

SPEAK OUT

Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Inc.

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Focus on Behavior

All too often, parents and teachers deal with the behavior of children by focusing on rules and punishments for not obeying them. We try to define “good” and “bad” behavior and set out in simple terms how children should act. We rely on lists of do’s and don’ts and discipline and take the view that a child who misbehaves *is* a problem, not that he or she *has* a problem. Although establishing rules and consequences is important, teaching children to behave appropriately involves much more than this.

More effective approaches recognize that defining what is appropriate and what isn’t is not so straightforward. The definition depends on many factors: on values and expectations; on who sets the rules and to whom they apply; and on the context—the where and when—of the behavior. Sitting quietly may be required by grandma at the dinner table, appreciated by friends at the movies, expected by a teacher during a lecture, or considered unacceptable by the same teacher during a class discussion.

In addition, effective approaches put more emphasis on supporting appropriate behaviors than on reacting to inappropriate ones. Such approaches recognize that knowing how and being able to behave appropriately requires certain skills, such as the ability to concentrate, to understand and follow directions, to solve problems, to build relationships, and to value one’s own strengths. Children need support to acquire these skills, and some children, including those with disabilities, may need more support than others.

Certainly, not all children with disabilities have a hard time behaving appropriately. But some children are more likely to have problems with behavior because of the nature of their disability—for example, their impulsiveness, an inability to think ahead and grasp consequences, difficulty controlling emotions, or trouble reading social cues, such as other people’s facial expressions. Others cannot learn how to act suitably just by watching other people or being told once; they need direct instruction. For others, the pressures of academic failure, peer rejection, or feelings of being different and isolated make behaving appropriately difficult.

This issue of SPEAK OUT looks at some of the ways parents and schools can promote appropriate behaviors and address challenging ones. As is true in the home, successful approaches in school put more emphasis on support and prevention than on discipline, which deals with misconduct only after it has occurred. These approaches consider the link between learning and behavior and focus on creating safe environments that promote not only academic success but also the social and emotional well-being of all children, including those with special needs. To create such environments, families, educators, and community members must work together. As Dr. Lawrence Kutner, a psychologist specializing in families and children, wrote, “Children learn and remember at least as much from the context of the classroom as from the content of the coursework.” We need to make sure they are learning to treat others with respect and to recognize that they all have something positive to contribute.

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**The Connecticut Parent
Advocacy Center, Inc.**

is a statewide nonprofit organization that offers information and support to parents of children with disabilities and the professionals who work with them. The center is staffed primarily by parents of children with disabilities who assist other parents in understanding how to participate more effectively in their children's education. A range of services are available, including telephone consultation; workshops and in-service presentations for parents, schools, and service providers; a website; and a lending library of books, CDs, videotapes, and DVDs.

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SPEAK OUT

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Jake's Story

I tell a lot of stories about my son Jake and the adventures we have with his interesting behavioral issues. It can be tricky figuring out the function of any behavior, but some are more complex than others. One story I tell often at CPAC's Positive Behavioral Interventions training is about Jake starting his day in the classroom. When he was in elementary school, the first thing in the morning Jake would go into the busy classroom, hang up his coat, hang up his backpack, and take out his homework folder. He then proceeded to plow through his classmates in an effort to hand in his homework. He did this every day—to the dismay of the classroom teacher and his friends. Nothing they did worked to change this behavior.

We finally brought in a behaviorist, who suggested using a visual schedule to keep Jake on task. The team shared that they had already done that, but it had not worked. The behaviorist asked to see it. He read, "Hang up your coat. Hang up your backpack. Take out your homework folder. Hand in your homework."

He then asked, "Where does it say, 'Stand in line'?" He pointed out that Jake was not lacking in compliance but in actuality was exceptionally compliant with this list of expectations. The next day the teacher added the instruction "Stand in line" before "Hand in your homework," and they never had this particular issue again.

Most behaviors are not so easily sorted out, but this is a great illustration of how effective the right support can be for a child. Often the key to improving challenging behaviors is to teach the expected behavior. We tend to tell children what they should not do but often fail to tell them what would be the correct thing to do in any given situation.

—Jane Hampton-Smith



Statewide Supports for Families

The following is a sample of organizations in Connecticut that provide information and support to families and professionals on issues related to behavior, social skills, and the emotional and mental health of children. Additional listings are available on CPAC's website, www.cpacinc.org. Click on the Resources section for access to our resource directory, *Connecting Connecticut*, or for a list of parent support groups in our state.

Child Guidance Clinics provide outpatient psychiatric services for children. To locate a clinic in your area, go to www.infoline.org/InformationLibrary/mentalhealth.asp and click on Child Guidance Clinics.

Families United for Children's Mental Health offers toll-free telephone consultation (866-439-0788), support groups, and family educational programs and facilitates family involvement in improving the children's mental health system. Call 860-343-7330, or visit www.familiesunited.org.

Youth Services Bureaus offer programs and services to help youth develop positively and function as responsible members of their communities. For contact information for the bureau in your town or city, visit www.ctyouthservices.org or check your local telephone listings.

Behavioral Interventions

The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) highlight the importance of behavioral supports that focus on understanding why a child misbehaves and making positive changes in the child's environment in order to improve his or her behavior. When the behavior of a student who receives special education "impedes his or her own learning or that of others," IDEA requires the Planning and Placement Team to consider including "positive behavior interventions, strategies and supports" in the student's Individualized Education Program. These interventions emphasize increasing desirable behaviors instead of simply decreasing undesirable ones through punishment.

In order to teach appropriate behavioral skills to a child with challenging behaviors, parents and teachers need to understand when and where the problem behaviors are likely to happen and what purpose they serve for the child. The process of gathering information to help determine why problem behaviors occur is called Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA). Data may be collected from interviews with the child and parents, observations of the child in different settings, reports from teachers and other professionals, and the child's records. The results of an FBA are used to develop a positive behavioral intervention plan. This plan usually includes:

- changes in classrooms or other environments to reduce or eliminate problem behaviors
- strategies to replace problem behaviors with appropriate behaviors
- supports for the child to use the appropriate behaviors.



A positive behavioral intervention plan is not a plan to determine what happens to a student who violates a school rule or code of conduct. Instead, it aims to stop or reduce a child's problem behaviors before punishment becomes necessary and to teach the child what to do instead. The use of this type of intervention—along with other supports such as violence prevention programs, social skills instruction, and school-based mental health services—benefits not only the individual student but also the school as a whole by improving school safety and climate. Systemwide changes in a school's or district's approach to behavioral intervention and discipline, including collaboration with families and community agencies, can have a significant impact: schools implementing effective strategies have reported reductions in office discipline referrals of 20 to 60 percent. This results in increased time students are engaged in learning and improved academic performance for all.

Sources:

"Fair and Effective Discipline for All Students: Best Practice Strategies for Educators," National Association of School Psychologists, www.nasponline.org; "Functional Behavioral Assessment and Positive Interventions: What Parents Need to Know," PACER Center, www.pacer.org



Parent Support at School...

Raising a child with a disability is challenging. Raising a child with a disability who also has behavioral needs is even more challenging. Parents may find themselves among competing approaches to handling concerns about behavior. Planning ahead for a school meeting about their child's behavioral needs can help parents explain their own ideas about the best way to help their child in addition to listening to the ideas of others. Parents may want to consider the following tips:

- View behavior as an opportunity to teach—As you prepare for a school meeting, consider why your child may have problem behaviors. Behavior is communication, and all people develop a style of communication that works for them. Problem behavior is negative communication that someone uses to meet a need, even if the behavior results in punishment.
- Understand that punishment doesn't teach new skills—Historically, schools have viewed problem behavior as disobedience, and punishment has often been the response. Punishment, however, is only a temporary way to stop the behavior. It does not teach new skills. If your child is not taught new skills, the behavior will more than likely continue, because it works for the child.
- Keep in mind that teaching positive behavioral skills is a process—One of the best ways to help your child learn new behavioral skills is to adopt a team approach with school professionals. Together, consider your child's needs and develop a program based on them. After you agree to a program, your responsibility is to support the teacher and the program and to monitor the effectiveness of services in meeting your child's needs. If you do not agree with the decisions that are being made, it is your responsibility to speak up.
- Prepare for the school meeting—Bring a list that includes what is working well and areas of concern you want to discuss. Behavior and discipline are often emotionally charged topics, so it is helpful to have written notes. At the end of the meeting, ask for a review of what has been decided or confirmation of what you believe was agreed upon. Sometimes, who will do what needs to be specified as well. If there are any changes to your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP), ask for them to be sent to you in writing.

Questions for a Team Meeting

1. What are my child's strengths?
2. What are my child's needs?
3. What is the problem behavior?
4. Is there a relationship between my child's disability and his or her behavior?
5. What has worked in the past to stop the problem behavior? At home? In the community? In previous classes?
6. What has not worked to stop the problem behavior?
7. How does the environment affect my child's behavior?
8. What school-based supports might my child need to learn new behaviors?
9. Does the Planning and Placement Team need any more information to address my child's behaviors appropriately?
10. Does my child need a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) to help us determine why the behaviors are occurring?

Source:

"Planning for a Meeting about Your Child's Behavior Needs," PACER Center ACTion Sheet, www.pacer.org



And at Home

Troubling behaviors in young children can cause parents to feel frustration and anxiety. When a child has a hard time making or keeping friends or is frequently disciplined with a time-out or some other type of punishment at daycare or preschool, family activities and classroom routines are disrupted and the child may have difficulty learning. When they see their child struggling with social skills or behavior, parents may fear that their son or daughter will have a lifetime of problems unless they get some kind of help. Yet parents often do not know what to do to help their children. Sometimes there is no support. They do not know where to turn for help. Sometimes there is too much support. Friends and family members may offer advice that will only make the problem worse.

The following strategies are part of the Regional Intervention Program, a program designed to teach parents how to work with their children to improve behavior:

- State your expectations in advance—Sometimes a child misbehaves because he or she will not do what is expected. But other times a child acts inappropriately because he or she does not know what is expected. Whatever the situation, clearly explain to your child what your expectations are.
- Catch your child being good—When your child is being good, let him or her know it. Tell your child what he or she is doing right.
- Present limited reasonable choices—Children must be taught how to make decisions. They also must learn to accept the consequences of their decisions. Learning to take responsibility for your choices is hard and requires plenty of

support and practice. A good way to help is to offer your child a limited number of reasonable choices. Asking your child, “Would you like to have chicken or fish?” gives only two choices. But asking, “What would you like for dinner?” offers too many choices.

- Say “when”—“When you finish picking up, you may go outside” is a statement of fact. This gives your child a specific job to do. It also tells him or her what will happen when the job is finished. On the other hand, saying “Please finish picking up” is begging. “If you finish picking up, I’ll let you. . .” is bribing. And “If you don’t finish picking up, you can’t. . .” is threatening. Children do better when they are told exactly what to do and the consequences for doing what you ask.
- Stay in control of yourself—You can do two things when your child’s behavior is not acceptable. You can respond to the behavior, or you can ignore the behavior. If you must react, remember that less is usually best. Move quickly and calmly with a minimum of discussion. This will reduce the risk of making the behavior you want to discourage stronger.
- Set a good example—Conflicts will happen. It is better to resolve them than it is to ignore them. This is not always easy to do. One way to do this is to be a good example. When you have problems, look for solutions instead of just getting upset. Remember that it is more helpful to listen than to argue.

Source:
“Early Childhood Interventions,” Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, www.cecp.air.org

Resources:

CPAC offers materials to help parents and teachers understand and work with children with challenging behaviors, including information on Functional Behavioral Assessment and positive behavioral intervention plans. Contact us at 800-445-2722 or cpac@cpacinc.org for more information.

The **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning**, www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel, provides information and training materials on promoting young children’s social and emotional development and preventing and addressing challenging behavior. Their videotape “Promoting Social Emotional Competence” is available from CPAC’s lending library. Contact us for more information.

The **Center for Social and Emotional Education** is an organization that helps schools and families create environments that support social and emotional, as well as academic, learning. Visit their website at www.csee.net for family resources, including information on social and emotional developmental milestones and early warning signs of troubling behavior.

The **National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports** provides information and technical support to help school districts design effective behavioral and discipline systems needed for successful learning and social development of students. Visit their website at www.pbis.org.

Information on child and adolescent mental health is available from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**, www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov.



Dear Parent Advocate,

Last year my eight-year-old son was diagnosed with ADHD. He gets help from a special education teacher in the resource room and has a behavior plan to support him in the classroom. Yet his classroom teacher has suggested several times that I put my son on medication.

What should I do?

—Puzzled Parent

Dear Puzzled Parent,

It's great that your son is receiving support from the school. But state regulation prohibits "any school personnel from recommending the use of psychotropic drugs for any child." The decision to medicate your son is entirely yours as the parent. If you would like more information about medical interventions, you should consult with your son's pediatrician.

However, the teacher's suggestion to medicate your son indicates that the symptoms of his ADHD are still posing some challenges for him in the classroom. Speak with the teacher to determine what her specific concerns are. For example, has she noticed issues with your son's disorganization, distractibility, or restlessness?

Then request in writing a PPT meeting to review the concerns with the team and to determine what steps to take next to support your son appropriately. For example, does he need additional accommodations, such as breaks to allow movement or posting a daily schedule on his desk? Or would he benefit from an occupational therapy evaluation to identify possible underlying sensory issues that are causing problems? Ask that these steps be written into his Individualized Education Program (IEP).

For more information about how to help your son, please refer to the Connecticut ADHD Task Force "Report on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)." To request a copy, contact the State Education Resource Center at 800-842-8678, or view it online at www.ctserc.org/initiatives/teachandlearn.



Resources:

A number of books on ADHD, including *Making the System Work for Your Child with ADHD* and *Managing Teens with ADHD: Practical Tools & Strategies for Dealing with Difficult Behaviors*, are available from **CPAC's lending library**. For more information on borrowing books from CPAC, contact us at 800-445-2722 or cpac@cpacinc.org.

Identifying and Treating Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Resource for School and Home is available from the U.S. Department of Education. View it online at www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/adhd, or contact CPAC for a copy.

Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder provides information, advocacy, and support for individuals with ADHD and their families. Visit their website at www.chadd.org.

Information on ADHD and resources for families and professionals are available from the **National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities**, www.nichcy.org, and the **National Institute of Mental Health**, www.nimh.nih.gov.

Discipline Rules and Rights

All schools in Connecticut are required to maintain a code of conduct that outlines which types of student behavior are unacceptable and how students who engage in those behaviors will be disciplined. Students are required to follow school rules, but they also have certain rights under the law to be treated fairly. All students have the right to know what their school's rules are. If a student breaks a rule, state law limits the ways the student may be disciplined. In addition, students who receive special education services have further protections under state and federal laws that guarantee their right to receive a free appropriate public education.

In what ways may a school discipline a student?

- **Removal from the classroom**—A teacher may remove a student from the classroom if that student is deliberately causing a serious disruption of the work in the class. A student who is removed from the classroom must be taken to another part of the school building to remain for the rest of the classroom period, up to ninety minutes. Removal for ninety minutes or more must be considered a suspension.
- **Suspension**—A student may be suspended from school if he or she has seriously disrupted work in the classroom or school; violated a school rule or policy; or put himself or herself, other students, or school property in danger. In addition, a student may be suspended for conduct off school grounds if the conduct violated a school rule or policy and seriously disrupted work in the school. (See page 8 for information on Connecticut's new law on suspension.)
- **Expulsion**—A student who is expelled is not allowed to come to school or participate in any classroom or school activities for a specified time up to a maximum of one calendar year. Prior to expulsion, a student has the right to a hearing. A student may be expelled from school for any of the reasons listed for suspension. A student must face expulsion proceedings if he or she possesses a gun or other deadly weapon on school grounds or at a school activity; uses a firearm or other deadly weapon to commit a crime off school grounds; or sells or attempts to sell illegal drugs on or off school grounds.

What rights does a student have if he or she faces a disciplinary action?

Whenever a student is disciplined by a school official, the school must notify the student's parent or guardian within twenty-four hours of the disciplinary action and must explain the type of discipline and the reason for it. In addition, if a student is removed from the classroom more than twice in one week or more than six times in one school year, he or she has the right to meet with the

principal to discuss the reason for the removal. A student also has the right to meet with the principal before he or she is suspended. When a student faces expulsion, both the student and a parent or guardian have the right to receive written notice stating the specific reason for the proposed expulsion. The notice must include information about how to find local free or reduced rate legal services. The student has the right to a formal hearing, as well as the right to get copies of all documents relating to the proposed expulsion before the hearing takes place. A student under sixteen years of age must be offered an alternative educational program during the period of time he or she is expelled from school.

What additional protections are given to students who receive special education services?

If a student who receives special education services is removed from the classroom or suspended, a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting should be held. If the suspension is for more than ten days in a school year, or if the district is considering expulsion, a PPT meeting must be held. The PPT should determine whether the student's behavior is caused by his or her disability and whether the student's special education program is being properly implemented. The PPT may initiate a reevaluation of the student to help answer these questions. The law prohibits a school district from continually suspending or from expelling a special education student for behavior that is the result of the student's disability.

A parent who disagrees with the PPT's decision has the right to ask for a due process hearing by writing to the school district's director of special education and sending a copy of the letter to the State Department of Education Due Process Unit. The student should remain in his or her current placement until due process is completed.

Source:
"Rules, Regulations and Rights in School," Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut, www.larcc.org



Discipline News

A recent study by Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based policy and advocacy group, looked at the use of out-of-school suspensions to discipline K–12 students in Connecticut. The study found that suspensions are often overused and harm children who need the most help in school. The report also cites research on school discipline practices that indicates that overreliance on suspensions is not only ineffective but also can be counterproductive in terms of student behavior and educational outcomes. Some of the findings are:

- During the 2006–2007 school year, 7 percent of children were suspended.
- Nearly two-thirds of suspensions were for relatively minor offenses, such as skipping school and showing disrespect. Attendance violations, including truancy, were the second leading reason for suspensions.
- Across school districts, suspension rates ranged from 1 percent to 22 percent of students.
- Students in districts with the lowest socioeconomic indicators were nearly four times as likely to be suspended as students in other school districts.
- Compared with white students, black students were more than four times as likely, and Hispanic students more than three times as likely, to be suspended.
- Special education students were more than twice as likely to be suspended as their peers.

Source:

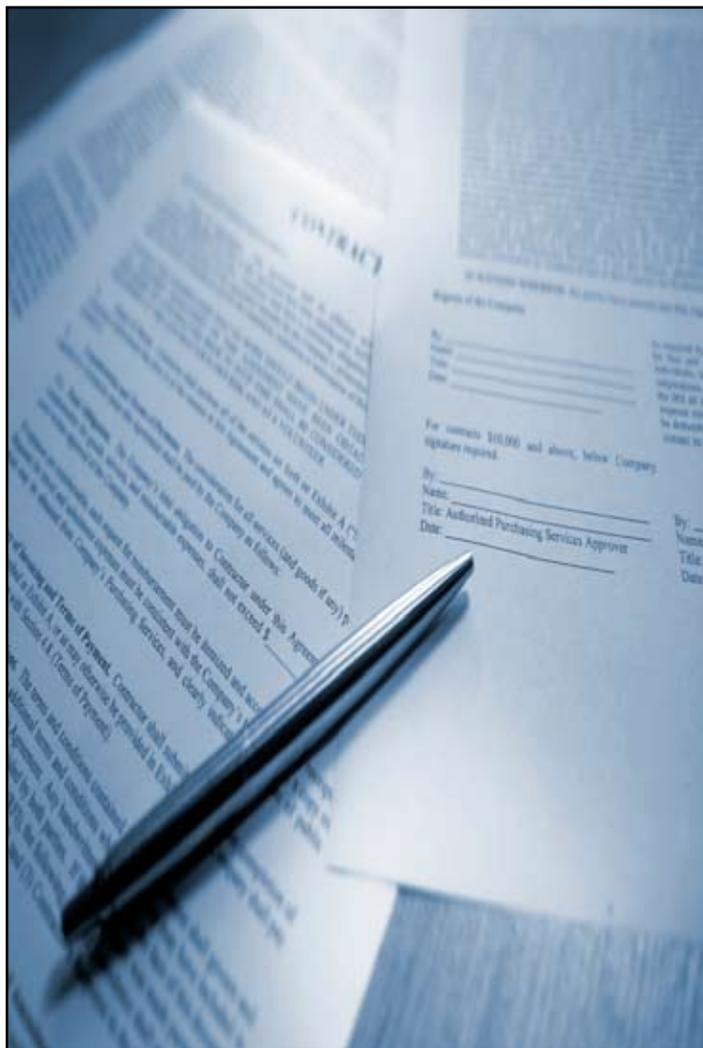
"Missing Out: Suspending Students from Connecticut Schools," by Taby Ali and Alexandra Dufresne, J.D., Connecticut Voices for Children, www.ctkidslink.org

NEW STATE LAW ON SUSPENSION

Connecticut's new law on school suspension takes effect in July 2009. Under this law, suspensions must take place in school unless school administrators determine that the suspended student poses such a danger to people or property or is so disruptive of the educational process that the suspension must be served outside the school. The law defines in-school suspension as exclusion from classroom activity but not from school and extends the maximum length of a suspension to ten school days in a row.

Students cannot be expected to follow rules they do not know about. State law requires schools to inform all students and their parents of the rules and policies on student conduct and discipline at least once a year (Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 10-233e). Parents who have not been informed of the code of conduct should contact their school's principal for information.

Parents of a child who qualifies for special education should also ensure that their child's ability to comply with the school's code of conduct is taken into account during the IEP process. At least annually, members of the Planning and Placement Team should discuss and determine whether the child's disability affects his or her ability to understand and follow the school's rules.



Parent Involvement

By getting involved in their school community, parents can help improve school safety and close discipline and achievement gaps. At school improvement, PTA, or school board meetings, parents can suggest that their school and district invest more in programs and services that help students avoid discipline problems and cope with personal issues that may cause disruptive behaviors. Some examples of these types of programs and services are:

- Alternative educational programs—educational programs that serve students who are more likely to succeed in a nontraditional setting or who have been excluded from the regular classroom for disciplinary reasons
- Counseling—assistance from professionals to help students overcome emotional and social problems that can interfere with learning
- Guidance services—individual and group counseling, parent-teacher conferences and consultation, and career and educational guidance
- Social work services—networking of appropriate home, school, and community services that address identified student problems.

Parents can also engage teachers, administrators, and school boards in discussions on how to ensure that in-school suspension (ISS) does not result in missed instruction and missed opportunities to correct behavior. In an effective ISS program, students are required to complete academic assignments as well as learn how to improve behavior and social skills. Characteristics of an effective program include providing students with tutors, requiring teachers to supply current assignments each day, setting aside time for individual counseling, keeping track of progress in behavior modification, following up with teachers to ensure that behavior is improving, and involving parents in deterring unacceptable behavior and supporting program goals.



Think Sheet for a Student in ISS

1. What behavior led to this consequence?
2. What were you thinking or feeling at the time?
3. What did you want to happen?
4. Did you get what you wanted?
5. What did it cost you?
6. What alternative(s) could you choose next time to avoid a consequence?

Sources:

"How to Make Sure Your Child Is Not Left Behind: A Connecticut Parent's Guide to Advocating for Equal Educational Opportunities," www.lawyerscomm.org; "Effective In-School Suspension Programs," by Mary Hrabak and Doris Settles, Kentucky Center for School Safety, www.kysafeschools.org

Resources:

Additional information on suspension and expulsion—and alternative ways for schools to deal with challenging behaviors—is available from **CPAC**. Contact us at 800-445-2722 or cpac@cpacinc.org.

The Connecticut State Department of Education has issued **Guidelines for In-School and Out-of-School Suspensions**. A link to the guidelines is available on the What's New page of CPAC's website, www.cpacinc.org.

The **Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut** provides information on school discipline and student and parent rights, including sample letters to request a PPT meeting or a due process hearing. Contact the center at 860-278-5688, or visit their website at www.larcc.org.

Dealing with Bullying

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power or strength. It is often repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms, such as hitting, kicking, or shoving (physical bullying), teasing or name calling (verbal bullying), intimidation through gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying), and sending insulting messages by text messaging or email (cyberbullying).

Bullying can have serious consequences. Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than other children to be depressed, lonely, or anxious; have low self-esteem; experience headaches, stomachaches, fatigue, or poor appetites; be absent from school and dislike school; and think about suicide.

Research indicates that children with special needs may be at particular risk of being bullied by their peers. Studies show that children are more likely to be bullied if they have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, medical conditions that affect their appearance (for example, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and spina bifida), or diabetes. Children with ADHD also are somewhat more likely than others to bully their peers.

Bullying behavior may cross the line to become disability harassment, which is defined by the U.S. Department of Education as "intimidation or abusive behavior toward a student based on disability that creates a hostile environment by interfering with or denying a student's participation in or receipt of benefits, services, or opportunities in the institution's program." Disability harassment is illegal under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

If you think your child is being bullied:

- Be supportive of your child and encourage him or her to describe who was involved and how and where the bullying or harassment happened. Be sure to tell your child that it is not his or her fault and that nobody deserves to be bullied or harassed. Do not encourage your child to fight back. This may make the problem much worse.
- Talk with your child's teacher immediately to see whether he or she can help to resolve the problem.
- Contact the principal and put your concerns in writing. Explain what happened in detail and ask for a prompt response. Keep a written record of all conversations and communications with the school.

- If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), ask the school to convene a meeting of the Planning and Placement Team. This meeting will allow you to explain what has been happening and will let the team review your child's IEP and make sure that the school is taking steps to stop the harassment. If your child needs counseling or other supportive services because of the harassment, discuss this with the team. Sometimes children and youth who are bullied also bully others. If your child is bullying other students, his or her IEP may need to be modified to include help to change the aggressive behavior.
- Be persistent. Talk regularly with your child and with school staff to see whether the behavior has stopped.



Many children, particularly boys and older children, do not tell their parents or adults at school that they are being bullied. Some children with disabilities may not be able to talk about what is happening to them or do not realize they are being targeted. A child may, for example, believe that he or she has a new friend, when in fact this "friend" is making fun of him or her. Parents should ask their child specific questions about his or her friendships and be alert to possible signs of bullying.

For a list of warning signs, as well as other materials about bullying, contact CPAC at 800-445-2722 or cpac@cpacinc.org.

Source:

"Bullying Among Children and Youth with Disabilities and Special Needs," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov

NEW STATE LAW ON BULLYING

Connecticut's new school bullying law defines bullying as "any overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate the other student." Schools must address bullying when it happens on school grounds, at a school activity, or on a school bus. Schools may address bullying that happens outside of school if the bullying has a direct and negative impact on a student's academic performance or safety in school.

The law requires each school district to have a policy to address bullying. The policy should explain the right to report the bullying and the actions the school must take in response to that report. The policy must



- allow anonymous reports by students and written reports by parents or guardians
- require teachers and other school staff who witness bullying or receive a student's report of bullying to report it to an administrator
- direct what school staff should do when bullying occurs
- require school administrators to notify the parents or guardians of all students involved in a confirmed act of bullying
- require interventions (including counseling and discipline) for students who repeatedly bully or are bullied
- require each school to keep a list of verified bullying.

Parents should ask their child's principal or another school administrator for information on their school's policy on bullying and for a list of all verified acts of bullying to see how often it has happened at their school.

Source:

"Rules, Regulations and Rights in School," Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut, www.larcc.org

Resources:

The **Connecticut State Department of Education** provides information on bullying, school climate, and school and district improvement. To speak with consultant JoAnn Freiberg, call 860-713-6598.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has a campaign against bullying called **Take a Stand. Lend a Hand. Stop Bullying Now!** Information and resources for parents and educators, as well as games and activities for children, are available in English and Spanish at www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov.

A toolkit and other resources are available from **Eyes on Bullying**, a multimedia project designed to help parents, caregivers, and educators understand, identify, and prevent bullying. Visit www.eyesonbullying.org.

The **Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use** offers information about cyberbullying. To view or download a parent handbook and other materials, visit www.cyberbully.org.

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Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum

July 26-30, 2009

University of Connecticut

The Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum is an annual educational and motivational event. It is hosted by the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project, an organization that provides opportunities for youth with disabilities to realize their leadership potential, learn how to overcome obstacles, develop strong self-advocacy skills, and discover how they can make a difference in the community.

Throughout the forum, young adults work together in small groups to explore personal leadership and career plans and participate in social, artistic, athletic, and recreational activities. Guest speakers address such topics as disability rights laws, innovations in technology, and resources. Adults with disabilities serve as faculty and staff, and alumni of the forum often return as volunteers to help make the program a success.

For additional information and an application form, visit www.ctylp.org.

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[The forum] really has made me more independent and an advocate. I hope to help other students realize their leadership skills and abilities. I even speak at the Legislative Office Building and at the Capitol. . . on handicapped access.

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—Shannon, 2002 delegate

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The thought of discussing myself and my challenges with a group of strangers terrified me. To my surprise, the forum was a confidence-building experience that helped me gain insight into who I was as a youth with a disability and focus on my hopes for the future. I feel better equipped to handle those 'life is not fair' moments not only to advocate for myself but also to support others.

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—Sean, 2004 delegate