

# The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

## ACTING UP, ACTING OUT: When Young Children Are Put Out of Programs

**I**magine that you get a phone call from your four-year-old's child care or Pre-K program Director. The Director tells you that your son is "out-of-control" – again. The Director goes on to say that if this behavior happens one more time, your son will have to leave the program. What would you do?



long-term success in school? What does it say about how adults view children's behavior?

There are many possible negative outcomes to a child being expelled from child care or school. It often results in:

- Loss of work time for parents.
- Stress for the family.
- Trouble finding another child care program or school.
- The child feeling unwanted and confused.
- Parents feeling rejected.
- Parents not knowing where to turn for help.

This situation is real for many parents. It happens every day. A recent 2005 study from Yale University reveals that many prekindergarten children are expelled from their programs due to problem behaviors (the behaviors in this study were never identified)\*. In fact, more Pre-K children are expelled than children in public schools from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Most Pre-K programs are designed to help children develop the skills they need to do well in school. Many of these programs are targeted for children who are behind in basic learning skills. It is disturbing that children as young as three, four and five are being turned away from programs because of behavior concerns. Having a child expelled from child care or school is very hard on parents and very damaging for their children. It also raises a lot of important questions. What does this say about these children's

### What are Problem Behaviors?

Problem behaviors in children are ones that adults find hard to handle. Usually these behaviors are ones that distract others, need a lot of attention or intervention, or that may cause harm to others. They can range from children biting, hitting, spitting, being overly active, and throwing things, to hurting others or themselves. Some of these behaviors may be age-appropriate, meaning that certain age groups are known to act these ways. For example, many two- or three-year-olds may hit another child when they do not want to share a toy. At these ages, children are not good at sharing and often do not use words to express their feelings, so they may hit.

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\*The problem behaviors were not identified in this report. For the full report, *Prekindergartners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Systems* by Walter Gilliam, Ph.D., Yale University Child Study Center, go to [www.ffcd.org](http://www.ffcd.org).

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PROBLEM BEHAVIORS IN CHILDREN ARE ONES THAT ADULTS FIND HARD TO HANDLE. USUALLY THESE BEHAVIORS ARE ONES THAT DISTRACT OTHERS, NEED A LOT OF ATTENTION OR INTERVENTION, OR THOSE THAT MAY CAUSE HARM TO OTHERS.

Child care providers, teachers, and parents who have a good knowledge of child development are often better able to handle behavior problems. It is important that adults have expectations that fit the child's age. Preschool children are very active. Some are more active than others. Sometimes a child may do something because they know they will get more attention when they do. For many children, any kind of attention is good attention.



When you look at a child's behavior, remember to always look at the behavior and label it – not the child. There is no such thing as a problem child or a bad child. The first thing to look at regarding behavior is what may be causing or influencing the behavior. A child's behavior is often a response to something that has just happened either to the child, around the child, or a reaction to what the child thinks may happen. Sometimes behavior can be a response to something that happened the day before. Every

child is different.

## WHEN LOOKING AT A PROBLEM BEHAVIOR, FIND OUT:

- If there is a lot of open space in the program or classroom (could encourage running or other active behavior).
- If there are clear program or classroom interest areas for children and they know what to do in them (if not, could encourage wandering or becoming frustrated)
- Everything that happens around that behavior. For example: When does the behavior happen? Does it happen all the time or only sometimes? What happens before and after the behavior?
- The group size and ratios of children and providers to see if there are enough time and attention being devoted to each child.
- If the child is in the best kind of setting for him or her.

## What Influences Behavior?

Everything and anything can influence behavior: what's around you, how you feel, something someone says to you, things that are going on in your life – all can be important influences on how you behave or what you do. This is true for everyone – children and adults.

## What Parents and Providers Can Do

Parents and providers who work together as a team are a child's best chance for succeeding. It is important to note that usually before any child is dismissed from a program or center, there often will have been several instances of the child displaying problem behavior. That means there is usually time and an opportunity to find out why the child is behaving that way and to come up with solutions to try. It is best to prevent any kind of problems that may occur and the best way to do that is to know your child and know what kind of setting is best for your child.

Here are some steps that parents can take when there is a behavior concern.

- **Talk to your child care provider.** If concerns around your child's behavior are brought to your attention, or if you notice any worrisome behaviors at home, talk to your child's provider about them.
- **Share what you see and how you respond** to that behavior at home.
- **Work with your child care provider on solutions.** Experienced providers are usually well trained and have been around lots of different chil-

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## EARLY INTERVENTION IS SO IMPORTANT IN HELPING EACH CHILD ACHIEVE HIS OR HER HIGHEST POTENTIAL.

dren. They have seen and heard just about everything and may have some helpful suggestions on your child's behavior. Providers also may know of people or places that may have resources that could help.

- **Come up with a plan of action** if the provider or center is considering dismissing your child from the program. Some behavior problems take time to address and it may take time before the behavior gets better or goes away. If you need child care, and it's a possibility that your child may be put out of the program, start looking for other arrangements or backups.



or other reasons. However, some behaviors could be the result of developmental delays, or physical or emotional conditions that need a professional's help.

For parents, it can be quite scary to think that your child may have developmental issues. However, the good news is that the sooner any delays or concerns are evaluated and addressed, the better it is for your child. Early intervention is so important in helping each child achieve his or her highest potential. If you have

any doubts or questions, ask your child's doctor, and find out what early intervention services are in your area.

Remember, you are not alone. Many parents have gone through or are going through the same types of concerns, and there are many programs and services available to help you and your child.

### Other Help is Available

Some children's behaviors are age-appropriate, whether you find them pleasant or not. Some are a result of what's going on in their environment, illness,

## THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOOKING AT BEHAVIOR

- **Child's development:**

Children's behavior often indicates where they are in their growth on all levels – physically, emotionally, mentally. Regular visits to the doctor can determine if the child is growing and developing similarly to other children in his age range.

- **Child's family life:** Things

that go on at home affect children's behavior. Often children are affected by a family member's illness, a parent's job problem, a new baby, a move, or of course separation or divorce.

- **Child's physical well-being:** Many children have

physical things going on that will make them crabby and act out. Check out to see if the child with problem behaviors:

- sleeps enough;
- eats a well balanced diet without too many sugary foods;
- has iron or protein deficiencies; or
- is sick—any kind of illness could have behavioral effects.



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## For More Information

- **PBS Parents:** [www.pbs.org/parents](http://www.pbs.org/parents), Public Broadcasting Service, 1320 Braddock Place Alexandria, VA 22314.
- **Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior,** <http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/index.html>.
- **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning,** <http://www.csefel.uiuc.edu/>, Phone: (217) 333-4123 or (877) 275-3227.
- **Positive Parenting, University of Minnesota Extension Service,** <http://www.extension.umn.edu/projects/positiveparenting/index.html>.
- **ZERO TO THREE,** [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org) (parents section), National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, 2000 M Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 638-1144.



- **Child Care Aware,** [www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org), 1-800-424-2246.

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