

Division of Child Development and Early Education Suspension and Expulsion Policy Statement

Purpose

It is the intent of the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) to severely limit suspensions and expulsions in early childhood education programs serving children birth-through-five years of age in North Carolina. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education's Joint Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings (2014), data released over the past decade have shown high rates of expulsion and suspension in early childhood programs, with variability in rate depending on the setting. Suspension and expulsion can impact many adverse outcomes across development, health, and education.

Teachers, administrators and support staff are the most critical ingredients of high-quality early learning programs. To that end, ensuring that the early childhood education workforce is adequately trained, supported, and prepared to help all children excel is a key strategy in eventually eliminating early suspension and expulsion. Early childhood education programs are responsible for creating positive climates focus on prevention, develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address challenging behaviors, and ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement to support children's social, emotional behavioral health.

Guidance for Prevention of Suspension and Expulsion

It is recommended that early childhood programs focus on fostering social-emotional development, appropriately responding to challenging behaviors by incorporating preventive guidance, discipline practices and policies before ever considering suspension from early childhood programs. Program discipline procedures can provide specific guidance on addressing challenging behaviors, including specific teacher responses, communication with families and consulting with early childhood mental health specialists and/or Healthy Social Behavioral Initiative specialists through the Child Care Resource & Referral, Smart Start network, Children's Developmental Services Agencies, county mental or social services agencies, or other community partner agencies.

Early childhood programs are encouraged to document and provide evidence that every effort has been made to maintain the child's placement including, but not limited to, implementing evidence-based practices to prevent challenging behaviors. Such practices include the Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) Pyramid Model, ongoing communication with the family, and consultation with early childhood mental health specialists, Healthy Social Behavioral Initiative specialists or other child development experts.

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, approximately four to six percent of preschoolers have serious emotional and behavioral disorders that require evaluation by a licensed professional specialist or therapist. Expulsion should occur only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a determination of a serious safety threat, significant concerns about the child's development and the program's capacity to address the child's developmental needs. Documentation is recommended with evidence that all possible interventions and supports recommended by the early childhood mental health specialist, Healthy Social Behavioral Initiative specialists or another child development expert were implemented. Programs are encouraged to assist with transitioning the child and family into an alternative early childhood education placement that is prepared to appropriately support the developmental needs of the child.

Definitions

Suspension- the temporary removal of a child from the assigned early childhood setting for disciplinary purposes.

Expulsion-the permanent dismissal of child from the assigned early childhood setting for disciplinary purposes.

Recommendations

1. Early childhood programs should consider adopting specific policies and procedures to limit suspension and expulsion of young children from early childhood education programs.
2. Early childhood programs should consider disseminating written policies and procedures to parents and families in a timely and efficient manner.
3. Early childhood programs can implement evidence-based practices to prevent challenging behavior including, consultation with the family, and consultation with early childhood mental health specialists, behavioral consultants, and licensed therapists.
4. Each early childhood program should consider documenting its efforts to prevent and reduce problem behaviors. This includes teacher observation to identify what may be triggering the behavior, planning and recording instructional modifications, implementing differentiated strategies, and documenting daily progress made by the child or additional modifications needed as well as other resources.

Children with Unique Needs and Challenging Behaviors

Early childhood programs are responsible for creating environments that promote children's social, emotional, and behavioral health. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services early childhood prevention and discipline practices should be used as learning opportunities to guide children's appropriate behavioral development.

The following outlines developmentally appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral health promotion practices in the early childhood and child care environment.

1. Forming strong supporting, nurturing relationships with children and families including valuing of cultural diversity.
2. Reinforcing children's desired behavior and implementing logical, non-punitive consequences for challenging behavior that are consistent and developmentally appropriate.
3. Paying distinct attention to the developmental appropriateness of both behavioral expectations and consequences for challenging behavior, given the substantial developmental and experiential differences among children birth-through-age five.

Serving Children with Disabilities

When a child with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Program (IEP) exhibits persistent challenging behaviors, special considerations are enacted due to procedural safeguards and due process rights ensured under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Parts C and B. Documentation may be required by the IFSP or IEP as to the attempts to address the behaviors and alternate placement plans developed to ensure continuation of special education and related services.

1. For children age birth-to-three years of age with an IFSP, the child's Early Intervention Service Coordinator must be contacted to facilitate the development of a plan to address the behaviors in question.
2. For children ages three-through-five with an IEP who exhibit persistent challenging behaviors, early childhood programs must communicate with the school district's special education program about the behavior as soon as the concern arises.
3. Teachers shall maintain continuous collaboration with the specialist(s) working with the child. Discuss strategies implemented in the classroom and seek additional research based effective practices to support the child with or without an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Resources

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Social-Emotional and Behavioral Health,

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (September 2015). Retrieved from the US Department of Health and Human Services:

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/ccdf_acf_im_2015_01.pdf

NC Child Care Resource and Referral Council. Retrieved from

<http://childcarerrnc.org/s.php?subpage=HealthySocialBehaviorsInitiative>

School Climate and Discipline. (2016, October). Retrieved from US Department of Education.

US Department of Education. (2014, September). Retrieved from US Department of Health and Human Services :

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/expulsion_suspension_final.pdf

US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families.

(2015, September). Retrieved from Social-Emotional and Behavioral Health:

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/ccdf_acf_im_2015_01.pdf

“For more information or to locate the Healthy Social Behaviors Initiative specialist for your facility, contact the Statewide Project Manager at sbrawley@childcareresourcesinc.org.”