

Discipline at School

Remember! Behavior Is a Form of Communication

When parents or caregivers get a call from their child's school about behavior issues, it can be very upsetting. It's important to remember that behavior is a form of communication; children often express their needs and feelings through actions more than words. For children with disabilities or those who have experienced trauma, it may take extra effort from adults to understand what they are trying to communicate. When these cues are missed, it can lead to unexpected or intense behaviors, sometimes resulting in suspension or expulsion, a practice known as *exclusionary discipline*. Schools are required to address students' behavioral health needs and limit the use of harsh disciplinary actions.

The federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) also issued guidance in July 2022 that describes federal work underway to improve behavioral supports and reduce disciplinary removal of students receiving special education services. OSEP's [Dear Colleague Letter](#) includes links to a [Q and A document](#) about disciplinary requirements and [A Guide for Stakeholders](#).

What to Do if the School Calls Home About Behavior:

Ask Questions:

- Ask if it's an official suspension or disciplinary action
- Ask for a copy of any documentation on the situation that they're calling about
- Ask for a copy of the school system's Student Code of Conduct, specifically the portion that your child is accused of violating



Document:

Any school disciplinary action that takes a student away from their regularly scheduled placement at school is called **exclusionary discipline**. Out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and in-school suspensions count. Shortened school days and informal removals—like when the school calls parents to have a child taken home for their behavior—are forms of exclusionary discipline, and are referred to as **informal exclusionary discipline**.



Immediately document the date your child was sent home -- write it down, screen shot the phone call you got from the school, email the principal confirming your child was sent home. **Ask the principal for a meeting** to explain what evidence they have to support the suspension or expulsion. **Ask for the number of days you are being proposed** for suspension or expulsion. Save all paperwork and emails!

Resources for Families in Maryland:

Maryland Suspension Representation Project 443-873-3531, [MSRP \(mdsuspensionrep.org\)](#)

Disability Rights Maryland 410-727-6352 [www.disabilityrightsmd.org](#)

Our Parent Educators remain available to assist families as well. [www.ppmmd.org/contact/](#)

Sources

- > [What Parents Need to Know when Disability Impacts Behavior and Discipline at School - PAVE \(wapave.org\)](#)
- > [MSRP](#)