

# kicked out of preschool

## Readers' responses to ExchangeEveryDay

by Roger Neugebauer

*The ExchangeEveryDay message on July 17, 2008, "Kicked Out of Preschool" and a follow up on August 1, elicited nearly 100 responses from readers. If you would like to read the original message, as well as all the responses, you can do so by going to [www.ChildCareExchange.com](http://www.ChildCareExchange.com), clicking on 'Previous Issues' under ExchangeEveryDay, and then scroll down to July 17 and August 1.*

**Cara Koch, Colorado Springs, Colorado:** Based on my observations, it is my belief that some of the kicking out of preschools goes far beyond inappropriate expectations of this age group. When children's basic needs are not met at home, for whatever reason, acting out in preschool is a cry for help that may be a child's desperate effort to get his or her needs met. Children of deployed parents are one example of this. Administrators refer to the 'new norm' of behavior in centers serving large numbers of such children who act out at an unprecedented level. It is my belief that much research is needed in this area to determine better ways of working with such children and to establish policies that better meet the needs of military families.

**Doreen, Little Lambs Preschool, Hartford, Wisconsin:** My son, who is now 27 years old, was kicked out of preschool. He was three years old; this was a Chris-

tian Preschool with a wonderful teacher whom my daughter had had. My son was afraid to be away from me. He cried a lot; the teacher after a few days suggested Josh not come to preschool anymore. She thought he needed to wait. She was right; we waited until he was four and he did GREAT! I know what your article is saying, but in some cases I believe if a parent can hold off, then this child will not act out and get into trouble and start being labeled. I also think the world needs to offer more parenting classes. By the way, I am a mother of three and my son mentioned above, married at 22, no children, is buying his second home, has a GREAT job, a Bachelor's Degree, and moved the farthest from home. But, YES, he was kicked out of Preschool.

**Ron Blatz, Discovery Children's Centre Inc., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada:** I share the thoughts of several other readers. Over 30 years I've come to the understanding that with the skills, resources, and strict regulations regarding restraint that exist in our province, it is probably not reasonable to think that our group care system is suitable for 100% of children. We shouldn't beat ourselves up or let others beat us up for our failure to be all things to all people. We will go to the end of the earth for a child whose family is concerned and doing whatever they can to help. However, if we

find ourselves caring more about the child than the parents, we do need to ask ourselves if something is wrong. If parents refuse to meet with us or support our calls for help, we will consider discontinuing service much sooner than if they are with us. In an industry where we pay approximately 30% less than market competitive industries pay, we will suffer from high staff turnover, and this will always affect quality. If society wants high quality services, they will have to pay for it. In our province we have one behavioural therapist and one family therapist for 26,000 ECE children. Compare this to the resources our local school division has for their 9,000 students and it is laughable to think that we could do as well as the K-12 system does.

**Leslie, Bellingham, Washington:** Appropriate expectations for child and teacher, documentation, observation, and consistent and constant parent/teacher communication can often lead to success when dealing with challenging behavior — albeit, sometimes slow progress. We sure do expect a lot of our teachers who are typically underpaid, lacking professional education and experience, and stressed out! We have an obligation to offer a place that's safe for all kids. All kids have a right to be there, not just those with or even without behavior issues!

**Nancy Py, Port Washington, New York:**

As a preschool teacher I agree that children should not be asked to leave a school. However, preschools that are small do not always have the professional support needed to successfully teach children with severe behavioral problems. Children who cannot sit for even one minute at the age of four, are disruptive even during play, etc. It takes months from a request for evaluation by a school district to the evaluation and CSE, and then services cannot always be provided because the district cannot find a professional to come to the child's school.

**Linda, Renton, Washington:** I have over 30 years of experience in the field, and I acknowledge that there are some children who need to be expelled from early learning settings for inappropriate behavior. Having said that, I also believe that this practice happens much, much too often, usually without any real effort to make it work for everyone involved. We are sending the message that we are giving up on very young children because they're not worth the effort. We are also sending the message that reasonable accommodations to help a child be successful are too much trouble. I often conduct classroom observations of children of concern, and I have seen teachers and directors behave in ways that I consider abusive towards children who challenge them. Children do not come into the world hardwired with impulse control, tolerance of frustration, social skills, etc., and yet they are expected to be able to behave appropriately with only a few years of life experience under their little belts. Children are being labeled, treated poorly, and kicked out, but there is no accountability for the staff whose bad attitudes and poor behavior made the situation worse. When children are expelled from one program after another before they even start school, is it any wonder that some of them feel so helpless, hopeless, and worthless that they pull out shotguns in the play yard when they are 12?

**Bonnie Becker, Metropolitan Family Services, Chicago, Illinois:** As a Director of a child care program serving at-risk, low-income families, I too have struggled with balancing the needs of children who desperately need help, with those of other children and staff who are at risk of potential harm. Reaching the decision to 'exclude' these children in the past (a more comfortable term than 'expelled') was based on my desire to respond to the concern of the staff and the other parents. I was not looking at my ethical responsibility to the child. Nor was I looking at my responsibility to provide the necessary support and training to the staff to enable them to successfully respond to the needs of individual children. Since then I have given this a lot of thought, attended numerous workshops, and read and re-read the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct* to provide direction. This is what I have learned:

- Children that I would exclude from our program typically have already been or will be excluded from at least one other program by the time they reach kindergarten.
- Parents hesitate to disclose information that would enable us to help their child out of fear of being kicked out.
- Our ethical obligation to other children does not preclude our obligation to help individual children.
- Teachers need to have a clear understanding of their expectations for meeting the needs of children.

I have now made the following changes and commitment:

- We do not discriminate against children based on their individual needs or challenges.
- Parent orientation and our handbook clearly states that we will not exclude children with challenging behavior, but will work with the family to ensure that they receive the necessary services or referrals.
- Staff understand that they may in fact have a child or children with more

challenging behaviors, but that the expectation is that they will make appropriate accommodations as needed.

- There are clear guidelines and procedures for determining the best way to meet the needs of the child and family.
- Additional staff is provided to ensure safety for all. This includes the Director being in the classroom as needed to observe, offer feedback, and 'shadow' the child.
- We help the parent identify the appropriate setting for their child when they transition to another school or are dually enrolled and try to develop a partnership with the staff.
- We use the *NAEYC Code* to help us reflect on our ethical responsibilities in the face of dilemmas.

There are still problems and I do not have a foolproof system of meeting everyone's needs, but this is what I do know and what I say to myself when faced with questions about why: "If I don't try and help this child, if we don't support this family now and try and make a difference, who will? I don't know if anyone will, so I must."

**Maryellen Waters, Sugar Plum Tree Preschool, Inc., Park Ridge, Illinois:**

We have been in business for 32 years and over that period of time I have had to let some children go because of very disruptive behavior. We try to have the children evaluated by the Early Childhood Intervention Center in our area, which requires the consent of the parents. Most of the time we are successful and can work with the families and school district. But, when a family is in denial and won't work with the teachers, there is no other choice for the safety of the children and the teachers. Sometimes it is too overwhelming for these children to be in a normal classroom of 15-20 children. I have recommended home day care as another alternative. It would be nice if we could afford an aide just for that child, but it is not possible.