

# Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

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## Early Care and Education Workplace Conditions and Teacher Stress: Research-to-Policy Resources

Early childhood teachers play a critical role in children's development, and teacher-child relationships in particular contribute to the development of young children's [social-emotional competence](#). [Research](#) finds that teachers' workplace stress affects the quality of the relationships they form with children in their classroom, with more workplace stress being associated with more conflict in teacher-child relationships.

Job stressors in the workplace have been [defined](#) as the work-related conditions that negatively influence one's psychological, social and physiological well-being. The literature on teacher stress has documented several factors that can contribute to stress including [financial issues](#) (e.g. lack of adequate compensation and benefits), poor workplace supports (e.g. lack of autonomy in decision making, inadequate resources for professional development) and child behavior challenges. [Research](#) has also begun to document the effect of teachers' financial stressors, including wages and work time supports, on the emotional expressions and behaviors of children in the classroom.

In terms of workplace supports, [research](#) finds that having more control over decision making and greater collegiality with coworkers is associated with a decrease in stress among preschool teachers. Recognizing the influence that work conditions can have on teachers' well-being, attention has been turned to improving work environments for early childhood teachers. A new instrument, called [Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning](#) (SEQUAL) has been developed by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment to document information about workplace conditions and teacher well-being and how these factors impact



teacher practice. The tool addresses five areas of teachers' work environments: "teaching supports; learning opportunities; policies and practices that support teaching staff's initiative and teamwork; adult well-being; and how supervisors and program leaders interact with staff to support their teaching practice".

Child behavior challenges are also a contributor to teacher stress. A recent [study](#) examined the relationship between teachers' perceptions of child behavior problems and teacher stress and found that higher levels of perceived behavior problems was associated with higher levels of teacher stress. This may be particularly true when teachers have not received adequate training in managing challenging behaviors.

This research-to-policy resource list compiles publications from 2010 to the present on early care and education workplace conditions and teacher stress. Much of the research focuses on teachers in center-based settings and preschools. There is little research examining this issue for home-based providers. Resources are grouped under the following headings:

- Descriptive information on teacher well-being and stress
- Factors that contribute to teacher stress:
  - Financial issues
  - Workplace conditions and supports
  - Child behavior challenges
- Effects of stress on teaching practices and child behavior
- Interventions to reduce teacher stress
- Policy resources

### **Descriptive Information on Teacher Stress and Well-Being**

Cumming, T. (2017). [Early childhood educators' well-being: An updated review of the literature](#). *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45(5), 583-593.

Hall-Kenyon, K. M., Bullough, R. V., MacKay, K., & Marshall, E. (2014). [Preschool teacher well-being: A review of the literature](#). *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 42(3), 153-162.

Roberts, A. M., Gallagher, K., Daro, A. M., Iruka, I. U., & Sarver, S. (2017). [Workforce well-being: Personal and workplace contributions to early educators' depression across settings](#). *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, , 1-9.

### **Factors that Contribute to Teacher Stress**

#### ***Financial Issues***

Phillips, D. A., Austin, L. E., & Whitebook, M. (2016). [The early care and education workforce](#). *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 139-158.

Ullrich, R., Hamm, K., & Herzfeldt-Kamprath, R. (2016). [Underpaid and unequal: Racial wage](#)

[disparities in the early childhood workforce](#). Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

Whitebook, M., Austin, L. E., & Amanta, F. (2015). [Addressing infant-toddler teacher compensation](#). Washington, DC: Early Educator Central.

Whitebook, M., Phillips, D. A., & Howes, C. (2014). [Worthy work, STILL unlivable wages: The early childhood workforce 25 years after the National Child Care Staffing Study](#). Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

### **Workplace Conditions and Supports**

Faulkner, M. R., Gerstenblatt, P., Lee, A., Vallejo, V., & Travis, D. (2016). [Childcare providers: Work stress and personal well-being](#). *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 14(3), 280-293.

Hur, E., Jeon, L., & Buettner, C. K. (2016). [Preschool teachers' child-centered beliefs: Direct and indirect associations with work climate and job-related wellbeing](#). *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 45(3), 451-465.

Jeon, L., Buettner, C. K., & Grant, A. A. (2017). [Early childhood teachers' psychological well-being: Exploring potential predictors of depression, stress, and emotional exhaustion](#). *Early Education and Development*, 1-17.

Wells, M. B. (2017). [Is all support equal?: Head Start preschool teachers' psychological job attitudes](#). *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 63, 103-115.

Whitebook, M., King, E. K., Philipp, G., & Sakai, L. (2016). [Teachers' voices: Work environment conditions that impact teacher practice and program quality](#). Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

### **Child Behavior Challenges**

Friedman-Krauss, A., Raver, C., Morris, P. A., & Jones, S. M. (2014). [The role of classroom-level child behavior problems in predicting preschool teacher stress and classroom emotional climate](#). *Early Education and Development*, 25(4), 530-552.

Friedman-Krauss, A., Raver, C., Neuspiel, J. M., & Kinsel, J. (2014). [Child behavior problems, teacher executive functions, and teacher stress in Head Start classrooms](#). *Early Education and Development*, 25(5), 681-702.

Zinsser, K. M., Christensen, C. G., & Torres, L. (2016). [She's supporting them; who's supporting her?: Preschool center-level social-emotional supports and teacher well-being](#). *Journal of School Psychology*, 59, 55-66.

## **Effects of Stress on Teaching Practices and Child Behavior**

Buettner, C. K., Jeon, L., Hur, E., & Garcia, R. E. (2016). [Teachers' social-emotional capacity: Factors associated with teachers' responsiveness and professional commitment](#). *Early Education and Development*, 27(7), 1018-1039.

Cassidy, D. J., King, E. K., Wang, Y., Lower, J. K., & Kintner-Duffy, V. L. (2017). [Teacher work environments are toddler learning environments: Teacher professional well-being, classroom emotional support, and toddlers' emotional expressions and behaviours](#). *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(11), 1666-1678.

King, E. K., Van Schagen Johnson, A., Cassidy, D. J., Wang, Y., Lower, J. K., & Kintner-Duffy, V. L. (2016). [Preschool teachers' financial well-being and work time supports: Associations with children's emotional expressions and behaviors in classrooms](#). *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 44(6), 545-553.

Ota, C. L., Baumgartner, J., & Austin, A. (2013). [Provider stress and children's active engagement](#). *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 27(1), 61-73.

Rusby, J., Jones, L., Crowley, R., & Smolkowski, K. (2013). [Associations of caregiver stress with working conditions, caregiving practices, and child behaviour in home-based child care](#). *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(11), 1589-1604.

Whitaker, R. C., Dearth-Wesley, T., & Gooze, R. A. (2015). [Workplace stress and the quality of teacher-children relationships in Head Start](#). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 30(1A), 57-69.

Zinsser, K. M., Bailey, C. S., Curby, T. W., Denham, S. A., & Bassett, H. H. (2013). [Exploring the predictable classroom: Preschool teacher stress, emotional supportiveness, and students' social-emotional behavior in private and Head Start classrooms](#). *NHSA Dialog*, 16(2), 90-108

## **Interventions to Reduce Teacher Stress**

There have been few studies of interventions to reduce teacher stress. However, some earlier studies examined the use of mental health consultation as a strategy for working with children exhibiting challenging behavior, which in turn can help to reduce teacher stress. A literature review from 2008 examining some of those studies is included here along with other studies.

Brennan, E. M., Bradley, J. R., Allen, M., & Perry, D. F. (2008). [The evidence base for mental health consultation in early childhood settings: Research synthesis addressing staff and program outcomes](#). *Early Education and Development*, 19(6), 982-1022.

Bridges, M., Fuller, B., Huang, D. S., & Hamre, B. (2011). [Strengthening the early childhood workforce: How wage incentives may boost training and job stability](#). *Early Education and Development*, 22(6), 1009-1029.

Li-Grining, C. P., Raver, C., Champion, K., Sardin, L., Metzger, M., & Jones, S. M. (2010). [Understanding and improving classroom emotional climate and behavior management in the real world: The role of Head Start teachers' psychosocial stressors](#). *Early Education and Development*, 21(1), 65-94.

Zhai, F., Raver, C., & Li-Grining, C. P. (2011). [Classroom-based interventions and teachers' perceived job stressors and confidence: Evidence from a randomized trial in Head Start settings](#). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 26(4), 442-452.

### **Policy Resources**

McLean, C., Dichter, H., & Whitebook, M. (2017). [Strategies in pursuit of pre-K teacher compensation parity: Lessons from seven states and cities](#). Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

Mitchell, A. W., & Stoney, L. (2017). [Pathways to high-quality child care: The workforce investment credit](#). Arlington, VA: Committee for Economic Development.

Sharpe, N., Davis, B., & Howard, M. (2017). [Indispensable policies & practices for high-quality pre-K: Research & pre-K standards review](#). Washington, DC: New America Foundation.

Ullrich, R., Hamm, K., & Schochet, L. (2017). [6 policies to support the early childhood workforce](#). Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

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