

Seclusion and Restraint Practices Under Scrutiny

Guidelines from the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders are issued in the wake of a federal study and congressional hearings.

It's a call every principal dreads: A student loses control and is endangering himself or herself, other students, teachers, and staff. Responding quickly—and appropriately—requires clear thinking, comprehensive training, and knowledge of sound policies and techniques. Even then, seclusion and restraint practices can be controversial.

A recent U.S. Government Accountability Office study on the use of seclusion and restraint in schools reported hundreds of allegations that children have been abused, and some even died, as a result of inappropriate uses of these practices. Further, the GAO study claimed that the practices were used disproportionately on children with disabilities. Following the report, U.S. Rep. George A. Miller, D-Calif., chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, convened a hearing to investigate the study's findings.

The Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD), a division of the Council for Exceptional Children, distributed two extensive position papers to the committee. The following is a summary of the papers' key points and recommendations, offered with the intention of providing additional insight to principals:

About Seclusion

CCBD defines seclusion as the involuntary confinement of a student placed alone in a room or area from which he or she is physically prevented from leaving, including situations where a door is locked, blocked, or held by staff. Seclusion is often associated with the use of physical restraint,

which might be used to transport a student to a seclusion environment. Most professionals believe that seclusion is warranted only when a student's behavior is so out of control or so dangerous that his or her behavior poses a risk of injury to the student or others.

Many schools maintain environments such as detention rooms and in-school suspension rooms that may not meet the strict definition of seclusion but employ some of its elements. In addition, many schools maintain safe places or cool-down rooms where students can voluntarily go to be alone and return to the school community at any time. Rooms used in this way do not constitute seclusion environments. Time-out rooms may constitute seclusion if students are involuntarily placed in a room and prevented from leaving.

About Restraint

According to CCBD, the practice of using restraint often applies to three types of procedures:

- Mechanical restraint, which is the use of devices or objects to limit an individual's body movement—tape, ropes, weights, and weighted blankets, for example

—but not devices to protect disabled students or help them move or sit;

- Chemical restraint, which refers to the use of medication that controls or limits an individual's behavior; and
- Physical restraint, which also is called ambulatory restraint, manual restraint, physical intervention, or therapeutic holding.

The purpose of physical restraint is to control the behavior of a student in an emergency or crisis situation to prevent immediate danger or possible injuries to that student or others in the environment. Historically, these procedures typically have been used in special-education programs; however, most experts currently believe that the use of physical restraint in schools has increased as more students with difficult or severe behavioral needs are being served in general education schools and classes.

Declaration of Principles

CCBD supports the following principles related to the use of restraint or seclusion procedures:

- Behavioral interventions for children must promote the right of all children to be treated with dignity.
- All children should receive necessary educational and mental health supports and programming in a safe and least-restrictive environment.
- Positive and appropriate educational interventions, as well as mental health supports, should be provided routinely to all children who need them.
- Behavioral interventions should emphasize prevention and creating positive behavioral supports.





HOT TOPIC

WEB RESOURCE

On the Web site of the Council for Children with Behavior Disorders, you'll find links to *CCBD Position on the Use of Physical Restraint Procedures in School Settings* and *CCBD Position on the Use of Seclusion Procedures in School Settings*.
www.ccbd.net



- Schools should have adequate staffing levels to effectively provide positive supports to students and should be staffed with appropriately trained personnel.
- All staff in schools should have mandatory conflict de-escalation training, and conflict de-escalation techniques should be employed by all school staff to avoid and defuse crisis and conflict situations.
- All children whose pattern of behavior impedes their learning or the learning of others should receive appropriate educational assessment, including instruction in appropriate behavior and strategies to de-escalate their own behavior.

Recommendations

CCBD offers the following recommendations to educators regarding the use of seclusion and restraint.

CCBD believes that physical restraint or seclusion procedures should be used in school settings only when the physical safety of the student or others is in immediate danger.

Mechanical or chemical restraints should never be used in school settings when their purpose is to manage or address student behavior, other than their use by law enforcement or as travel restraints in vehicles. Their use for other instructional-related purposes should be supervised by qualified and trained individuals and in accordance with professional standards for their use.


Neither restraints nor seclusion should be used as a punishment to force compliance or as a substitute for appropriate educational support.

CCBD calls for any school that employs physical restraint or seclusion procedures to have a written positive behavior support plan specific to that program, pre-established emergency procedures, specific procedures and training related to the use of restraint and seclusion, data to support the implementation of the principles of positive behavior supports, and data regarding the specific uses of restraint and seclusion.

All seclusion environments should be safe and humane and inspected at least annually, not only by fire or safety inspectors but for such factors as adequate light, ventilation, and bathroom facilities.

Any student in seclusion must be continuously observed by an adult both visually and aurally for the entire period of the seclusion. Occasional checks are not acceptable.


CCBD calls for federal, state,



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and provincial legislation or regulations that would require the implementation of:

- Recognition that restraint and seclusion procedures are emergency, not treatment, procedures;
- Requirement that preventive measures, such as conflict de-escalation procedures, be in place in schools where restraints or seclusion will be employed;
- Requirements that individualized safety plans are created for students whose behavior could reasonably be predicted to pose a danger;
- Requirements that comprehensive debriefings occur after each use of restraint or seclusion and that reports of the incident are created; and
- Requirement that data on restraints and seclusion are reported to an outside agency such as the state or provincial department of education.

CCBD calls for additional research regarding the use of physical restraint and seclusion with students across all settings. 

CCBD is a division of the Council for Exceptional Children. For more information, go to www.cec.sped.org.

NAESP Wants to Know:
How do you handle these situations at your school? What do you think of seclusion and restraint policies and practices? Share your thoughts on NAESP's blog, the Principals' Office, at <http://naesp.typepad.com>.



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