



Administrative Procedures Memorandum

APH 029

Guidelines for Use of Calming Rooms as a Proactive Self-Regulation Strategy

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MEMO TO: All Staff

FROM: Director of Education

PURPOSE

The Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB) recognizes its responsibility to provide a safe and supportive learning and working environment for all students and staff members. Staff considering the use of a calming room to support self-regulation of students with special education needs should also review [APH012 Physical Containment: Guidelines for Responding to Injurious and Self-Injurious Student Behaviour](#) in order to address issues related to the safety of our students and staff members.

The use of a calming room sometimes referred to as a de-escalation room, quiet area, calming space, sensory room etc., is based on the concept of reducing environmental and body triggers as a coping strategy for students in elevated and/or depressed emotional states of arousal. Calming areas are widely used in a variety of settings, including schools, homes, therapeutic clinics and hospitals to support self-regulation. It is important that calming areas are not to be used as places of punishment, seclusion and/or containment.

The Guidelines for use of calming rooms provide a consistent approach in the use of calming rooms for the purpose of prevention and de-escalation of challenging behaviours.

REFERENCES

Ministry of Education, Individual Education Plans Standards for Development, Program Planning and Implementation 2002

APC018 Code of Conduct

APH012 Physical Containment of Students: Guidelines for Responding to Injurious and Self-Injurious Student Behaviour

APH013 Emergency Planning & Procedures

FORMS

- APH029-01 Calming Room Log

APPENDICES

- APPENDIX A Questions to Consider Before Teaching the Independent Use of a Calming Room



COMMENTS AND GUIDELINES

1. Interpretation/Definition

- 1.1 **Self-Regulation:** is the ability to employ a variety of strategies to regulate one's emotions and actions in response to a situation occurring in the immediate environment which triggers arousal. Self-Regulation is the ability to employ a variety of strategies to regulate one's emotions and actions in response to the situation(s) occurring in the immediate environment and to intrinsic arousal.
- 1.2 **Calming Room:** is a room that the student self-elects to remove him or herself to and is one option as pre-determined by Administrators and outlined in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). The main purpose of the room is to support the student in the implementation of self-regulation strategies, resulting in the reduction of challenging behaviours. The calming room may contain materials to assist the student in calming methods (*e.g. deep breaths/breathing, squishy balls, visual supports that provide options/instructions, lying down on a mat, listening to quiet music, etc.*). A student in a calming room must be supervised by a staff member at all times. Staff are to collect data to reflect the student's use of the calming room (*Calming Room Log*)
- 1.3 **Sensory Room:** is a room utilized for the implementation of a sensory diet/program which addresses a student's identified sensory needs. It is an expectation that a sensory diet/program involving the use of a sensory room is recommended by an Occupational Therapist (OT). The use of scheduling of a sensory room should be explicitly outlined in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), must rely on the choice of the student's, and must be supervised by a staff member. The sensory room may contain materials as prescribed by an Occupational Therapist (*e.g. weighted blanket, body sock, yoga ball, lap snake, etc.*)
- 1.4 **Time Out Room:** The WCDSB does not support the use of any type of room as a form of involuntary isolation and/or for disciplinary purposes. As well, the WCDSB does not support physically restricting a student's ability to exit a room except in the case of an emergency in order to protect the safety of student(s) and/or staff from risk of injury.
- 1.5 **Time Out Strategy:** is a classroom management strategy whereby the staff member directs the student away from an activity or location as a temporary means to re-engage the student. This is a short-term strategy that a staff member may employ to promote student self-reflection and self-calming. This may be a part of the class rules and consequences as outlined by the teacher. Time out may occur within the classroom or take place in another supervised area (*e.g. the office*). The student must be supervised by a staff member at all times.
- 1.6 **Safety Plans:** is a predetermined plan of action developed by school staff in consultation with professional services personnel and with parents/guardians. A safety plan is created based on behaviour tracking mechanisms (*ABC Tracker*) and outlines the necessary response recommended for preventing the agitation levels of a student from rising and safely managing verbal and physical behaviours that may arise despite the application of strategies and interventions as outlined in BMS training. The Safety Plan is not a plan for remediating challenging behaviour. Its focus is maintaining safety. It is expected that other documents such as the IEP will address and evaluate proactive behaviour change strategies.
- 1.7 **Behaviour Plan:** is an alternative program page on an IEP. A behaviour plan may be titled "*self-regulation*," "*behaviour*," or another term designating its purpose. This program page is created and assessed by collecting behaviour data (*ABC Tracker*), outlines the skills the student needs to learn



in order to reduce challenging behaviour and how the staff will teach/support the student in learning the new skill. A behaviour plan is created by school staff in consultation with professional services staff and with parents/guardians and student if over 16 years of age.

2. Fire Safety and Calming/Sensory Rooms

- 2.1 The creation of a separate, self-contained calming and/or sensory room must be first approved through the WCDSB Facilities and the Superintendent of Learning Services. To ensure the room meets building codes, fire safety regulations, as well as program requirements.
- 2.2 School fire safety protocols must be updated every year by the principal. Fire drill protocols for calming rooms and sensory rooms must be included in the school's Fire Safety Plan. These protocols should be practiced as per APH013 Emergency Planning & Procedures.

3. Calming Room Principles

In this memorandum, the term calming is used synonymously with the term self-regulation. Some students may experience high levels of frustration, anger and anxiety while at school as a direct outcome of their exceptionalities. Teaching self-regulation strategies to these students is a proactive means of addressing safety issues and also providing the student with an increased opportunity of independence and success. The use of calming rooms in WCDSB schools is a proactive self-regulation strategy and will be guided by the following principles:

- 3.1 In all situations, it is the intent of the WCDSB to provide the best possible care and to ensure the welfare, safety, and security of all involved.
- 3.2 Students will access calming rooms voluntarily as part of a predetermined and documented plan, as outlined in their IEP. Students accessing a calming room will not be transported physically into or out of the room by staff.
- 3.3 Calming rooms will not be used as a disciplinary measure or as punishment for inappropriate challenging behaviour.
- 3.4 Students will not be restricted in their ability to leave calming rooms through the use of locks on the doors or by restricting the student's exit (*e.g. holding the door, blocking the door way, etc.*)
- 3.5 Calming rooms must have a window to allow the student to look out and alternatively staff to observe if required.
- 3.6 Students must be supervised and never left unattended in a calming room under any circumstances.
- 3.7 Calming rooms will not be used during an Emergency Lockdown. If a student is in a Calming Room and a Lockdown is implemented, the student should be directed to the nearest safest location, as determined in the school's Emergency Response (Lockdown) Plan.
- 3.8 If a student escalates and begins to engage in challenging behaviour which pose a safety risk to themselves or others while in a calming room and/or upon exit, the procedures as outlined in BMS training and APH012 Physical Containment: Guidelines for Responding to Injurious and Self-Injurious Student Behaviour should be implemented.



- 3.9 The use of a calming room must be tracked via “*Calming Room Log*” to refine and determine the effectiveness of the strategy. Please refer to the documentation section for more information.
- 3.10 The use of a calming room may not be appropriate for all students. This de-escalation strategy should only be employed after less restrictive strategies have been trialed in the classroom and school.

4. Guidelines

- 4.1 **Staff Training/Professional Development on Self-Regulation and De-escalation:**
Professional development related to self-regulation offers learning opportunities to assist in the development of preventative strategies and de-escalation interventions. These professional development opportunities are offered throughout the year and include the use of The Incredible 5 Point Scales and/or Zones of Regulation to help students recognize their emotional state to employ strategies in response to different situations that they may encounter throughout the day. Students should be taught a variety of responses when they are in a depressed and/or elevated emotional state. Specific teaching strategies may be combined with sensory equipment/diets (*as prescribed by an Occupational therapist*) or social narratives to support students in the process of self-regulation.

5. Self-Regulation Tiered Intervention and Support:

- 5.1. Self-Regulation strategies that assist students to remain in their regular classroom should be the first priority. These strategies are best employed as part of a systematic and comprehensive program such as Zones of Regulation and/or The Incredible 5 Point Scale.
- 5.2. Where these in-class strategies are not entirely successful or where they need to be supplemented, the focus moves to providing the student with opportunities to self-regulate through activities such as walking in the school or school yard, performing physical tasks or moving to a different classroom or other learning space. The student should be supervised during these activities.
- 5.3. Only after these strategies have been attempted and the behaviour the behaviour tracking demonstrates that they are not entirely successful should a calming room be considered as a part of a self-regulation strategy.
 - 5.3.1. Staff considering the use of a calming room, should refer to the **document “Questions to consider before Teaching the Independent Use of a Calming Room” APPENDIX A APH029**. If the majority of the questions can be answered in the affirmative, a calming room may be used as a self-regulation strategy. For students with significant cognitive and/or communicative impairments, special education staff should be consulted during the process.
 - 5.3.2. The use of a calming room as a proactive strategy should only be used as a part of a comprehensive self-regulation plan and be supported through behaviour tracking (e.g. *ABC, frequency & duration tracking*).
- 5.4. The IEP should explicitly state when and for what purpose the calming room will be used by the student. The IEP and Safety Plan should document how and when a student will access and leave the calming room, including clear and consistent language to be used by all staff who are instructing the student.
- 5.5. Self-regulation strategies, including the use of calming room, are implemented with the knowledge, understanding and support of the student. The student must understand the purpose of the calming



room, how to request the use of the room and how to communicate needs and wants while in the room.

5.6. The parent/guardian should be informed and agree to the use of the Calming Room for the student. The parent/guardian should be given the opportunity to see the calming room if requested.

5.7. The “*Calming Room Log*” (APH029 FORM-01) must be completed for all students who use the room.

5.8. The use of a Calming Room is not a long-term strategy and needs to be re-evaluated in each assessment cycle.

5.8.1. The Calming Room Log and the behaviour tracking data should be reviewed to determine the success of the calming room and other strategies. Where the raw (baseline) data shows that the use of a calming room is not successful, after a reasonable trial, it should be discontinued.

5.8.2. Where the data determines that the calming room is successful, after a reasonable period of time, the school team along with the Special Education Liaison (SEL) should focus on long-term goals to reduce the use of the room. The school team and Family of Schools Child and Youth Care Worker (CYCW) in conjunction with parent consultation, should consider the amount of time the student uses the room, the impact on other learning goals, the impact on social interaction and, where a student is transitioning to a different placement, lack of access to calming rooms in other environments.

5.9. **Type of Space**

Self-regulation strategies can be applied in many environments. Ideally, they are implemented in the classroom. As noted above, it may be necessary for the student to be taught self-regulation strategies that are implemented in spaces other than a classroom.

5.10. If a separate room is used as a calming room, the following considerations must apply. The room should:

5.10.1. Be a space that does not cause any further emotional or behavioural escalation;

5.10.2. Not contain items or fixtures that may be potentially harmful to students in an escalated emotional state;

5.10.3. Provide a means by which staff can monitor the student at all times;

5.10.4. Be well ventilated, clean and well lit;

5.10.5. Be available to designated student as outlined in their IEP; and,

5.10.6. Not be scheduled for other use throughout the day (*e.g. sensory room*) where such use would create conflict. However, some students use a sensory room for self-regulation by self-selecting to use the room at times of low escalating emotional states, not just at scheduled times. In such cases, the distinction between sensory and calming rooms is blurred. The importance consideration here is the individual student’s ability to self-regulate and the welfare and the safety of the student and others.

6 **Parent/Guardian Involvement**

6.1 When a Calming Room is used as a part of a program as outlined in an IEP, the parent/guardian of the student under 18 will be consulted and informed through:

6.1.1. IEP development;

6.1.2. Safety Plan development;



6.1.3. The School Team and FOS CYCW meetings and records documenting the increase or change in the frequency of use of the calming room.

6.2 In addition, professional judgment should be used to determine if any of the following might be appropriate:

6.2.1. Contact the SEL (*Special Education Liaison*) for proactive programming support;

6.2.2. Referral to the Board Autism Consultant (*if applicable*);

6.2.3. Referral for Professional Services Support (*e.g. SLP, Social Work*);

6.2.4. Referral to the Behaviour Support Team (*if all internal supports have been exhausted*);

6.2.5. Involvement in appropriate community supports.

7. Documentation

7.1 Documenting the use of a calming room is necessary for planning, effective usage and accountability. The “*Calming Room Log*” (FORM 1) will be completed for all situations in which the calming room is used.

7.2 The “*Calming Room Log*” should be individually completed for each student who uses the room and kept in a secure location to ensure privacy.

7.3 The “*Calming Room Log*” should be reviewed based on the continuous cycle of assessment by the school team and FOS CYCW, monitored by the school principal, to discuss the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the proactive strategy. It should be shared with parent/guardian.



Questions to Consider Before Teaching the Independent Use of a Calming Room

Before a student is taught to proactively use a calming room as a part of their IEP program, it is important for a school team to discuss the following questions.

Emotions

- Is the student aware of their emotional states (e.g. *tired, frustrated, happy, sad, angry, etc.*)?
- Can the student recognize when his/her emotional state is escalating or de-escalating?
- Can the student express that his/her emotional state is escalating or de-escalating?

Self-Regulation Strategies

- Has the student been directly taught self-regulation strategies and had the opportunity to generalize the skill (practice)
- Does the student have a calming routine he/she engages in independently and successfully?
- Does the student have a “*toolbox*” of strategies to use for “*calming*”?
- Can the student perform the calming routine in a variety of environments?

Transitions

- Is the student able to transition between environments independently?

Visuals

- Does the student use visual supports to transition between environments?
- Does the student use visual supports to engage in a calming routine?

Documentation

- Does the student have an IEP program page (i.e. *Self-Regulation*) outlining what he/she will learn in order to self-regulate?
- Does the IEP tracking demonstrate that the student is learning a calming routine and has begun to generalize the skill to different environments?
- Has a Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA) been completed to determine the function of the student’s behaviour? Does the FBA support that the student needs a separate environment in order to calm?
- Does the student have a Safety Plan outlining proactive strategies to ensure the student’s behaviour does not escalate?
- Has the board professional services staff been involved and assisted with proactive strategies (e.g. *SLP, Autism Consultant, Social Work*)?
- Have suggestions from a health professional (e.g. *OT, PT, Psychologist*) been implemented to aid the student in calming?

Calming Room

- Has the student used the calming room to practice a calming routine (e.g. deep breathing) when in a calm emotional state?



Calming Room Log (Sample)

This is an example form only, showing how the Calming Room Log may be individualized

The Calming Room Log is intended to be used to track individual student's use of the calming room as outlined in a predetermined program plan. The designated space is for a student to implement calming strategies so that he/she is able to successfully return to classroom activities. A staff member must monitor the students continually while they are in the calming room and record their observations. The record is to be retained as part of ongoing assessment.

Students Name: John Doe
School Name: St. Joseph

Date	Observations of student's physical & verbal state prior to entry	Time Entered	Observations of student's physical & verbal state when in room	Strategies implemented by support staff to support student	Time Exited	Observations of student's physical & verbal state when exited room	Staff Name
06/04/2015	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Swearing <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal Threats <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Crying <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Screaming <input type="checkbox"/> Agitated <input type="checkbox"/> Hitting <input type="checkbox"/> Kicking <input type="checkbox"/> Destruction <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	11:08 AM	<input type="checkbox"/> Screaming <input type="checkbox"/> Pacing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Quiet <input type="checkbox"/> Talking to self <input type="checkbox"/> Rocking <input type="checkbox"/> Banging <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sensory Items <input type="checkbox"/> Squared Breathing <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Point Scale <input type="checkbox"/> Bean Bag Chair <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Soft Music <input type="checkbox"/> Blanket/Mat <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	11:22 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Calm <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Responsive to Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Requests to leave <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigued <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	J Smith



Calming Room Log

Student's Name: _____

School Name: _____

Date	Observations of student's physical & verbal state prior to entry	Time Entered	Observations of student's physical & verbal state when in room	Strategies implemented by support staff to support student	Time Exited	Observations of student's physical & verbal state when exited room	Staff Name
	<input type="checkbox"/> Swearing <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal Threats <input type="checkbox"/> Crying <input type="checkbox"/> Screaming <input type="checkbox"/> Agitated <input type="checkbox"/> Hitting <input type="checkbox"/> Kicking <input type="checkbox"/> Destruction <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Screaming <input type="checkbox"/> Pacing <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet <input type="checkbox"/> Talking to self <input type="checkbox"/> Rocking <input type="checkbox"/> Banging <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Sensory Items <input type="checkbox"/> Squared Breathing <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Point Scale <input type="checkbox"/> Bean Bag Chair <input type="checkbox"/> Soft Music <input type="checkbox"/> Blanket/Mat <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Calm <input type="checkbox"/> Responsive to Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Requests to leave <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigued <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Swearing <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal Threats <input type="checkbox"/> Crying <input type="checkbox"/> Screaming <input type="checkbox"/> Agitated <input type="checkbox"/> Hitting <input type="checkbox"/> Kicking <input type="checkbox"/> Destruction <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Screaming <input type="checkbox"/> Pacing <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet <input type="checkbox"/> Talking to self <input type="checkbox"/> Rocking <input type="checkbox"/> Banging <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Sensory Items <input type="checkbox"/> Squared Breathing <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Point Scale <input type="checkbox"/> Bean Bag Chair <input type="checkbox"/> Soft Music <input type="checkbox"/> Blanket/Mat <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Calm <input type="checkbox"/> Responsive to Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Requests to leave <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigued <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
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