



Standing United: Preventing Suspension & Expulsion in Early Childhood

For Pediatricians

“Suspension and Expulsion are not a child’s behavior, but an adult’s choice.”



Walter Gilliam

Suspension and expulsion of children from birth to six years old in early childhood programs occur far more frequently than many realize. Nationally, preschoolers face expulsion at a rate more than three times higher than students in K-12 education.

The consequences of early exclusion from childcare or preschool are profound. Research shows that suspension and expulsion are linked to increased risks of mental health challenges, poor physical health, academic struggles, and even long-term involvement in the school-to-prison pipeline. For families, these practices lead to significant stress, financial strain, and feelings of stigma and isolation.

As trusted pediatricians, you are uniquely positioned to address this issue. Your relationships with families, ability to screen for developmental and behavioral concerns, and role as advocates for children’s well-being make you vital allies in the effort to end early childhood suspension and expulsion.

Through a partnership with Virginia’s Early Intervention Professional Development Center at Virginia Commonwealth University and Loudoun County’s Early Intervention program, the Standing United: Preventing Suspension & Expulsion in Early Childhood Information Package has been developed. This resource offers critical insights and data on the prevalence, causes, and consequences of suspension and expulsion, along with effective strategies to promote inclusion and prevent exclusionary practices. Familiarizing yourself with the toolkit can enhance your ability to support families of at-risk children and advocate effectively for systemic changes.

Your role as pediatricians and advocates is vital in ensuring that all children in Virginia have access to stable and nurturing early learning environments. By working together, we can tackle the underlying causes of suspension and expulsion, paving the way for a brighter future for our youngest learners and their families.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication to the health and well-being of Virginia’s children.



Pediatrician Toolkit for Reducing Suspension and Expulsion in Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

Introduction

Suspension and expulsion of young children from childcare and preschool settings are pressing issues with far-reaching consequences for children, families, and communities. Pediatricians play a key role in addressing these challenges by supporting families, advocating for evidence-based solutions, and promoting equitable practices within early childhood education environments.

This information package offers essential strategies, data, and resources to help pediatricians effectively tackle and reduce the suspension and expulsion of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.



HeartWired Video

<https://youtu.be/ZacejFXeO4?si=RULjiMY69em2ReND>



Virginia Statistics on Suspension and Expulsion

- **Suspension and Expulsion Rates:** A 2021 report from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation revealed that young children in Virginia experience suspension and expulsion at rates comparable to national data.
- Virginia's **Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five** initiative aims to address disparities by funding mental health consultations and professional development for teachers.

Why Pediatricians Should Address Suspension and Expulsion

Pediatricians are trusted by families and uniquely positioned to make a significant impact through their advocacy and support.

Promote Awareness

Many families are unaware of the prevalence and consequences of suspension and expulsion in early childhood settings. Pediatricians can play a key role in educating families about their rights and emphasizing the importance of stable, supportive early education environments.

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Support Mental Health

Early signs of emotional and behavioral challenges often precede suspension or expulsion. Pediatricians can proactively identify and address these challenges through developmental screenings and timely referrals to appropriate services.

Build Family Resilience

Families dealing with suspension or expulsion face significant stress and financial hardship. Pediatricians can provide guidance and connect families to resources that help alleviate these burdens.

Impacts of Suspension and Expulsion

On the Child:

- **Mental Health:**
 - Increased risk of anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders.
 - Feelings of rejection and stigma can harm self-esteem and emotional regulation.
- **Physical Health:**
 - Stress from exclusion can lead to physical health issues, such as sleep disturbances, poor appetite, and weakened immunity.
- **Long-Term Impacts:**
 - Higher likelihood of academic failure, grade retention, and eventual school dropout.

On the Family:

- **Financial Impact:**
 - Families may lose access to affordable childcare, resulting in missed workdays or job loss. They often face high costs when seeking alternative care or special education services.
- **Stress and Emotional Strain:**
 - Families may feel stigmatized or blamed for their child's behavior. This stress can strain relationships and impact overall family well-being.

On the Community:

- Early suspensions and expulsions contribute to the **school-to-prison pipeline**.
- Communities bear the financial burden in addressing long-term outcomes, such as higher rates of incarceration and unemployment.

Strategies for Pediatricians to Support Families

Promote Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC)

- **What is IECMHC?**
 - It is a collaborative approach in which mental health professionals work with teachers, caregivers, and families to address emotional and behavioral challenges in young children.

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- **How Pediatricians Can Help:**

- Refer families to IECMHC programs available in their community.
- Advocate for policies that expand access to mental health consultation in early care and education settings.

Conduct Developmental and Behavioral Screenings

- Use tools like the **Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)**, **ASQ Social Emotional**, or the **Pediatric Symptom Checklist** to identify developmental delays or behavioral concerns.
- Discuss results with families and provide timely referrals to early intervention services or behavioral health providers as needed.

Educate Families About Their Rights

- Inform families about state laws and policies regarding suspension and expulsion in early childhood settings. In Virginia:
 - The **“Preventing Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood Programs”** guidelines focus on alternatives to exclusionary practices.
- Empower families to advocate for their child’s needs and seek appropriate accommodations within early learning environments.

Advocate for Professional Development for Educators

- Promote training for teachers on trauma-informed care and social-emotional learning (SEL).
- Share resources with families and early educators to foster a culture of awareness and understanding.

Facilitate Access to Community Resources

- Provide families with referrals to:
 - [Early Intervention Services](#) (e.g., Virginia’s Early Intervention Part C program for children under 3).
 - Parenting programs like **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**.
 - Local organizations addressing food security, housing, and other social determinants of health.

Advocacy Strategies for Pediatricians

Partner with Schools and Childcare Centers:

Collaborate with early childhood programs to implement strategies that reduce suspension and expulsion, such as classroom management training.

Advocate for Policy Change:

Support state and federal policies designed to limit suspension and expulsion in early childhood settings.

Advocate for increased funding to expand access to mental health consultation services.

Engage in Public Awareness Campaigns:

Raise awareness about the harmful impacts of suspension and expulsion through community events, social media outreach, and partnerships with local organizations.

Collaborate with Stakeholders:

Work with early childhood coalitions, mental health providers, educators, and families to establish comprehensive systems of support for young children.

Quick Tips:

Talk with Families About Their Experiences

Families may not openly share concerns about suspension or expulsion unless prompted. During wellness visits or developmental screenings, ask questions such as:

- “How is your child doing in their childcare or preschool setting?”
- “Have you encountered any challenges or concerns with your child’s early education experience?”
- “What supports would be helpful to you and your child in their learning environment?”

These conversations can reveal family needs, provide insight into potential challenges, and empower families to advocate for their child in early learning settings.

Advocate for Families and Children in Your Community

As a pediatrician, your voice carries substantial influence in shaping policies and practices that safeguard young children. Advocate for approaches such as trauma-informed care, early childhood mental health consultation, and continuous professional development for educators to minimize reliance on suspension and expulsion.

Your advocacy efforts can also include:

- Referring families to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) programs to address behavioral and emotional challenges within early childhood environments.
- Encouraging developmental screenings to identify and intervene with challenges early.
- Collaborating with local early childhood programs to establish developmentally appropriate and supportive environments for all children.

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Insights from Dr. Walter Gilliam

- He strongly advocates for classroom-based mental health consultation as an effective tool to significantly reduce suspension and expulsion rates. By providing teachers with strategies to address and manage challenging behaviors, these consultations foster a more supportive learning environment.
- Dr. Gilliam also highlights the profound role of teacher-child relationships in promoting positive behavioral outcomes, illustrating how nurturing connections can influence a child's development and overall success in early education settings.



Conclusion

Reducing suspension and expulsion in early childhood necessitates a comprehensive approach that brings together families, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers. Pediatricians play a pivotal role in this effort, offering guidance, support, and advocacy to ensure every child has access to stable and nurturing educational environments.

By addressing the underlying causes of suspension and expulsion and prioritizing mental health and resilience, pediatricians can significantly reduce the long-term impacts on children and families. This toolkit empowers pediatricians to take proactive steps within their communities, fostering environments where children and families can thrive.

For more information and resources, consider visiting:

- The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI): <https://challengingbehavior.org/resources/>
- Zero to Three: <https://www.zerotothree.org/>
- Legal Aid Justice Center (applicable to public Pre-K through 3rd grade): <https://www.justice4all.org/what-we-do/youth-family-schools/know-your-rights-expulsions/>

