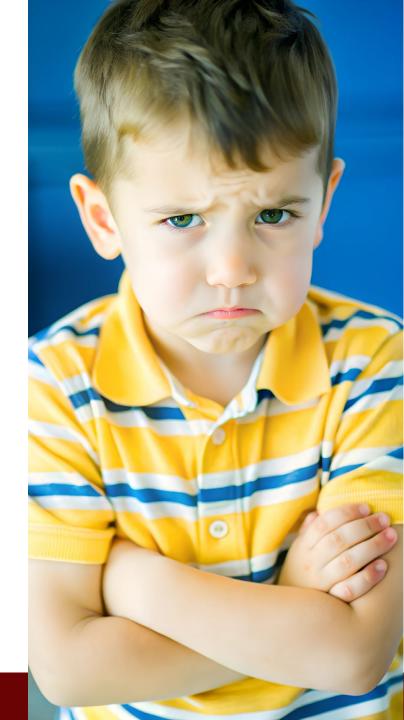


# Preschool Suspension and Expulsion: What Indiana Families Tell Us, the Role of Disability, and Tools to Support Programs

Dr. Katherine Herron, Early Childhood Center, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community

## **Meet Ryan**

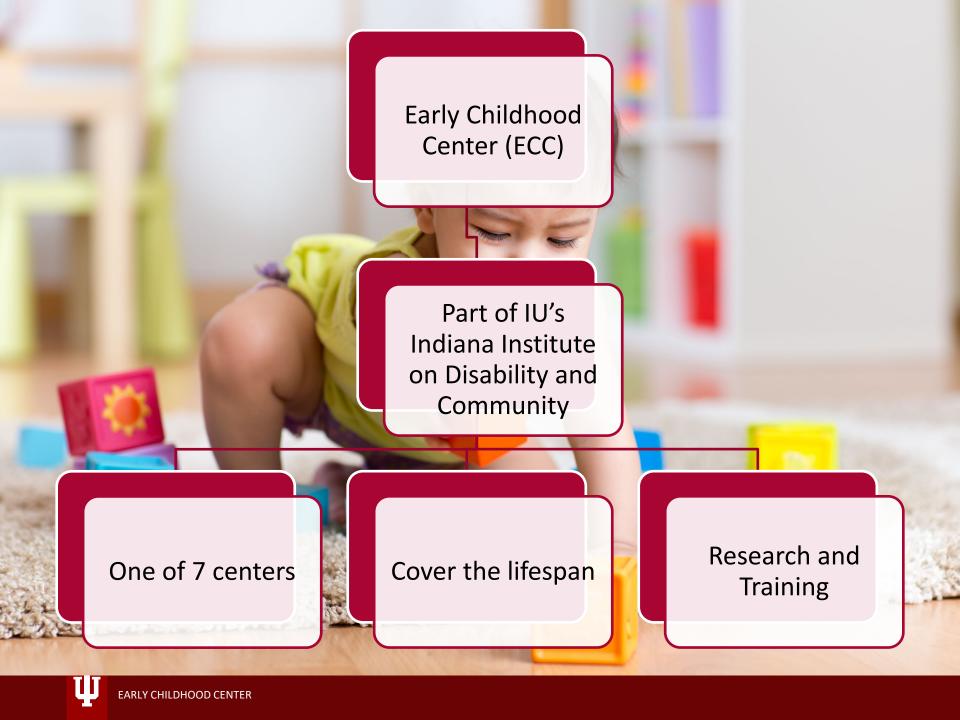
- Ryan has an IFSP (speech delay)
- At 3, he received an IEP for ADD and emotional disturbance.
- Began attending preschool at a childcare center.
- Issues from the beginning.
- Program staff told Mom that Ryan was eloping, that he was presenting a danger.
- Major episodes always occurred at naptime.
- Mom got calls almost every day. Often, Ryan would be sent home for the rest of the day.



# **Acknowledgements:**

• We thank the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for their generous funding of this project in 2023-2024.





# Agenda/Session Goals

- Why are we concerned about preschool removals?
- What do families tell us about the experience and the impact of preschool removals?
- How does this data inform the tools that exist to support programs?



# Why are we interested in preschool removals?

## Why are we concerned?

Early childhood is a critical period

Suspension and expulsion are stressful and negative experiences

Suspension or expulsion in early childhood predicts suspension or expulsion in later grades.

Students suspended or expelled in K-12 are more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who are not.

## First, let's talk terms:

- Informal Removal: Defined in July 2022, actions taken by school personnel in response to a child's behavior that excludes the child for part or all of the school day, or even for an indefinite period of time.
- Out of School Suspension: Child is temporarily removed from classroom.
- Soft Expulsion: Program encourages family to voluntarily end their services.
- Expulsion: Permanent dismissal of child from the program in response to problem behavior.

https://sites.ed.gov/osers/2023/02/discipline-discussions-informal-removals-matter/

## How big a problem is this?

- 1. Expulsions and suspensions occur at a higher rate in preschool than in grades K-12 (3x the rate in public preschools, 13x the rate in private preschools)
- 2. Boys are expelled 4.5x more than girls
- 3. Black boys account for 9% of preschool enrollment but represented 23% of suspensions and 20% of expulsions.
- 4. Children with disabilities represented 24% of preschool enrollment but 34% of suspensions and 62% of expulsions.



Suspended a student

21%

Ministries: 34%

Centers: 29%

Childcare homes:

13%

Expelled a student

17%

Ministries: 29%

Centers: 25%

Childcare homes:

9%

Believe suspension/expulsion is effective

17%

Ministries: 8%

Centers: 8%

Childcare homes:

35%

2022 SPARK Professional Development Needs Assessment (n=1242)



# There was a need for stories

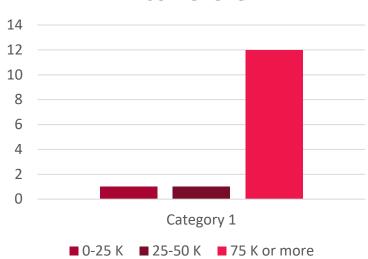
- IU recruited families who have a child under the age of 8 who has experienced one of the following at a childcare or preschool in Indiana:
  - Been sent home early more than once
  - Suspended
  - Expelled
  - Told they weren't a good fit for the program (soft expulsion)
- Recruitment via Facebook, Instagram, email listservs for families/parenting
- 14 families responded and met the criteria



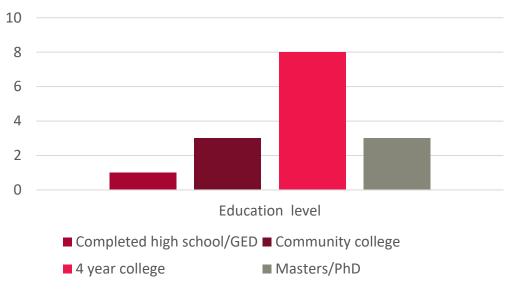
# Sample

Age of Mothers Interviewed: 31-35 Years Old: 6 families
Over 35 Years Old: 8 families

#### Income level



#### **Education level**



#### Mothers:

All White

#### Children:

- 14 White,
- 3 More than one race

If THIS sample struggled (which they did), imagine the challenges families from marginalized groups must experience.



## Disability status of sample

#### Children:

- Yes-12
- No-2

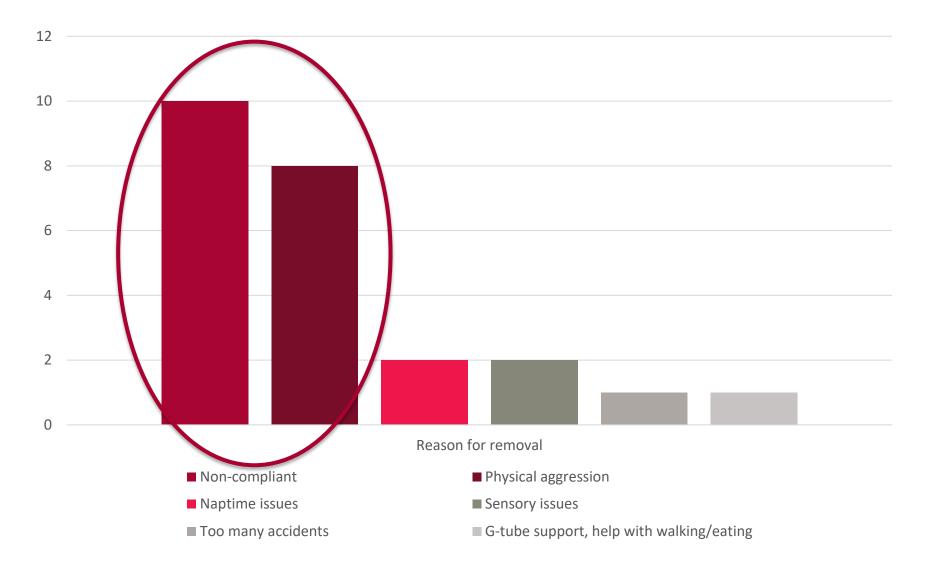
# Children receiving IFSP/IEP services at the time of removal:

- Yes-9
- No-5

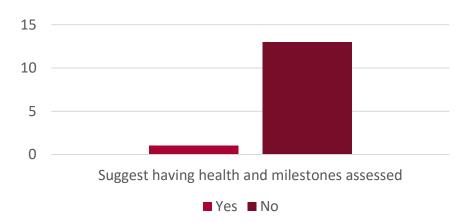
#### **Mothers:**

- Yes-5
- No-9

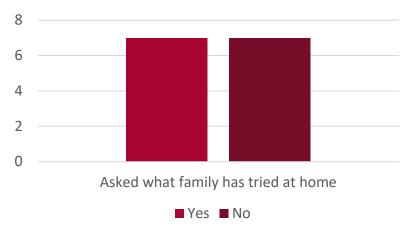
## Reasons for removal



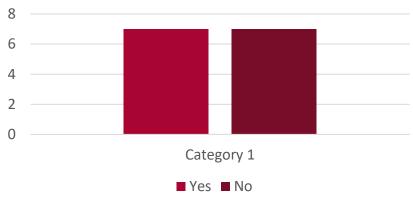
# Program suggested that child's health and developmental milestones assessed



# Program asked family what they have tried at home



# Program communicated what they are trying in the classroom



- Other things some programs tried:
- Behavior chart
- Implemented a calm-down area
- Allowed child to bring comfort items from home
- Used re-direction
- Suggested First Steps
- Did some observation
- Tried being more flexible
- Tried sensory items

### Communication

Families reported varied communication with programs, from 1 to 90+.

- Most families reported having multiple communications with programs before expulsion
  - Communication included incident reports, emails/texts/phone calls, meetings with teachers and directors

Yet, the top answer when families were asked what they wished programs would have done differently:

#### Communication!

- 13 out of 14 mothers stated they wished that the communication could have been different...
  - Direct, Two-way, Cooperative; more interest in problem-solving, less focus on policy and documentation, strength-based, compassionate



## Family quotes: communication

"They were good at writing reports so that they looked like they did everything they needed to do. When I'd pick him up, I'd ask if they did everything they said they would try, and they said, 'It happened so fast, we didn't have time,' but by the time they wrote the reports, they had put in all the strategies. So, I didn't trust them anymore."

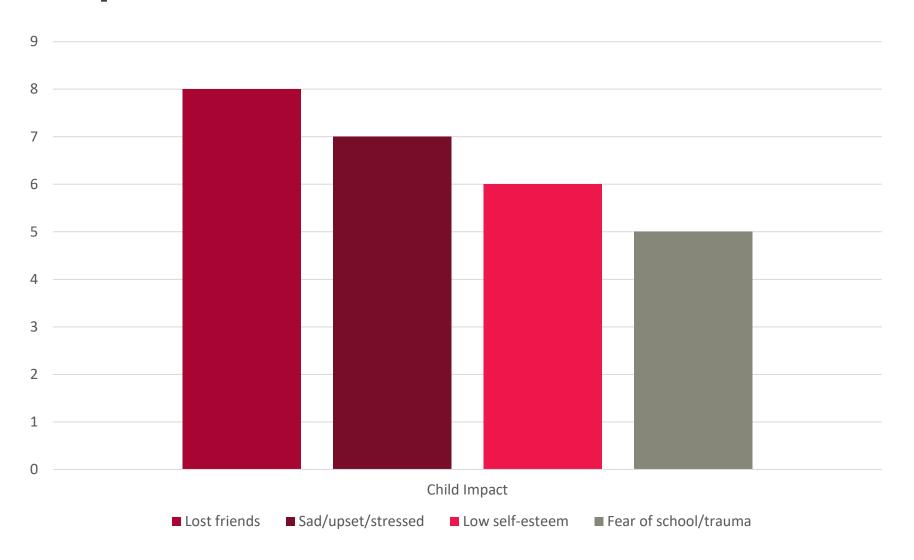
"I sent suggestions but got no response. The director would send a huge list of everything that had happened but never responded to my messages. And we never got positive messages or photos like other parents got."

"I wish there could have been more two-way communication. It didn't appear cooperative. We didn't get information or responses about what they were doing or how it was going. There was no spirit of communication. We didn't get information about what the process is/expectation."

## **Quotes from families: child impact**

- 1. "I think it made him sad, embarrassed. He knows that he 'got kicked out' He feels like a 'bad kid' but he can't articulate why."
- 2. "It was his fault as a kid."
- 3. "He didn't understand why he wasn't going to school or he'd cry that he was in trouble when he had to go there. I knew he wasn't happy."
- 4. "He didn't understand why the teachers didn't want to be around him. When he was kicked out, that hurt him emotionally-why can't I see my friends? It affected him socially because he lost his friends. He had friends, and then he didn't anymore."
- 5. "He has trouble feeling safe places. We were working to get him feeling safe. We had to start all over somewhere else. It was a developmental loss for me."

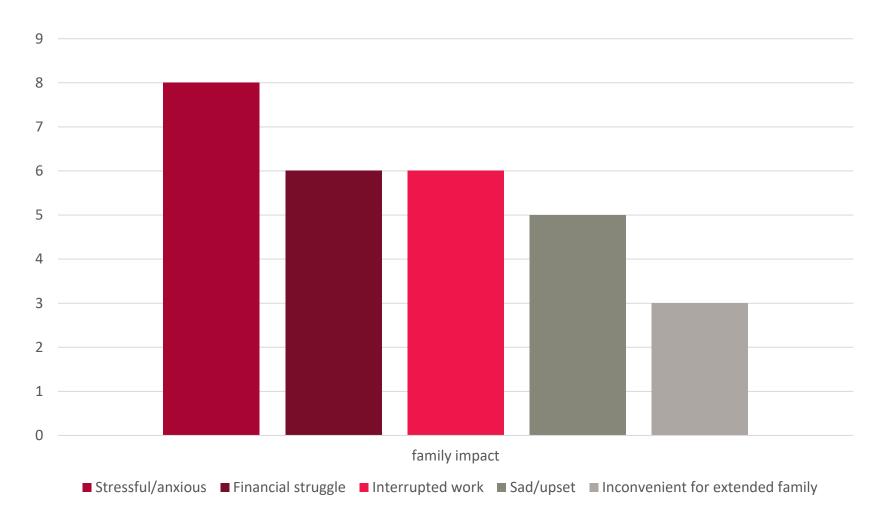
# Impact of removal on children



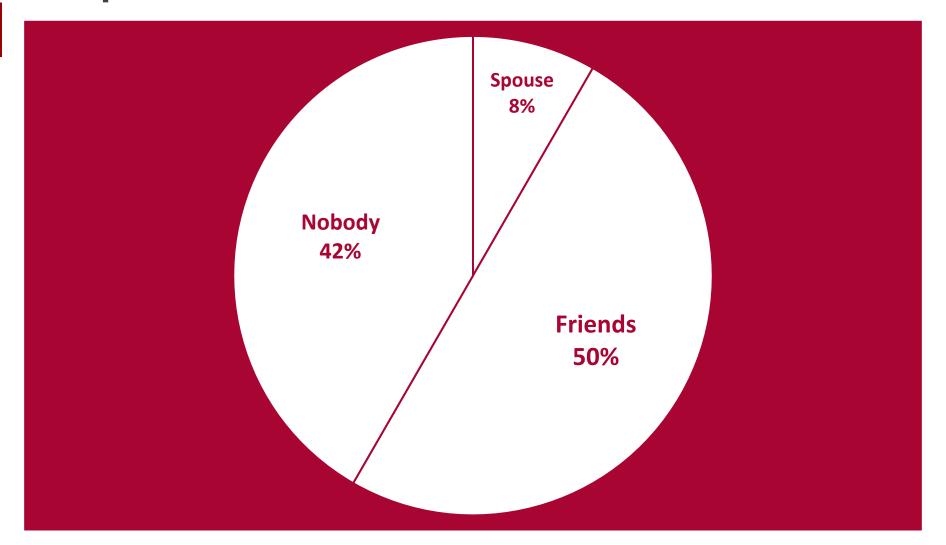
# Quotes from families: family impact

- 1. "I'm a bad parent. Blame was put on us. That is a horrible feeling. You question a lot of things. I thought I was going to lose my mind."
- 2. "Whenever I would get a call with that code I would panic. I had to take vacation to help find something else. I lost productivity. I was piecing together childcare. I lost a lot of trust in education systems."
- 3. "It's been challenging for everyone. Mental health-wise its been very difficult. It's hard on everything-my schedule, my marriage, my finances. I was having panic attacks."
- 4. "I work from home. I felt like I should be in the office, but I couldn't be, because I have a kid at home. I'm lucky to have a good employer who understood that. But try having a professional demeanor while a 3 year old is running around behind you."

# Impact of removal on family



# Who helped families to navigate this experience?

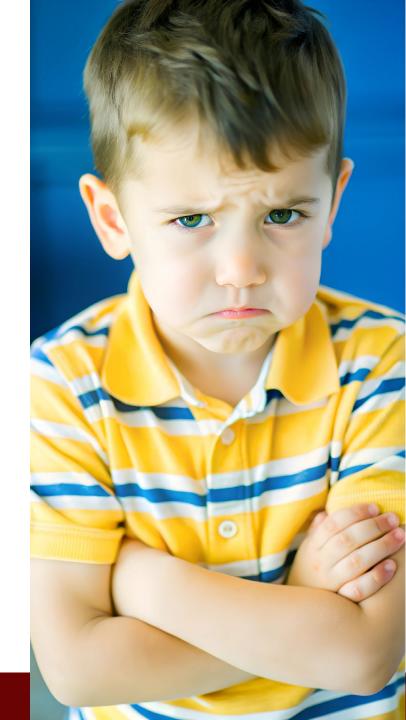


# Recommendations

## Remember Ryan?

- Naptime issues. Staff tried to make him lie down, take off shoes.
- Teacher would hug kids, not Ryan.
- School allowed Ryan to have comfort items from home.
- Ryan was suspended 23 times.
- Informally removed more than that.
- Expelled after six months.
- Mom initiated any communication that wasn't the office calling to have Ryan removed.

How could this be handled differently?



## **Recommendations:**

- Increase awareness of and capacity for developmental screening and referral
- Build support for programs to include children with disabilities and/or "challenging behaviors" successfully
- Transparent and objective policies
- Strong family partnerships



# What we know about screening now

- Only 1 out of 14 families stated that the program suggested developmental screening or evaluation.
- "It was a good thing. It got us toward a developmental pediatrician and getting an evaluation. But it could have been done better."
- What we know (SPARK 2022 PD Needs Assessment, n=1242):
  - 48% (n=601) reported using a developmental screening tool
  - 54% of those who use a tool use the ASQ-3



# Increase awareness of and capacity for developmental screening and referral

- 1. Improve monitoring to allow for improving targets for screening: <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html">https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html</a>
- 2. Invest in Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) and train staff <a href="https://agesandstages.com/">https://agesandstages.com/</a>
- 3. Indiana Learning Paths SPARK! Ages & Stages
  Questionnaires®: An Introduction to ASQ®SE-2: Social-Emotional



# Build supports for programs to successfully include children with disabilities

Here is what families sometimes hear from childcare programs:

- "We are not a special education school."
- "They explicitly stated they didn't know what to do."
- "He is not the first to be let go due to Autism. This center has a waitlist. We are in a childcare desert, so there is always a waitlist. There is no incentive to accommodate."
- "My mom told me to call Childcare Answers. They told me I'd have to interview all the programs to see if they deal with kids with disabilities."
- "Behavior is communication. I wish people would understand that. Don't look at my child like he is a bad child. He is struggling and needs help. My autism helps me to understand what he needs. But it also makes change hard for me, so getting those phone calls felt catastrophic."

# Build support for programs to successfully include children with disabilities

- Systems must invest in building inclusive practices
  - Training on how to handle challenging behavior and what inclusion looks like
  - Support for teaching staff





Webinar Resources

**Decision Tree** 

Language Project

Family Resources

We are excited to share an ongoing professional development opportunity with you! The Early Childhood Center (ECC) created a free four-part webinar series, **What it Takes to Implement Effective Preschool Inclusive Services**, open to all early education providers and administrators. It addresses evidence-based practices proven to effectively include children who are at risk or have disabilities in early education settings.

## **Indiana Learning Path Resources**

#### **Indiana Learning Paths**

- Planning Your Physical Environment to Reduce Challenging Behaviors
- Preventing Expulsion Series
- Behavior Observation and Support Planning: Part 1 Observing Behavior in Your Learning Environment
- Challenging Behavior Reveal the Meaning
- Reframing and Responding to Behaviors that Challenge You
- Managing Challenging Behaviors that Escalate
- Managing Challenging Behavior in Child Care Settings
- Infancy Onward: Helping Parents Develop Skills that Support Social and Emotional Development
- Strengthen Your Emotional Well-Being: Self-Regulation Techniques to Navigate Difficult Situations

Flip It! from the Center for Resilient Children



# **Support for Teaching Staff**

- Develop and use supports within the admin team
- Support Staff Reflection:
  - In staff meetings-allow it to happen, provide tools
  - Build a culture where reflection can happen in the lounge, dropins with colleagues



## De escalation Preferences Form for Teachers

D	ate:	https://sde	e.ok.gov/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/De-
		Escalation	Preferences.pdf
1. It's helpful for us to be aware of the things that can help you feel better when you're having a hard time. Have any of the following ever worked for you? We may not be able to offer all these alternatives, but I'd like us to work together to figure out how we can best help you.			
0	Listening to music.	0	Playing a computer game.
	Reading a newspaper/book.	0	Using ice on your body.
	Sitting by the nurses' station/principal's offic	e, etc.	Breathing exercises.
0	Watching TV.		Putting your hands under running water.
	Talking with a peer.		Going for a walk with staff.
	Walking the halls.		Lying down with a cold facecloth.
	Talking with staff.		Wrapping up in a blanket.
	Calling a friend.		Using a weighted vest.
	Having your hand held.		Voluntary time out in a quiet room.
	Calling your therapist.		Voluntary time out (anywhere specific?):
	Getting a hug.		
	Pounding some clay.		
	Punching a pillow.		Other:
	Physical exercise.		

Writing in your diary/journal.

# Support Staff Reflection

- Questions to consider:
  - Are your expectations realistic for the child age and development?
  - Are your expectations realistic for what you know about that child?
  - Are you regulated? Do you know how to get regulated at school?
  - What kind of help would be most useful when you are struggling with a child's behavior?



# WHY DOES MY CHILD'S BEHAVIOR TRIGGER ME?

You have unrealistic expectations of parenting.

You're overworked, overscheduled, and overwhelmed.

You're worried people will judge you.

You feel out of control.

It causes you to question your ability to parent. It activates feelings and emotions from the past.

Your child reminds you of yourself or the very things that you don't like about yourself.

You feel unsupported and alone in your parenting.

You feel
distrespected and
take their actions or
lack of action
personally.



@MOTHERHOODREDEFINED.CO

## When staff is struggling with child behavior:

- Teachers know that school culture allows them to request help without admonishment
- Teachers know they can request breaks to regulate, even if it requires admin support, no questions asked
- During breaks, teacher are allowed to do something they've identified as calming with no judgement





i've shifted away from the "always put yourself first," and moved into "remember yourself always." there will be moments when situations ask you to consider more than just yourself. but you can always remember and take care of you.

Illustration: Danny McAlindon

# Build support for programs to successfully include children with disabilities: Part 2

Take advantage of existing professional development offerings

- Pyramid Model
- Universal Design for Learning
- Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

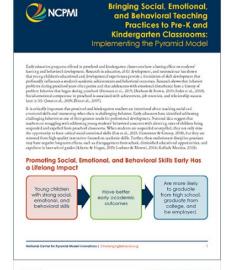


#### Link to this accordion





secondary level of the teaching



Bringing Social, Emotional, and
Behavioral Teaching Practices to
Pre-K and Kindergarten
Classrooms: Implementing the



PDF FACT SHEET

Definition of Social-Emotional

Development

This fact sheet reviews the definition of social-emotional



behavior have a significant risk of

Challenging Behavior

Facts About Young Children with

Young children with challenging

www.challengingbehavior.org/pyramid-model/overview/resources







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SPARK is now offering Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) services to child care providers in Bartholomew, Boone, Brown, Decatur, Hendricks, Jackson, Jennings, Johnson, Marion, Monroe, Montgomery, and Shelby Counties. This prevention-based service pairs a mental health consultant with families and adults who work with infants and young children in the places they learn and grow. Services include:







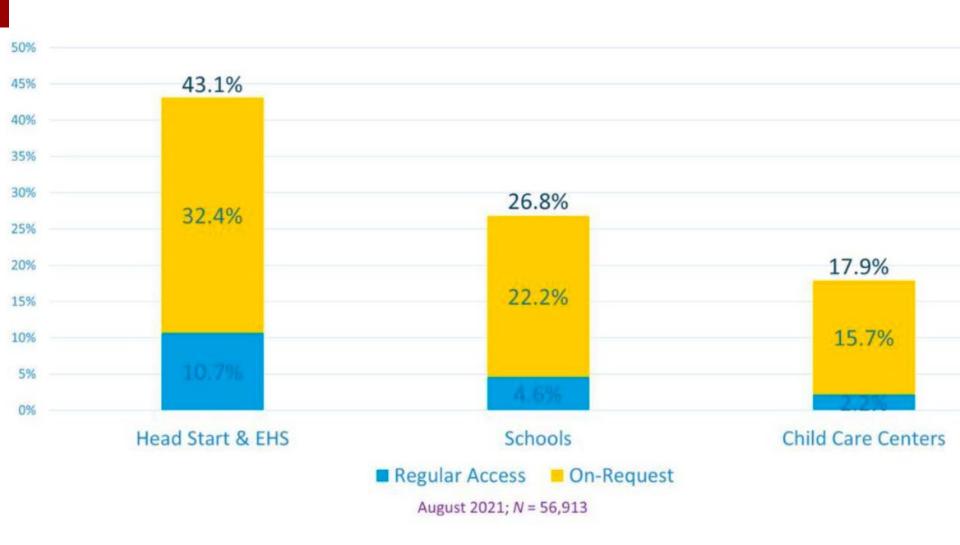
Weekly Office Hours On-Site Consultation

Connect with Local Support

## What to expect:

Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) is a specialized service that provides support and guidance to caregivers, professionals who work with young children (birth to age eight), and highly trained licensed or license-eligible professionals who specialize in development, behavior, and mental wellness. The goal of IECMHC is to

## **IECMH Consultation**



## Transparent and objective policies

- 1. Establish developmentally appropriate social emotional and behavioral health promotion practices and discipline and intervention procedures.
- 2. Clearly *and frequently* communicate these practices to all staff and families and use them when making decisions.
- 3. Establish expulsion and suspension policies, communicate them and use them.
- 4. Set goals and review data regularly. Samples include:
  - Provide PD to all staff in one year, ensure that 50% of teachers have access to consultants and/or specialists in two years, and ensure that all lead teachers have access to consultants/specialists in three years.
  - Adopt a program-wide approach to behavior (e.g., Pyramid)
  - Reduce the total # of suspensions/expulsions by 50% in one year, eliminate all with exceptions only in extraordinary cases, in two years



## OECOSL Suspension and Expulsion Policy Guidance for Programs

Indiana early childhood education programs that are eligible to accept Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) vouchers are required to have a policy on suspension and expulsion—and that policy must be clearly communicated to families before enrollment.

The policy must promote positive social and emotional growth and should include age appropriate positive behavior supports. It should limit—or eliminate altogether—the use of expulsion, suspension and other disciplinary practices that center on excluding children.

The program's policy must include the following information:

- How teachers will provide a purposeful, engaging environment that represents and supports cultural diversity and the different stages of child development.
- How classroom environments encourage children's sense of self, help with self-regulation, supports for conflict resolution and relationship building.
- 3 How teachers will support children's social and emotional development by helping them understand their own (and others') feelings, regulate and express their emotions appropriately, build relationships and support positive interactions with others in group settings.
- 4 How the program will access SPARK Learning Lab (or appropriate support organization/internal resource, e.g., school counselor) for coaching and professional development on positive social/emotional and behavioral development to ensure children's developmental needs are being met.
- The process for engaging in prompt family collaboration regarding a child's behavior, including solutions that have worked at home or in other settings.

- The process to support the family in identifying agencies for services including but not limited to:
  - a. Supports to address challenging behaviors
  - b. Early childhood mental health consultations
  - c. Part C early intervention (First Steps)
  - d. Part B intervention (preschool special education)
- How teachers will be supported through job embedded professional learning around implicit bias and distinguishing concerning behaviors from developmentally appropriate behaviors.
- How educators will collect and analyze information on suspensions and expulsions that are occurring in their early education environment and set goals to limit or prohibit such disciplinary actions in the future.
- How exclusionary processes will be used as a last resort.
   Exclusionary measures should only be taken when
  a serious safety threat exists and can't be addressed
  with reasonable modifications and/or the use of positive behavioral supports.

https://www.in.gov/fssa/ carefinder/files/Suspensi on and Expulsion Policy Guidance for Programs .pdf

https://www.in.gov/fssa/carefinder/files/IN Suspension -Expulsion Checklist.pdf

A child cannot be expelled due to behavioral challenges unless the procedures outlined in the suspension and expulsion policy have been followed. The suspension and expulsion policy must clearly define the steps that must be followed when a child engages in challenging behaviors that cannot be resolved using ordinary classroom strategies. For support or assistance creating this policy, please reach out to SPARK Learning Lab at <a href="http://indianaspark.com/">http://indianaspark.com/</a>.

# Strong Family-School Partnerships

- How are you building relational trust with families, from the beginning, so that when challenges arise, there is a foundation for difficult conversations?
- Welcoming environment
- Initial connections with teachers (parentteacher home visits? Phone calls?
   Questions about hopes and dreams?
- On-going communications-individualized, strength-based
- Use your existing routines—be clear about your purpose



## **Resources for Families**

- 1. Have resources ready to send or give to parents to back up any policies and procedures you have in place.
- 2. Offer educational information, training, and collaborative support for parents to help them navigate their child's challenging behavior at home in a way that mimics classroom techniques.
- 3. Ask what resources \*they\* may have accessed that you should know about



### **Resources for Families**

INSOURCE



Indiana Family to Family (INF2F)



CDC: Learn the Signs. Act Early (Milestone Tracker app)







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### References

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- 2. Zeng, S., Pereira, B., Larson, A., Corr, C. P., O'Grady, C., & Stone-MacDonald, A. (2021). Preschool suspension and expulsion for young children with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 87(2), 199-216.
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- 4. Chow, K. A., Gaylor, E., Grindal, T., Tunzi, D., Wei, X., & Tiruke, T. (2021). Associations of teacher characteristics with preschool suspensions and expulsions: Implications for supports. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 129, 106162.