help children succeed socially, emotionally, and academically.
- ❖ Focusing on teaching, nurturing and encouraging *positive* behaviors for children.
- ❖ Adding supports to a child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) if he/she has one.

What families can do

❑ Know their children’s rights under the law

- ❖ Maryland law*
 - A student enrolled in a public prekindergarten program, kindergarten, first grade, or second grade may not be suspended or expelled from school.**
- ❖ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] (special education law)
 - IEP teams must “consider the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and other strategies” to address behavior
 - If a child with an IEP is suspended a total of 10 days in an academic year, a manifestation determination must take place – if the behavior was a result of the



child’s disability, the IEP must either:

- Conduct a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and implement a behavioral intervention plan (BIP); or
- If there is already a BIP in place, review and modify it to address the behavior

❑ Be aware of school/program policies

- ❖ Review code of conduct and discipline policies.
- ❖ Become familiar with key positive intervention terms:
 - *Tier 1* or *universal academic and behavior supports*. These are positive, proactive supports used for all students.
 - *Tier 2* or *targeted supports*. These are positive, proactive strategies for students whose behaviors impact their learning (or the learning of others).
 - *Tier 3* or *intensive or individualized supports*. Designed to meet a child’s individual needs; FBA/BIP is often part of Tier 3 support.

❑ Be proactive and find support

- ❖ Document when exclusionary practices are used. Click here to read our fact sheet [Discipline at School](#)
- ❖ Work with school/daycare/program staff to make sure family values and cultural strengths are part of the *positive* strategies used to teach, nurture and encourage your child’s behavior.
- ❖ Add behavior goals to your child’s IEP, if needed.
- ❖ Talk to your child about goals and expectations (if age-appropriate).
- ❖ Visit the school website or office to learn about resources like family support programs.

Sources

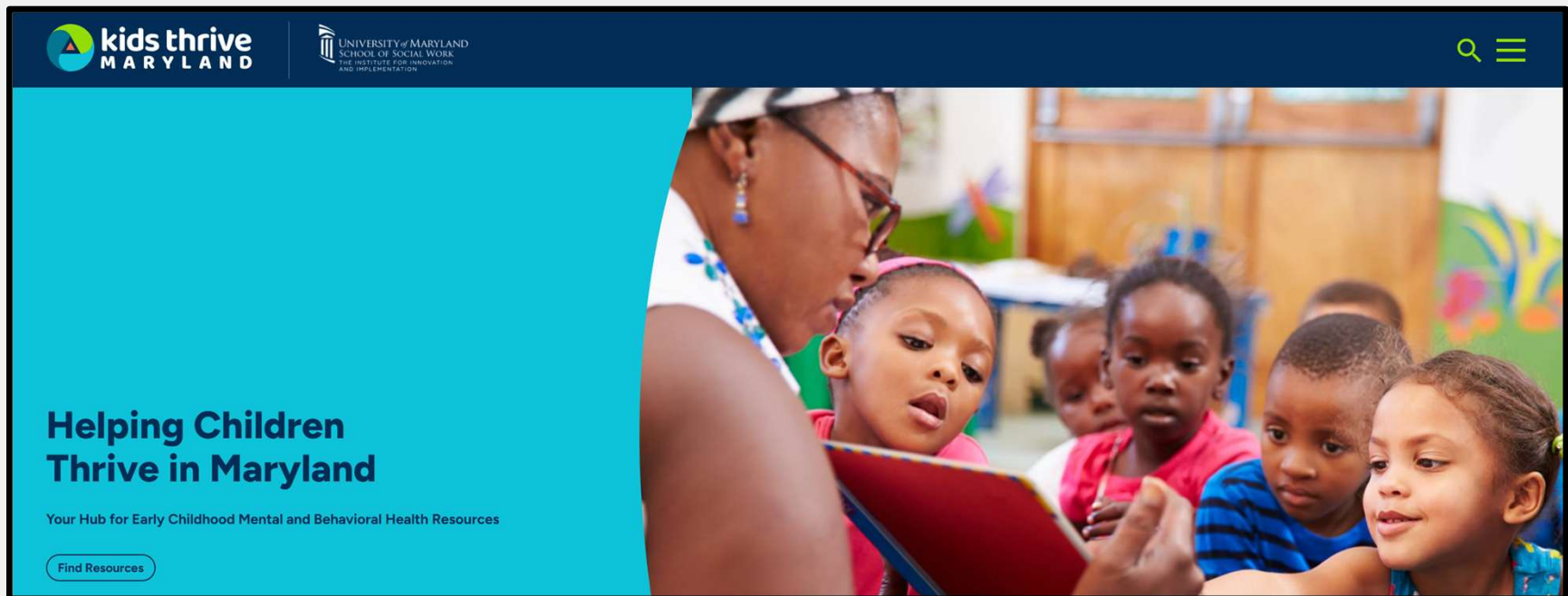
- Adapted from: [Reducing Exclusionary Practices: Positive, Proactive Approaches to Supporting Children With Disabilities](#)
- Adapted from: [Positive, Proactive Approaches to Supporting Children with Disabilities: A Guide for Stakeholders \(July 19, 2022\) - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)
- Adapted from: [guidance for prohibition of suspension or expulsion for students in grades prek to 2 comar 13a.08.01.1 1.pdf \(marylandpublicschools.org\)](#)
- Adapted from: [Maryland School Discipline Laws & Regulations: Limitations or Conditions on Exclusionary Discipline 1 National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments \(NCSSLE\) \(ed.gov\)](#)
- [Positive Behavior Support: Top 10 Tips for Parents](#)

* COMAR 13A.08.01.11(C)(1)(a)

**Except as provided in §C(1)(b) of the regulation. There are instances in which children in these grades may be suspended or expelled, but there are specific procedures that must be followed.

Kids Thrive Maryland

Maryland's hub for early childhood mental and behavioral health resources



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Kids Thrive Maryland website. The header features the 'kids thrive MARYLAND' logo on the left, the University of Maryland School of Social Work logo in the center, and a search icon and menu icon on the right. The main content area has a blue background on the left with the text 'Helping Children Thrive in Maryland' and 'Your Hub for Early Childhood Mental and Behavioral Health Resources'. A 'Find Resources' button is located below this text. On the right, there is a photograph of a woman reading a book to a group of young children in a classroom setting.

<https://kidsthivemaryland.org>



What can YOU do to support the elimination of the use of exclusionary discipline in early childhood?

For more information, or if you have questions, please
contact me:

Kristen Paul

kristen@ppmd.org

(410) 768-9100 ext. 111

The Parents' Place of Maryland
802 Cromwell Park Drive, Suite H
Glen Burnie, MD 21061
www.ppmd.org

PPMD's information, resources, and trainings can be made available in languages other than English, including sign language, upon request. Please contact us regarding your translation and interpretation needs.



Sources & Additional Resources

Buettner, C. K., Jeon, L., Hur, E., & Garcia, R. E. (2016). Teachers' social-emotional capacity: Factors associated with teachers' responsiveness and professional commitment. *Early Education and Development*, 27(7), 1018–1039.

Carlson, J.S et al. (2012). Implementing a Statewide Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Approach to Preventing Childcare Expulsion. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 2012-05, Vol.33 (3), p.265-273.

DaSy Center, NCPMI, & ECTA Center. (2024). Ensuring access and positive outcomes for all young children: Using data to understand and eliminate the use of exclusionary discipline practices. SRI International

Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion: A Content Analysis of State Legislation

https://library.piagetcoe.edu.ng/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Early-Childhood-Suspension-and-Expulsion_A-Content-Analysis-of-State-Legislation.pdf

Exclusionary Discipline in U.S. Public Pre-K Programs: An Initial Look at the 2017-2018 CRDC Data

<https://cep.asu.edu/sites/g/files/litvpz916/files/2021-01/PEDS%20RESEARCH%20BRIEF%201.pdf>

Sources & Additional Resources

Fabes, R.A., Quick, M., Musgrave, A., Meek, S., & Catherine, E., (2020, October). Exclusionary discipline in U.S. public pre-K programs: An initial look at the 2017-2018 CRDC data. The Preschool Exclusionary Discipline Project: Research Briefs (Issue 1). Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University

Gilliam, W. S. (2005). Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

Gilliam, W. S., Maupin, A. N., Reyes, C. R., Accavitti, M., Shic, F. (2016). Do early educators' implicit biases regarding sex and race relate to behavior expectations and recommendations of preschool expulsions and suspensions? Yale University Child Study Center.

Malik, Rasheed. (2017). "New Data Reveal 250 Preschoolers Are Suspended or Expelled Every Day." Center for American Progress. www.americanprogress.org/article/new-data-reveal-250-preschoolers-suspended-expelled-every-day/.

National Disability Rights Network (2022). Out from the shadows: Informal removal of children with disabilities from public schools. <https://www.ndrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Out-from-The-Shadows-1.pdf>

Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline Policies.



Sources & Additional Resources

Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline Policies. Cambridge, MA: Civil Rights Project, Harvard University; 2000.

Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings

<https://www.challengingbehavior.org/docs/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings: A Program Leader's Guide to Supporting All Children's Success <https://preventexpulsion.org/>

Zeng, S., An, Z.G., Xu, F. et al. Under the Radar: Unpacking Center-based Program Providers' Use of Informal Removals for Children with Challenging Behaviors. *Early Childhood Educ J* (2026).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-026-02167-y>

Zinsser, K. M., Zulauf, C. A., Nair Das, V., & Silver, H. C. (2017). Utilizing social-emotional learning supports to address teacher stress and preschool expulsion. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. 61, pp. 33-42.

Zinsser, K.M., Silver, H.C., Hussaini, Q., & Zulauf, C.A. (2019). Evaluation Report of the Implementation of Illinois Public Act 100-0105: Early childhood programs' knowledge of and responses to the 2018 expulsion legislation. The University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.

