

## CEC's Policy on the Prevention of and Response to Maltreatment

The Council for Exceptional Children recognizes that all children and youth with disabilities have the right to live and flourish in a safe environment where they are protected and have support to protect themselves from all forms of maltreatment—neglect as well as physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Experiencing maltreatment can create a cascade of negative effects on children and youth's health and cognitive, behavioral, language, and social development. CEC believes that professionals in special education must play an active role in preventing and responding to instances of maltreatment. CEC is an organization of professionals dedicated to advancing the success of children and youth with disabilities, and advocates for:

- The safety and well-being of all children and youth with disabilities.
- Consideration of cultural factors when recognizing and responding to incidents and indicators of maltreatment while acknowledging personal attitudes and implicit bias.
- Child-centered interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration when recognizing, reporting, and responding to maltreatment.
- Professional preparation and professional development opportunities for special educators focused on preventing, recognizing, reporting, and responding to maltreatment, inclusive of issues of challenging behavior, implicit bias, bullying, and disproportionate identification in special education.
- Evidence-based policies that delineate and enforce practices for preventing, recognizing, reporting, and responding to maltreatment.

CEC will be inclusive of issues of maltreatment by continuing to promote the enhancement of teacher preparation standards, professional development, policy and advocacy, and research.

CEC recommends a consistent approach of building awareness and understanding of the maltreatment of children and youth, enhancing maltreatment recognizing and reporting mechanisms, and incorporating prevention and response strategies in everyday practice.

*CEC advocates building awareness and understanding of the maltreatment of children and youth with disabilities by:*

- Adopting a consistent definition of maltreatment. Although differences in definitions exist (World Health Organization, Center for Disease Control, Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act), there are common salient features: neglect, as well as physical, sexual, and psychological acts of omission or commission that inflict harm on children and youth with disabilities.
- Acknowledging that perpetrators of maltreatment are most often known by the victim: caregivers, relatives, neighbors, employers, educators, and peers.
- Acknowledging that children and youth with disabilities experience maltreatment at significantly higher rates than children and youth without disabilities. Challenges related to behavior, cognitive, language, and social and communication skills, along with a lack of understanding of what is appropriate physical interaction, access to health and wellness, appropriate sex education, and social isolation lead to this increased risk.
- Acknowledging that incidents of maltreatment are underreported because of a lack of awareness of the signs and symptoms among stakeholders, who often lack sufficient preparation and resources to effectively interact with, discuss, and document the suspected maltreatment of children and youth with disabilities.

- Providing resources to professionals supporting children and youth with disabilities who have been maltreated. This includes understanding one's personal attitudes and implicit bias, as well as increasing cultural awareness and culturally responsive practices to enhance the ability of professionals to work with families of diverse cultural backgrounds when recognizing, reporting, and responding to indications of maltreatment.
- Understanding that some families experience multiple stressors—from racial discrimination to undocumented or temporary immigration status, poverty, financial strain, housing and food insecurities, violence, addiction, maternal depression, and lack of social support. As a result, children and youth from these families are at a heightened risk for maltreatment.

*CEC advocates enhancing mechanisms for recognizing and reporting maltreatment by:*

- Acknowledging that the high prevalence of maltreatment of children and youth with disabilities demands attention to the recognizing and reporting mechanisms in home, education, and community settings.
- Increasing educators' knowledge and understanding of their responsibility to recognize and report cases of suspected maltreatment of children and youth with disabilities.
- Providing guidance to educators and education agencies through the development of maltreatment policies, standards, and implementation procedures specifically relating to children and youth with disabilities. Because some educators may be hesitant to share information from school records with child protective service personnel for fear of violating education law or deterring or preventing the investigative progress, they also need guidelines for acceptable information sharing.
- Supporting the building of mutual trust and respect between educators, early interventionists, families, and caregivers in order to establish open, collaborative, and child-centered partnerships.
- Defining the roles of administrators, educators, and support staff as critically important to the implementation of effective procedures to address maltreatment. Clearly defined expectations support and encourage partnerships with community experts from the child welfare, medical, mental health, and justice systems.

*CEC advocates incorporating prevention and response strategies in everyday practice by:*

- Establishing clearly articulated maltreatment prevention and response policies, procedures, and curricula.
- Incorporating maltreatment intervention strategies—including prevention, assessment, and instruction—within multitiered systems of support, partnerships with community agencies, and parent-to-parent expertise. Effective intervention strategies support informed reporting of maltreatment and engage professionals and families in interdisciplinary approaches to address the health, academic, social, emotional, communication, and behavioral development of children and youth with disabilities.
- Promoting and enhancing professional development plans and opportunities for key stakeholders: administrators, families, teacher candidates, educators, early interventionists, paraprofessionals, and related service personnel.

To access CEC's Policy on the Prevention and Response to Maltreatment, go to <https://www.cec.sped.org/Policy-and-Advocacy>. For additional information, contact Deborah A. Ziegler, Director, Policy and Advocacy, Council for Exceptional Children, at (703) 264-9406 or [debz@cec.sped.org](mailto:debz@cec.sped.org).

***Date Adopted***

Approved by the Council for Exceptional Children Board of Directors September 2018