

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are an important tool to ensure media outlets are accurately reporting on and including expert perspectives on the issues of the day. They typically appear in the online “Opinion” section of a media publication, and, in some cases, the print editions.

These letters are concise (usually between 150-200 words), reference and link directly to the publication’s article or item in question, and serve to clarify or correct something written in an article, offer a different or fresh point of view, or call out important context the author might have missed. This form of opinion is often easier to get placed in a publication than an op-ed (opinion-editorial).

Requirements and Submission Process

Letters to the editor should be timely in order to be considered for placement (e.g., submitted within one or two days of the story in question running). In order to increase the chances of placement, the author responding to the publication’s story should be living in the same city as the publication’s location/headquarters. Additionally, outlets will not publish anonymous letters so the piece should be attributed to a real author. Finally, the letter must be exclusive to the publication. Editors will not run a letter that has already been published elsewhere.

To submit the piece, paste it into the body of an email and send it to the designated editor or general email noted on the publication’s website. Be sure to include the full name, mailing address, city of residence, phone number and e-mail address for the author of the letter. The publication’s submission requirements and contact details can be found typically on one of the following web pages: Opinion, Contact Us, About Us, or Masthead.

Letter to the Editor Template

Short and Compelling Action-Oriented Headline

Brief blurb in less than 200 words that references the story and outlines the response.

[Responder’s Name]

[City, State]

[One-sentence biography (if the responder has a relevant affiliation and title).]

Sample Letters to the Editor

National and local stories appear almost daily on a broad array of issues related to infant and early childhood mental health consultation, such as mental health issues with preschool students, the rate of suspensions and expulsions, research in the field, the high cost of child care, and local success stories. While many of these stories are helping to bring awareness to the field and the importance of supporting infants and young children,



there might be opportunities to offer opinions that would supplement or clarify what's being written. Following are sample letters that can be tailored to key stories that run and require a response.

Articles on Behavioral Issues for Young Children that Don't Mention IECMHC

Tap mental health professionals to help caregivers improve well-being of young children

The [Month Day] article “[hyperlinked article headline]” discussed [brief description of the article]. It's encouraging to see that we're playing closer attention to the health and mental well-being of our youngest citizens. How we support them at the earliest stages of their lives will have a real impact later on in life – not just for them, but for society as a whole. It's important that we offer the right resources to child care providers, home visiting staff, preschool teachers and families so that these children will have the best shot to succeed in life.

There's an emerging field that is creating a new standard of care to improve the emotional and social well-being of infants and young children: Infant and early childhood mental health consultation. These mental health professionals help caregivers build strong relationships and a supportive environment that will enable our children to feel safe, supported and valued. They have invaluable expertise to help providers dig into the root causes of challenging behaviors or notice early warning signs – when it counts most. As we continue to discuss mental health issues for infants and young children, we should keep this option in mind.

[Name]

[City, State]

[One-sentence biography.]

Articles on Suspensions and Expulsions that Don't Address Solutions

Substitute suspensions and expulsions with mental health consultation

The [Month Day] article “[hyperlinked article headline]” discussed [brief description of the article]. It is alarming how many young students are getting suspended or expelled, especially those from minority communities. We are doing a disservice to them if we simply react to their external behaviors without digging deeper to identify and understand the root cause. Also, we might be missing early warning signs that some infants and young children are internalizing behaviors and withdrawn. It's very possible they're experiencing traumatic situations that are shaping the way they behave now, which can lead to life-long problems if not adequately addressed.

There's a better way to give young children and infants the best opportunity to succeed in life. Infant and early childhood mental health consultants can equip child care providers, home visiting staff, preschool teachers and families with tools and insights to help develop healthy emotional and social behaviors in infants and young children. These services are really making a difference. Some studies have shown that expulsions are reduced by



47% when preschoolers are given access to mental health services. This new standard of care will benefit our society in the long run.

[Name]

[City, State]

[One-sentence biography.]

Articles on Discipline/Mental Health Issues of Middle or High School Students

Address children’s mental health issues at a younger age

The [Month Day] article “[hyperlinked article headline]” discussed [brief description of the article]. Unfortunately, “zero tolerance” policies have made the “school-to-prison” pipeline more pronounced. While these policies were created in response to dangerous situations at schools, they have led to unintended consequences for students. There’s a solution emerging that can tackle this problem at earlier stages of students’ lives when it could make a bigger impact.

What our youngest children experience shapes the foundation for how they will learn and behave later on, and traumatic experiences that manifest early on can lead to some of the problems we are seeing in middle and high school. We now have services in place to address issues sooner – even before children are in preschool. Child care providers, home visiting staff and families around the country are starting to tap infant and early childhood mental health consultants to offer guidance that fosters healthier social and emotional behaviors in infants and young children. It’s really making a difference – reducing expulsions and suspensions, reversing caregiver turnover, and supporting families. We would benefit from this kind of support in our community.

[Name]

[City, State]

[One-sentence biography.]

Example of a Real Letter to the Editor

As reference, following is a relevant [letter to the editor](#) that ran on the WashingtonPost.com in November 2016:

Pass mental health reform for the very young

The Nov. 1 Health & Science article “[Help is scarce for troubled youth](#)” discussed the shortage of child psychiatrists, which is leading to a critical lack of access to mental health care for adolescents. Even before adolescence, however, the need for mental health intervention exists and access to services for our youngest children is dire.





Infants and very young toddlers deal with issues that can often manifest in dysfunction or illness even before preschool, when expulsion rates are more than three times the expulsion rate of students in Kindergarten through 12th grade. The brains of babies and young toddlers are developing rapidly, forming the architecture for future learning and progress. If they are exposed to unrelenting trauma, fear or stress, it can result in challenges that are harder to address down the road.

Taking up comprehensive mental health reform for the young — already passed through the House and on the Senate’s plate right now — is something Congress can and should come together to do now.

Matthew Melmed, Alexandria

The writer is executive director of Zero to Three.

