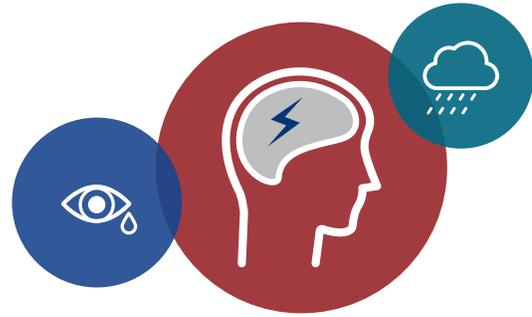


## What Do **Disruptive Behaviors** Indicate?

**Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** have a tremendous impact on a child's future. At the same time, many children also experience the effects of racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural biases, which add extra stress to already vulnerable childhoods, in addition to the severity of, exposure to, and symptoms of a childhood trauma. These circumstances are reflected in children's behavior and their social relationships or lack thereof.

When children display disruptive behaviors at school, it often means that there is turmoil in their lives. These behaviors are



caused by underlying issues that students are trying to communicate. They are purposeful and are their attempts to solve a problem.

However, the **responses to students** with such behaviors often are **discrimination, criminalization, and exclusion**, particularly for students identified as **poor, of color, immigrants, or disabled**.

## What is the **School-to-Prison Pipeline?**

Concerns about crime led to the adoption of Zero-Tolerance policies. Schools have worked with school resource officers and established codes and punishments that criminalize students for minor infractions of school rules. This has led to more suspensions, expulsions, and even in-school arrests. In addition, Zero-Tolerance policies are applied to nonviolent offenses and disruptive behavior.<sup>i</sup>

Marginalizing and policing vulnerable students are prevalent and systemic and have led to what is called the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Because of suspensions or expulsions, students spend more time away from school, increasing the chances of students dropping out of school, ending up in the juvenile justice system, and returning to a prison as an adult. In fact, juvenile incarceration can have long-lasting impacts on a child's future.<sup>ii</sup>



# Facts About School Discipline Policies & Youth Incarceration

Roughly 70% of student arrests or students referred to law enforcement are Black or Latinx,<sup>iii</sup> far over representing their prevalence in the general population.



Students with **disabilities** represent **12%** of the overall student enrollment and **28%** of students referred to law enforcement or arrested.<sup>iv</sup>



The most significant indicator predicting which children will be suspended is not the type of offense but the **color of their skin**, their special education status, what school they go to, and whether they have been suspended before.<sup>v</sup>



Students suspended or expelled for a discretionary violation are **3 times** more likely to be in **contact** with the **juvenile justice** system the following year.<sup>iv</sup>

Students with **disruptive behaviors** are most in need of **trauma-informed practices** and environments. Many of them come from families with **histories of poverty, disabilities, abuse, or neglect**.



**14 MILLION** students are in schools with **POLICE**

but without at least **one** of the following school personnel:

**counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker.**<sup>vi</sup>



They should be handled by the **school administration** rather than a school resource officer or a juvenile court judge that singles out, punishes, and removes them from the school system.

# How to End the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Schools have the power to divert students from the School-to-Prison pipeline. Educational programs and counseling services have been proven to be effective in helping students succeed in a meaningful way. School staff are ongoing observers of the students' usual behaviors, social interactions, and emotions. Therefore, they can encourage positive life choices and promote positive mental health in youth, with a focus on building relationships and emotional literacy development, preventing or de-escalating challenging behaviors and youth violence.

When school staff members get to know students and build supportive relationships with them, students are more likely to stay in school and stop their disruptive behaviors as they realize that they are being heard. Dealing with social, emotional, or academic issues in students is difficult, and educators need more support and training to enact effective discipline. It is important for schools to have strategies to address problem behaviors while keeping students in school and learning.

One strategy for addressing students with disruptive or withdrawn behaviors, identifying emerging behavioral health conditions, and offering students support is using **Notice. Talk. Act.™ at School.**



**TALK:** To facilitate a conversation, use open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and summarizing to show that you care and the student is respected. Communicate clearly about acceptable behavior as well as expectations and consequences in place to prevent misconduct.

**NOTICE:** Build positive relationships with students. Look for changes in a student's behavior such as putting themselves or others in harm's way, extreme disengagement, or isolation. Examples of disruptive and withdrawn behaviors include disagreement, aggression, and activities others might find disruptive.



**ACT:** Within your roles, take appropriate action to connect students with the support services they need. This may include resources for developing the social, emotional, and conflict resolution skills needed to manage difficult situations. Referring a student to school resource officers should be used as a last resort and only for severe infractions. Consider adopting restorative justice, an approach to replace punishment with repairing harm, and positive behavioral interventions and supports.

In addition, building a **positive school climate** that ensures fairness and equity for all students, regardless of their **race, ethnicity, disability, or family income**, helps prevent and change **inappropriate behaviors**.

School staff members are encouraged to work with **school mental health professionals** so that together they can help students to address the underlying causes of their misbehavior. Discipline policies and practices should also be evaluated often and updated regularly with **evidence-based practices**.



It is critical for schools to equip staff with skills, work with families and the community, and find resources to help students with social and emotional development, as well to foster favorable peer social interaction at school and nurture an encouraging approach to life challenges to positively impact student emotional and mental health.



**Notice. Talk. Act.<sup>TM</sup> at School** is a school-based mental health program developed by the **American Psychiatric Association Foundation** to promote educators' and staff understanding and identification of psychiatric problems in adolescent students, as well as to comprehensively address all psychiatric illnesses and needs related to youth mental health.

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