

Tip Sheets

Preventing Expulsion in Child Care



Early care and education professionals are responsible for providing consistent quality care to young

children. However, there are times our tools as caregivers are taxed working with a young child who pushes all our buttons. It may be a child who behaves aggressively with peers or is defiant with adults.

This tip sheet is designed to give you strategies to prevent expulsion of a child with challenging behaviors.

The Impact of Expulsion on Children

Children who are expelled from early care and education settings:

- Are less likely to be prepared for kindergarten.
- Are more likely to be among those most at risk for school failure.
- Are more likely to experience peer rejection.
- May develop low self-esteem.
- May become labeled as “bad,” “naughty,” etc.
- May experience multiple losses (friends, peers, caregiver, etc.).
- Lack the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging.
- Learn that their worth is based on what they do rather than who they are.

Proactive Steps to Prevent Expulsion

Provide clear expectations and behavior guidelines in your parent handbook.

Make it a policy to refrain from expelling children and spell out the ways you as a provider will seek support.

- Develop a clear plan for steps that will be taken when extreme challenges occur.
- Provide these guidelines to all parents upon enrollment.
- make it clear how you expect parents to seek assistance and answers through Early Childhood Screening or a Mental Health Referral.

Connect with local support networks and programs.

Building a positive support network in your area and continuing your education will help you develop more tools and strategies for working with children with challenging behaviors.

- Find other providers in your area to meet with regularly or to connect with on the phone.
- Enroll in training, especially programs that focus on guidance strategies, mental health, and social-emotional development.
- Know the contact information of school districts and local hospitals and assessment/evaluation providers in the community.

Observe and document.

Making notes about a child’s behavior will help identify behaviors and make it easier to share this information with parents and other providers.

- As soon as a child is enrolled begin to make notes about the day-to-day behaviors you observe.
- Keep a running record of things the child engages in when calm, peers the child has positive interactions with, and information the parent shares about the child's sleep and routine at home.

Stay connected with parents.

If you have concerns about a child's development or about a pattern of challenging behavior it is critical to talk with parents daily. Build a relationship of trust by:

- Listening to concerns.
- Providing tips for home, primarily to help them get through the tough times.
- Assure them that they are not alone.

Develop a plan with staff and parents for interventions.

When there are recurring challenges it is vital to develop a written plan. This plan creates consistency and follow through while bridging home and child care. Meet with all of the caregivers in a child's life and discuss responses to behavior. This will allow for greater success when trying to change the pattern of the behavior.

Preventing Expulsion and Alternative Placement

You may implement the strategies above and still find that a child continues to exhibit challenging behaviors in your setting. At this point it may be time to talk with parents about an alternative placement. This option should be thought of as a last resort and only if it puts the child's best interest at the center of the decision.

Compassionately discussing options with a family will help them be informed about what type of setting may be better suited the child and their needs. When the child moves to a new setting with different children, routine, physical space and provider style, challenging behaviors may diminish.

The ideal situation is one that creates an environment of support and understanding with both provider and parents focusing on a common goal—the healthy development of the child.

Additional Resources

Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings

<https://preventexpulsion.org>

Zero to Three | Preventing Expulsion from Preschool and Child Care

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/preventing-expulsion-from-preschool-and-child-care>

Head Start | Preventing Suspension and Expulsion

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/preventing-suspension-expulsion>

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