What Families Need to Know About Restraints

Student safety is a top priority for all educators. School staff are trained to help students with disabilities manage their emotions and behavior. They use different techniques to de-escalate students, refocus attention, and reduce behaviors that could create unsafe situations. **As a last resort, staff may need to use restraints to ensure the safety of the student and others.**

Understanding Why Restraints Might Be Used in Educational Settings

There are times in schools when students exhibit behaviors that pose a safety risk that might require a physical restraint to ensure safety of that student or others. Restraints are only to be used after other less restrictive measures have been unsuccessful at reducing the potential risk of harm to the student or others. Restraints should never be used as a method to influence compliance or as punishment. Find more information on the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Basic Education Circular, Use of Restraints for Students with Disabilities and in Pennsylvania Code on Positive Behavior Support – 22 Pa. Code § 14.133.

Defining Restraints

A physical restraint in an educational environment occurs when school staff uses physical force to restrain the free movement of a student's body. Its sole purpose is ensuring safety in dangerous situations.

A mechanical restraint involves the use of a device or equipment. Mechanical restraint may only be used when determined necessary by a qualified medical professional, agreed to by the parent(s), and specified in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). The purpose of a mechanical restraint is to prevent a student from injuring themselves or others, or to promote normative body positioning and physical functioning.

Restraints NOT allowed: Prone restraints, in which a student with a disability is held face down on the floor, are never permitted in educational programs.

Reducing the Use of Restraints

The need to use restraints can be reduced by utilizing proactive strategies, such as:

- Recognizing early signs of anxiety in students to prevent escalation.
- Teaching students self-regulation and co-regulation skills.
- Identifying the factors that cause certain behaviors.
- Using de-escalation techniques to avoid power struggles.
- Being aware of the physical and emotional risks of restraints.
- Understanding the legal, ethical, and policy aspects of restraint interventions.

Steps Families Can Take

- Learn about Pennsylvania's laws and your Local Education Agency's school-wide positive behavior support policy.
- Read your child's Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP), Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), and/or Individualized Education Program (IEP) behavior goals and progress.

  Request an IEP meeting to discuss the plans and/or request changes or updates as needed.

- **Communicate with school staff about**:
  - Your child's stressors, and any behaviors, including self-injurious behavior, that could lead to a crisis.
  - How your child feels about school tasks and activities that may lead to escalated behavior.
- Support your child in communicating with school staff about their concerns, emotions, and frustration.
- Keep your own record of incidents, documents, and details communicated by your child.
- Contact ConsultLine at https://odr-pa.org/consultline-contact/ or by phone (800-879-2301) to ask questions or get more information.

Restraints in the IEP

The use of restraint should not be considered a primary strategy for managing student behavior. However, if the IEP team, including parent(s), determine restraint is appropriate, the use of restraints may be included in a student's or eligible young child's IEP only when the following conditions apply:

- The restraint is utilized with components of positive behavior support.
- The restraint is used in conjunction with teaching alternative skills to replace problematic behavior.
- Staff are trained and authorized to use restraint.
- A plan is in place to eliminate the use of restraint.

Reporting Requirements for Schools When Restraints Are Used

- Notify the family about the use of a restraint.
- Hold an IEP meeting within 10 school days of the incident to consider the need for a reevaluation, a FBA, a new or revised PBSP, or a change in the student's educational placement.

  The IEP meeting may be waived if the parent agrees, in writing, after receiving written notice of the IEP meeting.

- Report data on the use of restraints to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Related Resources

- Annotated Positive Behavior Support Plan

  This resource provides guidance on integrating positive behavior support strategies into a student's individualized education program (IEP).

- Functional Behavioral Assessment Process

  This publication explains the Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) process of gathering information to understand the function (purpose) of behavior in order to write an effective Positive Behavior Support Plan.

- Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education Restraint Information System of Collection (RISC) Program Guidelines

  The guidelines are designed to fulfill and adhere to the positive behavior support requirements set forth in the Pennsylvania Code.

- Pennsylvania Department of Education's "Use of Restraints for Students with Disabilities"

  The purpose of this Basic Educational Circular (BEC) is to provide guidance regarding the definition and use of restraints as outlined in the Pennsylvania special education regulations, Chapters 14 and 711 of Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code.

- Pennsylvania Code on Positive Behavior Supports – 22 Pa. Code §14.133 and §711.46

  These sections of the Pennsylvania Code outline the requirements for positive behavior support plans, emphasizing the use of research-based, positive strategies to address student behavior.

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