

# FOCUS on Special Education

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## Recognizing Mental Health Needs of Youth

We're in the midst of a serious teen mental health crisis. Between 2011 and 2021, clinical depression cases in teens and young adults more than doubled. High school student suicide rates increased by 41% from 2007 to 2019, with a tripling in the suicide rate for 10 to 14-year-olds, nearly quadrupling for girls this age. In 2021, a C.D.C. survey found that almost 60% of high school girls experienced persistent sadness, and nearly 25% made suicide plans.

Researchers make a strong argument that this crisis is linked to the rise of smartphones and social media. In 2012, smartphones became widespread, and by 2015, 80% of teens were using them primarily for social media. By 2022, teens spent an average of 5.5 hours daily on their phones.



Smartphones affect teen issues, eating disorders, mental health through mechanisms like time displacement. They disrupt sleep due to blue light, replace social interactions with screens, and reduce physical activity. These changes harm mental health.

To address this crisis, education is vital. Teens should learn how screen time and social media impact their mood, sleep, friendships, and mental health. This should include teaching them practical steps such as silencing their

Social media fosters social comparison, leading to body image

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### USE WEBLINK PORTAL FOR ALL REQUISITIONS AND LEAVE

We are now fully transitioned over to using the Weblink portal for all of our various operational needs. This includes submitting requisitions for materials and supplies as well as mileage and other reimbursements. In

addition, you need to submit all leave requests through the system. This is even if you do not require a substitute. Please remember that we need you to submit your absences with your individual districts if you will be requiring a substitute, but even if that is not the case you must

go into Weblink and document your time off. There have been some questions as to what type of leave to use—in most cases it will be simple discretionary leave, but if you have questions about required training absences, just contact our office.

### FREQUENTLY (RECENTLY) ASKED QUESTIONS

*Often in Special Education, questions arise which you may need the answer to and others may benefit from that answer as well. Each month we will include a few of these questions, so please don't hesitate to ask.*

Q: We're seeing a lot more significant behavior in our students at the elementary level. Do we need to be looking at a WEBS referral? When do we need a BIP?

A: It's not unusual in ECKCE that for students with the emotional disability exceptionality have no behavior intervention plan (BIP) as part of the IEP. Legal requirements for BIPS under IDEA are meager in scope and specificity, and Kansas offers no additional guidance. However, special education law guru Perry Zirkel reminds us that "as professionals we should focus on differentiating minimum legal requirements from professional norms of evidence-based practices." **Best practice in cases of behavior which interferes with learning of the student or others is the formulation of a BIP as part of the IEP.**

We should also focus on legal precedent, as an average of about 14 legal cases pertinent to FBAs and BIPS make it through the courts each year and provide us guidance. The primary question in these cases analyzed by Zirkel in 2020 is always about eligibility for a

BIP, its appropriateness, or its implementation.

For the **eligibility** question, the two steps in the courts' decisions are 1) do the behaviors impede the learning of the child or others, and 2) did the IEP reasonably address the behavior. When eligibility has been established with the first step, as aligned to best practice stated above, **districts lose if a BIP or PBIS hasn't been provided as part of the second step.**

For the **appropriateness** question, the issue is whether FAPE has been provided when a BIP isn't in place. The 2019 case of L.M. v. Henry County Board of Education illustrates the court's reasoning in such cases. "An FBA works by determining the causes of a student's inappropriate behavior. To be successful, then, an FBA relies on specifically defining inappropriate behaviors. Afterwards, teachers and observers collect data on the student for those defined

behaviors. If [the district] failed to either adequately define the behavior or fails to collect high-quality data, the FBA will be useless." That is, **districts lose when a BIP or other IEP behavioral provisions that are reasonably calculated to result in appropriate progress aren't in place, due to failure to provide FAPE.** For the **implementation** question, the issue is whether a BIP has been implemented with fidelity. In these cases, **districts lose when the BIP in place hasn't been substantially implemented.**

This yields solid guidance for case managers and their teams. If in doubt about whether a BIP should be written and well implemented for a student whose behaviors interfere with their learning or that of others, best practice and legal precedent strongly suggest to go with a BIP. **And in cases where emotional disability is the exceptionality, the presumption should be that a BIP is a necessity for reasons of eligibility and FAPE.**

**MENTAL HEALTH AND YOUTH (CONT. FROM PG. 1)**

notifications during sleep, setting daily screen limits, and gradually reducing screen time while replacing it with healthier activities. Teens will benefit from guidance of what to do when facing the urge to reach for their phone when bored. It can start with helping them make a list of what they might do instead such as to arrange to hang out with a friend, read a physical book, learn a new recipe, make art, or

go outside. They can keep this list physically, e.g., as a sticky note attached to their screen as a prompt. Such prompts, known as behavioral activation, are one of the better ways to replace unhealthy habits.

In conclusion, cell phones and social media are major contributors to the teen mental health crisis. Brief yet regular interactions with a

caring adult at school aimed at helping youth understand the effects of screens and how to take control of them can greatly improve the well-being of many of these youth. If you're responsible for social-emotional learning, look for natural opportunities to incorporate these interactions into your teaching, if not your own life! I doubt anybody will, on their deathbed, bemoan having not spent enough time on social media.

Dr. Jim Persinger

*Thank you to all of our teachers and service providers for continuing to do a great job with all of our students! Your efforts in managing the day-to-day behaviors and academic needs of your very diverse kids are greatly appreciated!!!*

**More CPI Trainings Are on the Horizon**

I know that many of you are asking about CPI refreshers, so just know that we are in the process of setting up initial trainings and refreshers as we speak. You should have received an email with an invitation to sign

up, but because of the number of folks needing recertification and initials, we have prioritized who receives the invites initially, focusing on the programs that have the highest likelihood of

needing the training first. To that end, please respond to the email, but don't forward until we can get those high needs positions offered first. Also, please try to remember that CPI is a de-escalation tool, not a restraint tool.

**Please Remember the Webkidss Walk-through Tool**

Just a reminder that the IEP walkthrough tool that we developed is available on the Webkidss front page just by clicking on the link. Everyone can use

a little support getting through the IEP draft now and then. To that end we have created an IEP walkthrough tool that will help you not to overlook any critical

information as you are writing your IEPs. This tool will be available later this week on our website.

If the Walkthrough tool is not enough, remember we are available for training if you need it. Just email!

## ECKCE Guardian EAP Still Available When You Need It



### ECKCE

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Often times we have questions about things that may or may not be job related, but are heavy on our minds. Whether it is a question about legal advice, financial guidance, family or life planning, or things that might be weighing you down, our Employee Assistance Program is here to help. The Guardian EAP is available to all ECKCE

employees. All you need to do is go to [worklife.uprisehealth.com](http://worklife.uprisehealth.com) and login as an ECKCE employee using the access code worklife.

Once you have logged in, you have access to a myriad of services, including mental health counseling. You can have up to three visits per family member per issue, all free of charge

to you. Because you are our employees and your well being is important to us. We need you to be all you can be for the students we serve and for the teams you support.

The Guardian EAP is only one of the ways we hope you know we are here for you. We hope you all have a tremendous first month of school! Let us know how we can help!

### PARAPROFESSIONAL NEWS AND NOTES

We are delighted to know that so many of you are contributing to the lives of our students in all three districts! This year we have been able to bring so many new folks into our schools, but we can always welcome more. If you have friends who are thinking about going into education and are looking for a great job, please send them our way!

The calls for how to

use the new clock-in system have nearly ceased as you guys have gotten used to how to navigate it all. Thanks for your patience in this changeover.

There have been a few instances of employees needing to be reminded to not be on their phones during school hours until you are clocked out for lunch or end of day. Remember that you are not only a support

for the students you are working with, you are also an example.

Lastly, please remember to clock in and out for lunch within the timeline your supervisor has given you—you need to take at least 20 and no more than 40 minutes for lunch unless otherwise arranged. Your students are counting on you being prompt as they need that consistency. As always, thanks for all that you to support our students in all districts!