



# Behavior Today Newsletter 41.3

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## From the President's Desk

*Robin Ennis*

I hope everyone is enjoying an exciting fall semester. We're past the midpoint and can look forward to remaining months filled with fun holiday and seasonal activities. When I think of fall, I think of football, cooler days, and the Teacher Educators for Children with Behavioral Disorders (TECBD) Conference. TECBD is time when many DEBH members come together for professional development, networking, and collaboration. This year TECBD is November 16-18 in Tempe, AZ. This year's conference also will feature virtual Saturday workshops for \$35, so if you can't make it to Arizona, you can still join in the on the great PD options. To register for both in-person and virtual activities, please visit <https://education.asu.edu/annual-tecbd-conference>

For those of you who can join us at TECBD this year, please note these exciting activities supported by DEBH:

Thursday morning, we will host a breakfast honoring our past presidents of CCBD and DEBH and glean their insight on the future of the organization. If you are a past president and plan to attend, please email past president Tim Landrum ([t.landrum@louisville.edu](mailto:t.landrum@louisville.edu)). Immediately following breakfast our executive committee will meet to continue our discussions of activities based on strategic plan.

Thursday Afternoon (1:00 to 3:00 p.m.) we will host a mentorship roundtable double session featuring DEBH members, including Aaron Campbell, Nick Gage, Kristine Jolivette, Ashley MacSuga-Gage, Sarup Mathur, Mary Rose Salles, and Kimber Vannest. See the attached flyer for a description of their session. This session is designed for graduate students, post-doctoral scholars, and early career faculty. Immediately following this session (3:00 to 4:00 p.m.), will be the Journal Editors Forum featuring Eric Common (*Education and Treatment of Children Special Issue*), Bill Evans (*Preventing School Failure*), Dan Maggin (*Behavioral Disorders*), Sarup Mathur (*Education and Treatment of Children Special Issue*), Ben Ridden, Bill Therrien (*Research in Special Education*), and Stan Zucker (*Education and Training in Autism and Development Disabilities*).

Friday morning (9:00 to 11:00 a.m.) our Advocacy and Government Relations chairs, Lee Kern and Sarup Mathur, will be moderating a panel entitled *Shifting Perspectives to Inform Movement: Discussing Diverse Approaches to Understanding and Addressing Disproportionality* featuring Alfredo Artiles, Aydin Bal, Kelly Carrero, and Adai Tefera. See the attached flyer for more details on this exciting session.

Friday evening be sure you don't miss the White Rhino, a yearly highlight of TECBD. And you might just find a drink ticket from DEBH in your registration materials.

I'll close by offering thanks to Heather Griller-Clark and her team at Arizona State University for always putting on such an outstanding program each year. I hope you can join us this year either in person or virtually.



## New Study Spotlight: Confronting the Silent Impact of Verbal Maltreatment

*Eric A. Common - University of Michigan-Flint*

*Robin Parks Ennis - University of Alabama at Birmingham*

Childhood experiences, memories, and lessons from those formative years ripple throughout our lives, influencing our thoughts, actions, and overall well-being. Both minor incidents and significant events from youth can leave lasting imprints, emphasizing the importance of addressing these traumas. Doing so will pave the way for healthier, more resilient futures.

Verbal abuse during childhood, which includes derogatory remarks, insults, and unwarranted criticism, often goes unnoticed. Yet, it leaves lasting impacts. Recent studies have illuminated the broader implications of **verbal abuse experiences**. As our understanding of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), toxic stress, and trauma evolves, addressing these silent yet profound childhood experiences become even more vital.

Recent research has placed a spotlight on this issue, defining and delving deep into the challenges it presents. This form of abuse, though sometimes subtle, plays a crucial role in the wider spectrum of trauma and adverse experiences. As practitioners, families, and those facing these challenges grow more aware of ACEs, toxic stress, and the role of trauma in shaping lives, we realize the urgency in addressing verbal mistreatment's impact. It is important to note that as a culture we generally think of "big" trauma as the primary culprit (i.e., physical abuse, observing a violent act). In reality, studies suggest that "little" trauma (i.e., frequent yelling, ongoing criticism, neglect) can be just as impactful on the lives of children and their future selves.

The rise in childhood emotional abuse has alarmed professionals and advocates. A recent study by Dube et al. (2023) in "Child Abuse & Neglect" examined childhood **verbal** abuse (CVA) in detail. The authors reviewed 166 studies and provided a detailed analysis of the existing literature on the topic. Key findings include:

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- **Prevalence & Recognition:** Despite its rising frequency, CVA remains an under-acknowledged form of maltreatment.
- **Terminology & Measurement:** The ACE Questionnaire and the Conflict Tactics Scale stand out as primary tools for evaluating CVA.
- **Perpetrators & Definitions:** Parents, particularly mothers, followed by teachers, are the primary caregivers whose language has been reported to contribute most significantly to ACES. The nature of CVA centers around speech volume, tone, and negative content.
- **Outcomes & Consequences:** CVA results in lasting emotional and behavioral outcomes. It's essential to recognize its unique characteristics for proper prevention and intervention.
- **Recommendations for Prevention:** The study champions trauma-informed approaches and emphasizes the role of adult training in promoting safety, support, and nurturance during interactions.

Educators, parents, and practitioners (e.g., teachers, coaches, directors) can make a substantial difference in children's lives by understanding these intricacies. We can support these efforts by reviewing theoretically and empirically supported practices that we know work.

- **Teaching Expectations and Skills:** Clear expectations form the backbone of effective education and mentorship. Teaching, modeling, and reinforcing behaviors and skills offer a clear roadmap. Teaching behaviors can resemble direct instruction, which involves showing, telling, and doing. It can also incorporate role-playing to enhance learning, and consistent feedback and behavior-specific praise solidify these lessons.

- **Preventing Problem Behavior:** Being proactive is essential. Encouraging desired behaviors through positive reinforcement can yield significant results. Strategies like precorrection and active supervision can remind children what the expectations are before going into a challenging situation, while also increasing active supervision during that transition or situation can further facilitate children's success!
- **Responding to Behavior:** Proper responses are as essential as teaching expected behaviors. Celebrating children for meeting behavior expectations and addressing undesirable actions with care and guidance fosters an environment of growth. Reinforce positive behaviors and re-teach and use logical consequences when problems arise. As adults we should respond to challenging behavior by clearly articulating what desirable behaviors we hope to see instead. This focus on what we want to see minimizes the chance that children will experience a negative experience from always hearing what they are doing wrong.
- **Trauma-Informed Approaches:** Tailoring our interactions to be trauma-aware ensures that children feel secure, cherished, and understood. The crux of this approach hinges on safety, support, and nurturance. Parents and teachers alike should involve children in behavioral reflection when challenges arise. Wait until the child is in a calm state and then discuss things that contributed to the behavior (e.g., unmet needs, lacking skills), describe the behavior, and possible consequences (i.e., effects of the behavior on themselves, peers, and adults). Use a restorative lens to focus on what to do differently going forward rather than condemning the child for choices made in the past.
- **Adult Training:** Comprehensive training modules can teach adults to recognize their unconscious biases, control reactive behaviors, and approach children with patience and empathy. By enabling adults to adopt trauma-informed perspectives, we create environments where children feel understood, valued, and protected. Training should emphasize the importance of adults as models of social/emotional regulation. Adults should seek to narrate as they process through their own emotions. Adults should also model apologizing or engaging in restorative practices when making mistakes.

In conclusion, while our efforts to combat childhood traumas, especially **verbal** abuse, are ongoing, with dedicated research, effective training, and community engagement, we inch closer to a world where every child flourishes in a nurturing environment.

## Reference

Dube, S. R., Li, E. T., Fiorini, G., Lin, C., Singh, N., Khamisa, K., McGowan, J., & Fonagy, P. (2023). Childhood **verbal** abuse as a child maltreatment subtype: A systematic review of the current evidence. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 144, 106394.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106394>

## The State Complaint Procedure

*Mitchell Yell*

When we think of parents filing complaints against school districts regarding special education services, we usually think of mediation, resolution sessions, due process hearings, and possible court cases. However, there are additional, less well known, complaint resolution systems that the parents of students with disabilities may use.

The IDEA includes requirements regarding mediation, resolution sessions, due process hearings, and court cases but does not address state requirements for developing and implementing a state complaint procedure (SCP). Nonetheless, the U.S. Department of Education has determined that states must development, offer, and implement a SCP system. According to the U.S. Department of Education in 2006, “we believe that the State complaint process is fully supported by the (IDEA) and necessary for the proper