

Sascha Longstreth, PhD, Sarah Garrity, EdD, and Lisa Linder, PhD

Developing
and Implementing

Effective Discipline Policies

A Practical Guide

for Early Childhood Consultants, Coaches, and Leaders

Sascha Longstreth, PhD, Sarah Garrity, EdD, and Lisa Linder, PhD

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and Implementing*
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Published by Gryphon House, Inc.

P. O. Box 10, Lewisville, NC 27023

800.638.0928; 877.638.7576 [fax]

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2022947531

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Introduction	1

Part One **About the Teaching and Guidance Policy Essentials Checklist: A Five-Step Process for Improving a Behavior-Guidance Policy**

Chapter 1: A Focus on Policies and Systems	6
Chapter 2: The Teaching and Guidance Policy Essentials Checklist	10
Chapter 3: An Overview of the Five-Step Process	17
Chapter 4: The Consultative Stance	31

Part Two **Improving Your Behavior-Guidance Policy Using the TAGPEC**

Chapter 5: Step 1: Assemble Your Behavior-Guidance Team	40
Chapter 6: Step 2: Commit to Improving Your Behavior-Guidance Policy and Practice	48
Chapter 7: Step 3: Collect the Program Guidance Policy and Practice Documents	51
Chapter 8: Step 4: Assess the Quality of Your Behavior-Guidance Policy Using the TAGPEC	54
Chapter 9: Step 5: Implement and Monitor the Program's Action Plan to Improve Its Behavior-Guidance Policy	61

Appendices

Appendix A: The Teaching and Guidance Policy Essentials Checklist	65
Appendix B: TAGPEC Workbook	75
Appendix C: TAGPEC Five-Step Process Sample Timeline	84
Appendix D: Resources	88

References and Recommended Reading	91
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Index	93
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Acknowledgments

We are indebted to Drs. Ann and Rud Turnbull for their thoughtful feedback regarding how the TAGPEC can better support the inclusion of children with disabilities and their families. We would also like to thank the teachers, directors, principals, coaches, and program leaders who have allowed us into their programs. We have learned a great deal from these partnerships, and we hope that this guidebook will provide practical advice and guidance to others who engage in this important work.

Introduction

How to best support children with challenging behaviors in early childhood classrooms is one of the most frequent training topics requested by teachers. Troubling data on suspension and expulsion in the early years has created an urgent need to develop systems that support the social-emotional development of young children. For almost twenty years, we have examined how high-quality behavior-guidance policies can be used to create an infrastructure that supports the social, emotional, and academic success of all children. This guidebook complements our book *Effective Discipline Policies: How to Create a System that Supports Young Children's Social-Emotional Competence* (Longstreth and Garrity, 2018), which provides clear, evidence-based information to early childhood program administrators about developing and implementing behavior-guidance policies that support teaching and learning and prevent and address challenging behaviors.

We intentionally use the term *behavior guidance* rather than *discipline* in our work with early childhood programs, and the distinction between discipline and behavior guidance is key to our philosophical approach. Rather than focusing on trying to *prevent* challenging behaviors, many discipline policies focus on what will happen *after* the challenging behavior has occurred. As a result, discipline is often synonymous with punishment. Unfortunately, using punishment and rewards to “guide” children’s behavior is common in early childhood settings. Asking a child to move his card from yellow to purple, using time-out, and posting sticker charts are typical strategies used to control children’s behavior.

Behavior guidance, on the other hand, seeks to prevent challenging behaviors and focuses on teaching children social-emotional skills such as self-regulation, cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. We believe it is the adult’s responsibility to teach children how to get their needs met in ways that not only work for the child but are also socially acceptable. As we will describe in greater detail in chapter 3 of this guidebook, the TAGPEC and related five-step process for improving behavior-guidance policies is grounded in a humanistic approach (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1961) rather than in a behavioral approach to challenging behavior. Both prevention and teaching are central to our philosophy.

About the TAGPEC

At the heart of our work is the Teaching and Guidance Policy Essentials Checklist (TAGPEC), an easy-to-use checklist (see appendix A) that describes seven essential features of high-quality behavior-guidance policies for programs serving children from birth to eight years of age. We developed the

TAGPEC via an extensive review of the literature in the fields of general education, special education, early childhood education, early care and education, early childhood special education, educational administration, and school psychology. Since that time, we have continued to refine the tool via our ongoing research project in partnership with early childhood programs in a variety of settings.

The TAGPEC is used to rate the quality of a program's existing policy, and each essential feature of the TAGPEC includes specific criteria that should be included in a high-quality behavior-guidance policy. Using information gained through the TAGPEC and discussions with stakeholders, programs can then engage in the five-step process described in *Effective Discipline Policies* as they begin in this work. The five-step process provides concrete, step-by-step instructions for revising policies and creating systems that support children's social-emotional development.

This guidebook expands on that five-step process and shares what we have learned working with program directors, early childhood mental-health consultants, technical assistance networks, and quality-improvement coaches.

What's in This Book

This book is intended as a companion to *Effective Discipline Policies* (Longstreth and Garrity, 2018). It will guide you as you use the TAGPEC to assess and revise your behavior-guidance policy.

Part 1 of this guidebook provides an overview of the TAGPEC and of the related five-step process for improving your behavior-guidance policy. The first chapter describes why we focus on policies and systems, and why we believe the TAGPEC can help create an infrastructure that supports children, families, staff, and administrators. In chapter 2, we offer an overview of the TAGPEC and describe its seven essential features, along with examples of how we have used the essential features in our work. Chapter 3 reviews the five-step process and provides background information that will prepare you for the more in-depth description of this process found in Part 2. In Chapter 4, Lisa Linder, a clinical child psychologist with expertise in early childhood attachment and the role of early experiences, environments, and relationships on early childhood mental health, describes the consultative stance that is essential to forming collaborative and responsive relationships with teachers, families, and other program staff. This chapter also includes "Pause to Reflect" activities that we hope will support you as you think through the complexities of the consultative process.

Part 2 offers an in-depth description of the five-step process, beginning with chapter 5. Chapters 6 through 10 explain each of the steps in turn and describe how to use the worksheets found in the appendices. We draw from our own experiences to describe how we have dealt with difficult situations, and we provide examples of how to talk through complicated issues. In this section, we take a closer look at the process of implementing the TAGPEC's and its five-step process in early childhood education settings. The process of crafting and fully implementing a high-quality behavior-guidance policy often takes three to five years. In this sense, the steps that we present in this guidebook are more cyclical than linear. We expect a program will engage in the steps multiple times before a true shift in the program's discipline culture occurs. This guidebook is a resource for programs to use repeatedly as they move through the cyclical process.

Most important, however, this guidebook contains an updated version of the TAGPEC. We have also incorporated new guidance from the field, including an increased focus on equity and inclusion that reflects the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC's) *Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education* position statement (2019) and the recently revised *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* (NAEYC, 2022). We have been very fortunate to collaborate with our colleague and friend Lisa Linder, who is the executive director of the Healthy Early Years (HEY) clinic at San Diego State University. The HEY clinic is a counselor training facility focusing on young children and their families. Through this partnership, we have used the TAGPEC and its related five-step process as part of early childhood mental-health consultation. We have also worked with county- and state-wide organizations that have used the TAGPEC to examine the quality of behavior-guidance policies as part of their continuous quality-improvement efforts.

The appendices include the TAGPEC tool, worksheets to help you think through the steps and develop an action plan, and suggested resources.

We recommend that you use our books as a starting point for your work. In them, we offer an overview of our humanistic approach to behavior guidance, a chapter on the importance of culture and languages, the research behind the TAGPEC's seven essential features, and information about how to score the TAGPEC and use the five-step process to revise and implement high-quality behavior-guidance policies. In keeping with our humanistic approach to behavior guidance, we hope practitioners in the field of early childhood education use these books as they work to ensure systems are in place to support children, families, and staff to be their very best.

1

Part One



About the Teaching and Guidance
Policy Essentials Checklist:
A Five-Step Process for Improving
Your Behavior-Guidance Policy



CHAPTER 1

A Focus on Policies and Systems

Josephina was thrilled to begin her new position as the director of a community-based preschool. After several weeks, however, she is feeling exhausted and unsure of whether she is the best person for the job. There have been issues with biting in the toddler classroom, and just yesterday a preschooler threw a chair during group time and injured another child. Several of the teachers frequently send children to her office for behaviors that Josephina considers developmentally appropriate, and others will call parents to pick up their children from school when faced with behavior challenges. Parent and staff handbooks give little guidance to teachers or families about the center philosophy or practices to follow when children exhibit challenging behaviors. The teachers tell her that they feel unsupported and stressed out. One parent is very angry because her son is the only child who is sent to her office for behaviors that she sees other children doing too, and other parents are upset because their children are getting hurt. Josephina has just been assigned a coach by her state's local quality improvement program, and she plans to bring up these concerns during their first meeting.

Why We Focus on Policies and Systems

We have focused our efforts at the policy or systems level of early childhood programming for several compelling reasons. Policies are an inherent component of effective and systemic service delivery and represent an intentional set of guiding principles designed to translate the goals of the system into practice (Longstreth and Garrity, 2018). We view policies as a blueprint that guides program leaders as they collaborate with key stakeholders to build an infrastructure that supports the goals

and philosophy of the program. We also believe that high-quality behavior-guidance policies can help administrators ensure that all children learn the social and emotional skills needed to be successful, and that teachers, families, and administrators feel supported and valued.

To be considered high quality, behavior-guidance policies need to promote practices grounded in research on evidence-based practices that are inclusive and developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate. High-quality behavior-guidance policies can also help address the troubling rates of suspension and expulsion in the early years. Policy initiatives and guidelines from the US Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education (2014); US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Head Start (2016); Child Care and Development Block Grant of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-186); and NAEYC et al. (2016) describe the importance of policy in preventing and addressing challenging behavior and decreasing rates of suspension and expulsion. More recently, the book *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* (NAEYC, 2022) has a strong focus on equity. The book shares how the field can best teach and support all children using strategies to eliminate the use of suspension and expulsion in early childhood programs. NAEYC's equity position statement (2019) explicitly describes steps program administrators can take to advance equity in their programs that include a focus on policy and procedures:

- Establish clear protocols for dealing with children's challenging behaviors, and provide teaching staff with consultation and support to address these behaviors effectively and equitably.
- Consider potential effects of implicit bias by regularly collecting and assessing data regarding whether certain policies and procedures, including curriculum and instructional practices, have differential impacts on different groups of children.
- Set a goal of immediately limiting—and ultimately eliminating—suspensions and expulsions by ensuring appropriate supports for teachers, children, and families.

These recommendations are very much in line with the essential features of the TAGPEC. Furthermore, the TAGPEC five-step process will help program leaders design and implement policies that promote equity and reduce suspension and expulsion in the early years.

Another reason to focus on the policy and the systems level is the need to shift from blaming individual children and families to looking at how systems do or do not support children and families. Terms such as *institutional racism*, *structural racism*, and *systemic racism* draw attention to historical, political, economic, and educational practices that uphold systems of oppression and preserve the status quo. Attention to these macro-level contexts is essential when considering children's behavior.

NAEYC's position statement *Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education* (2019) proposes that equity requires understanding this broader societal context, these biases, and the ways in which historical and current inequities have shaped the profession, as they have shaped our nation. The biases we refer to are based on race, class, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ability and disability,

language, national origin, indigenous heritage, religion, and other identities. They are rooted in our nation's social, political, economic, and educational structures. NAEYC's position statement on developmentally appropriate practice also addresses the importance of understanding development in context and the need for early childhood educators to "reflect on and address their own inherent biases and to help them provide developmentally, culturally, and linguistically responsive learning experiences to an increasingly diverse population of children" (NAEYC, 2020). When considering what this means, it is helpful to review the definition of *diversity* provided in the position statement:

Variations among individuals, as well as within and across groups of individuals, in terms of their backgrounds and lived experiences. These experiences are related to social identities, including race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, social and economic status, religion, ability status, and country of origin. The terms *diverse* and *diversity* are sometimes used as euphemisms for non-White. NAEYC specifically rejects this usage, which implies Whiteness is the norm against which diversity is defined (NAEYC, 2020).

Revisiting this definition as we engage in our work has helped us to reflect on our own positionality as White women and to consider the ways in which our privilege may affect our interactions, interpretation of events, and relationships with program staff and families.

By focusing on systems and policies, early childhood program leaders can examine and address structural or systemic issues that prevent the provision of equitable experiences for all children and families and can develop policies that support the inclusion and success of all children. As noted by Kendi (2019), "a racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups" and "an antiracist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups." This distinction is critical given the data on preschool suspension and expulsion rates. Young boys of color and young children with disabilities are suspended and expelled for behavioral challenges three to four times as often as other children (US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights, 2014). Unfortunately, our research indicates that program policies fail to address the TAGPEC items related to culture and diversity, with an alarmingly few programs describing evidence-based strategies for supporting culture and language in the classroom, in their work with families, or in their quality-improvement efforts (Garrity and Longstreth, 2020).

NAEYC's equity position statement (2019) also describes the importance of building awareness and understanding of one's own culture, personal beliefs, values, and biases. We have also identified the need for self-reflection in our work with early childhood programs, and Part 2 of this guidebook contains tools and processes intended to support consultants and program staff as they engage in critical dialogue that can result in meaningful change. Chapter 4 of this guidebook specifically describes the importance of reflection and the need to step back and consider multiple perspectives. Our hope is that using the TAGPEC five-step process to examine behavior-guidance policies will support the examination of how program policies, practices, and curriculum can support children's social emotional competence and ensure equitable outcomes for all children.

DEFINING TERMS

In our work, we have noted a variety of terms used in the field to describe professionals who work with young children in educational settings. To provide clarity and consistency, we use the following terms throughout this book:

- **Educator:** any adult in a program who has been hired to interact with students, including teachers, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, and playground supervisors
- **Administrator:** an individual who is part of program leadership and is often (but not always) the program director or school principal
- **Consultant:** the individual who is leading the efforts to assess and revise behavior-guidance policies using the TAGPEC five-step process. This can be a consultant from outside the program, a quality-improvement coach, a center or program director, a principal, or any other leader in the field.
- **Positionality:** the ways in which differences in social position and power shape identities and access in society
- **Program:** any early educational organization whose purpose is to educate and care for young children from birth to age eight. Types of organizations that care for young children vary widely and may include schools, corporate child care, family child care, private preschools, community-based preschools, state-funded preschools, and faith-based preschools, among others.
- **Student-support professionals:** individuals who work with children, educators, parents, and administrators to provide multitiered interventions that support the development of all students. Student-support professionals may include nurses, psychologists, counselors, social workers, librarians, behavior specialists, developmental specialists (for example, occupational and speech therapists), and members of pupil-support services teams. Sometimes, the word *staff* will be used to refer to educators and student-support professionals collectively.

CHAPTER 2

The Teaching and Guidance Policy Essentials Checklist

Josephina and her coach, Michelle, discussed Josephina's concerns and the frustration she was feeling in her new role as a center director. They identified the need for the program to have a clear philosophy that describes the program's goals, beliefs, and values about how children learn and develop. They also identified a need to build consensus about how to meaningfully engage families in the program and how to develop behavioral expectations that are clear and age appropriate. Josephina thought it was especially important for everyone to be on the same page regarding developmentally appropriate behavior and what to do when challenging behaviors occur. She also wanted to put strategies in place to prevent challenging behaviors, rather than just reacting to them after the fact. Michelle pointed out that working on these issues would require discussions among staff and family members about how beliefs, values, and assumptions often affect how individuals interpret and respond to children's behavior. Michelle introduced the TAGPEC and its five-step process as a way to address Josephina's concerns.

The Teaching and Guidance Policy Essentials Checklist (TAGPEC) and its five-step process (Longstreth and Garrity, 2018) is a tool for assessing program policies and supporting dialogue about a program's philosophy and practices on behavior guidance. The aim of the TAGPEC is to support program leaders, staff, families, and those tasked with supporting early childhood programs in developing policies that reflect what research tells us about how to prevent and address challenging behavior in the early years.

We have found the TAGPEC to be a useful tool in having conversations with program leaders about their program's strengths and areas of need. We have also found it helpful in supporting teams to engage in reflection not only about program goals, but also about their own cultural attitudes and behaviors that may affect how they view children's challenging behavior.

Create Effective, High-Quality Behavior-Guidance Policies in Your Program

Learn how to rethink discipline policies, strengthen team spirit, and implement policy changes with *Developing and Implementing Effective Discipline Policies*, the workbook companion to the award-winning book *Effective Discipline Policies: How to Create a System that Supports Young Children's Social-Emotional Competence*. Written for early childhood administrators and principals, trainers, coaches, and consultants, this book helps leaders develop policies that support young learners.

Using the five-step model, discover how to use the data gained from the unique Teaching and Guidance Policy Essentials Checklist (TAGPEC) tool to:

- build teams,
- rethink discipline approaches,
- train staff,
- implement school-wide policies,
- support continuous quality improvement efforts, and
- develop young children's social-emotional competence to reduce challenging behaviors.

Effective behavior-guidance approaches in early childhood education programs aren't only possible, they are also highly successful! With this book you can ensure young children receive the best guidance possible under thoughtful discipline policies aimed toward skill development and growth.



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