

ACF Administration for Children and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
	1. Log No: ACF-IM-HS-16-01	2. Issuance Date: 11/07/2016
	3. Originating Office: Office of Head Start (OHS); Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary's Office on Early Childhood Development	
	4. Key Words: Head Start; Expulsion and Suspension; Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Development	

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

To: Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees and Delegates, and Other Interested Parties

Subject: Expulsion and Suspension Policy Statement

References:

- Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (2016)
- U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension in Early Childhood Settings (2014)¹

Purpose:

This Information Memorandum highlights new requirements in the [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#) related to expulsion and suspension. It also encourages Head Start grantees and delegates to adopt practices set forth in the [Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension in Early Childhood Settings](#) issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Appendices 1 and 2 offer free resources grantees can use in their implementation efforts.

Background:

The Head Start Program Performance Standards (2016) prohibit programs from expelling or un-enrolling children from Head Start because of a child's behavior in [45 CFR §1302.17](#). These Standards **also require programs to prohibit or severely limit the use of suspension due to a child's behavior**. Programs are required to partner with families, consult with specialists, help the child and family **obtain additional services as appropriate, and take all possible steps to ensure the child's successful participation in the program**.

Aligned with the Head Start Program Performance Standards, HHS and ED released a [joint policy statement](#) with state and local recommendations to address expulsion and suspension in early learning settings, including in Head Start programs. The policy **statement affirms the Departments' efforts to prevent and eventually eliminate expulsion and suspension in all early childhood settings and support young children's social, emotional, and behavioral development**. The policy statement also provides information about resources that are available at no cost to programs.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Education Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings (2014). ODAS, ECD-ACF-PS-2016-01. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/ecd/expulsion_ps_numbered.pdf

Neuroscientists agree that the first five **years of a child's life are critical for building the** foundation of learning, health, and wellness needed for success in school and later in life. While access to high-quality early learning **can have important benefits on children's development and learning**, expulsion and suspension from such programs can have detrimental effects, **particularly on children's social** and emotional development and learning outcomes. Expulsion and suspension are stressful and negative experiences for children, their families, and their teachers and can negatively affect child development and outcomes. Research indicates that **expulsion and suspension early in a child's** life predicts expulsion and suspension later in school. Children who are expelled or suspended from school are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who were never suspended or expelled.

Furthermore, data consistently show racial disparities in expulsion and suspension. For example, recent data from ED's **Office of Civil Rights** indicate that African-American boys make up 19 percent of preschool enrollment, but 45 percent of preschoolers suspended. African-American girls represent 20 percent of female preschool enrollment, but 54 percent of female preschoolers suspended.²

Though each case is different, suspensions and expulsions may be products of misguided or absent policies and/or insufficient training and support services for staff, especially in managing challenging behavior, recognizing trauma, and promoting social and emotional development. Research indicates that disparities in these practices may be influenced by implicit biases, uneven implementation of discipline policies, and under-resourced, inadequate education and training for teachers, especially in self-reflective strategies to identify and correct potential biases in perceptions and practice.

Guidance:

Aligned with the new requirements on expulsion and suspension found at [45 CFR §1302.17](#) of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, grantees are encouraged to implement the following recommendations included in the HHS and ED federal policy statement. A brief summary of program-level recommendations is below, but we urge grantees to [read the Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension in Early Childhood Settings](#) in its entirety.

1. **Develop and Clearly Communicate Preventive Guidance and Discipline Practices:** Programs should establish developmentally appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral health promotion practices, as well as discipline and intervention procedures. These practices and procedures should be clearly communicated to all staff, families, and community partners, and implemented consistently and without bias or discrimination. Preventive and discipline **practices should be used as learning opportunities to guide children's** appropriate behavioral development, and distinct attention should be paid to the developmental appropriateness of both behavioral expectations and consequences for challenging behavior.
2. **Develop and Clearly Communicate Expulsion and Suspension Policies:** Head Start grantees and delegates are required to implement expulsion and suspension policies consistent with the Head Start Program Performance Standards at [45 CFR §1302.17](#), such that expulsions are prohibited and suspensions are prohibited or severely restricted.
3. **Access Technical Assistance and Workforce Development to Prevent Expulsion and Suspension:** All program staff should have a strong set of skills **to support children's social**, emotional, and behavioral development. Programs should also ensure that teachers have support from specialists or consultants, such as early childhood mental health consultants, behavioral coaches, school counselors, or special educators. Head Start programs should also promote teacher health and wellness and ensure that teachers work reasonable hours with breaks and have access to social services, health, and mental health supports, as needed.
4. **Set Goals for Improvement and Analyze Data to Assess Progress:** Programs should set goals **to optimally support children's social**, emotional, and behavioral development, monitor

²U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2016). A First Look: Key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation's public schools.

data to assess progress, and modify their practices and investment, as needed, to reach their goals.

5. **Access Free Resources to Develop and Scale Best Practices:** Programs should access free resources to assist in eliminating suspensions and expulsions in early childhood settings. The Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) new [Training and Technical Assistance System](#) provides resources and training on a variety of issues, including those related to suspension and expulsion; **children's health and well-being**; and development, teaching, and learning. Many of those resources can be found on the [Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Center \(ECLKC\)](#) website. Additional resources **to support children's social and emotional development** can also be found at the [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning](#) and at the [Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention](#) websites. The HHS-funded [Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) website will offer a comprehensive toolkit on building early childhood mental health consultation systems in the fall of 2016. Appendices 1 and 2 provide several free resources that programs and families can access to address expulsion and suspension practices.

Please contact your Office of Head Start Regional Office for more information.

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Appendix 1: Resources for Parents and Families

Preventing expulsion and suspension requires a strong partnership with families. Programs should treat families as the foremost experts on their children, and as such, exchange information relevant to **the child's culture, social**, emotional, and behavioral strengths and concerns, approaches to learning, and strategies that work at home. At a minimum, programs should ensure families have information on:

- **Their child's health, behavior**, and development, especially social and emotional development, during the hours they are in their early learning setting
- Developmental milestones, healthy development and behavior, and places to go for help
- Identifying a high-quality early learning program
- Communicating with program or school personnel and advocating for their child

Below are resources to share with families to facilitate this partnership and information-sharing:

- Child learning and social, emotional, and behavioral development:
 - [Parenting Your Child](https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/for-families/parenting/parenting-child.html)
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/for-families/parenting/parenting-child.html>
 - **Fostering Children's Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning**
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html>
 - [Backpack Connection Series](http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/backpack.html)
<http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/backpack.html>
 - [Essentials for Parenting Toddler and Preschoolers](http://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/)
<http://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/>
- Developmental and behavioral milestones, monitoring, and screening:
 - [Milestones Moments](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/milestonemomentseng508.pdf)
http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/milestonemomentseng508.pdf
 - **Free Tools to Track Your Child's Development**
<http://www.cdc.gov/features/trackmilestones/>
 - [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive – Families](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/eecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive/families)
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/eecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive/families>
 - [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Developmental and Behavioral Screening Passport](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/screening_passport.pdf)
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/screening_passport.pdf
 - **If You're Concerned.**
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/concerned.html>
 - [Center for Parent Information and Resources](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/)
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/>
 - [Parent Training and Information Centers for Parents of Children with Disabilities](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/)
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/>
- Identifying a high-quality early learning program:
 - [Child Care Aware](http://www.childcareaware.org/)
<http://www.childcareaware.org/>

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Appendix 2: Resources for Programs, Schools, and Staff

The following resources offer support for superintendents, program directors, principals, teachers, providers, and other staff to prevent and eliminate expulsions and suspensions in early childhood settings.

- Social, emotional, and behavioral health:
 - [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/)
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>
 - [Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention](http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/)
<http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/>
 - [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](https://www.pbis.org/)
<https://www.pbis.org/>
 - [Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](http://www.ecmhc.org/)
<http://www.ecmhc.org/>
 - [National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health)
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health>
- Universal developmental and behavioral screenings:
 - [Watch Me! Celebrating Milestones and Sharing Concerns - Training for Teachers](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/watchmetraining/index.html)
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/watchmetraining/index.html>
 - [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive)
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive>
 - [Learn the Signs. Act Early.](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html)
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html>
- Partnering with community service providers:
 - [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! A Community Guide for Developmental and Behavioral Screening](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/communities_guide_march2014.pdf)
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/communities_guide_march2014.pdf
 - [Legacy for Children™ Parenting Intervention](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/legacy.html)
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/legacy.html>
 - [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](http://ectacenter.org/)
<http://ectacenter.org/>
 - [Association of University Centers on Disabilities](http://www.aucd.org/directory/directory.cfm?program=UCEDD)
<http://www.aucd.org/directory/directory.cfm?program=UCEDD>
- Forming strong relationships with parents and families:
 - [National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement: Resources A-Z](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/resources.html)
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/resources.html>
 - [Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality Measures: Updated **User's Manual**](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/family-and-provider-teacher-relationship-quality-measures-users-manual)
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/family-and-provider-teacher-relationship-quality-measures-users-manual>
 - [National Association for the Education of Young Children: Engaging Diverse Families](http://www.naeyc.org/familyengagement)
<http://www.naeyc.org/familyengagement>
- Nondiscriminatory discipline:
 - [U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Data Collection](http://www.ocrddata.ed.gov)
<http://www.ocrddata.ed.gov>
 - [U.S. Departments of Education and Justice Notice of Language Assistance: Dear Colleague Letter on Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline](#) [PDF, 5MB]
 - <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.pdf>