



Position Statement on Challenging Behavior and Young Children – Executive Summary

Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
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What is challenging behavior and how is it defined?

- Challenging behavior is defined as “any repeated pattern of behavior...that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with the child’s optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers and adults” (Smith & Fox, 2003, p. 6).

Why is DEC taking a stand?

- Challenging behavior often can interfere with the development of social-emotional competence. Conversely, children with low social-emotional competence may develop challenging behavior as a way to communicate their needs.
- Punitive practices don’t teach children needed social and communicative behaviors. Additionally, punitive practices, such as corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion disproportionately affect young children of color.
- Professionals and families need positive strategies to support young children’s development and prevent challenging behavior.

Who is this for?

- This statement offers guidance to professionals and families as they support young children whose behavior interferes with or is at risk of interfering with their learning, development, or engagement.

DEC’s Position and Recommendations

With the many benefits of quality inclusion in mind, it is exciting to note that the CCDBG provisions related to children with disabilities and inclusion are aligned with and designed to support high quality inclusion as defined in the DEC/NAECY statement. Each of the provisions, taken together, support policies and practices that advance access, participation, and supports for children, families and providers.

We believe:

1. Families are essential to promoting social-emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior. When there are strong relationships, family and professional teams are better able to understand the child’s behavior across contexts and successfully implement interventions.

2. Positive approaches should be used to prevent and address challenging behavior. We must eliminate punitive practices such as suspension and expulsion which disproportionately affect young children of color, especially young African-American boys.
3. Professional development and technical assistance are essential to ensuring meaningful inclusion and implementation of evidence-based practices for children with challenging behavior.
4. Culturally sustaining practices—those that acknowledge, value, and support children’s home cultures and help children develop a healthy identity—are essential to healthy child development.
5. Collaboration is essential to promoting social-emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior.
6. A comprehensive assessment process is needed for children from infancy through early elementary years, and this process should begin with universal screening for social-emotional competencies, mental health, and challenging behavior.
7. High-quality early childhood programs and services are crucial to promoting social-emotional development and meaningfully impacting the lives of young children.
8. To support young children’s social-emotional development and effectively address challenging behavior, the field must promote the use of culturally responsive, evidence-based practices in the context of program-wide, multi-tiered systems of support.

Access the full position statement at:

<http://www.dec-sped.org/position-statements>

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