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**Subject** **USE OF CALMING ROOMS AS A PROACTIVE SELF-REGULATION STRATEGY**

**References** Ministry of Education, Individual Education Plans Standards for Development, Program Planning and Implementation 2002  
APM 1440 Physical Containment: Guidelines for Responding to Injurious and Self-injurious Student Behaviour  
APM A2310 Injuries to Students and Visitors  
APM A2320 Workplace Accident and Incident Reporting  
APM A7100 Violent Incidents – Response Procedures  
APM A7630 Code of Student Conduct

**Links** FORM 1 (Calming Room Log)

**Contact** School Services; Instructional Services – Special Education

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## 1. Interpretation/Definitions

- 1.1 Calming Room: is a room that the student self-elects to remove him or herself and is one option as pre-determined by the program outlined in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). The main purpose of the room is to teach de-escalation strategies, resulting in the reduction of challenging behaviours. The calming room may contain materials to assist the student in calming methods (e.g. squishy balls, visuals of deep breathing, etc.). The use of a calming room must be supervised by an adult at all times.
- 1.2 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. The use and scheduling of a sensory room is explicitly outlined in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), relies on the choice of the student, and must be supervised by an adult. The sensory room may contain materials as prescribed by an occupational therapist (e.g. peanut ball, weighted blanket, etc.).
- 1.3 Time Out Room: Both the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB) Administrative Procedures Memorandum (APM) A1440 on the use of Physical Containment and Behaviour Management Systems (BMS) procedures do not support physically transporting students from one location to another. Placement in a "time out room" is not voluntary. A Time Out Room is a room in which students are directed when exhibiting challenging behaviours.<sup>1</sup>

- 1.4 Time Out Strategy: is a classroom management strategy whereby the teacher directs the student away from the activity or location as a temporary means of re-engaging the student. This is a short-term strategy that a teacher may employ to promote student self-reflection and self-calming. This may be part of the class rules and consequences. Time Out may occur within the classroom, involve a buddy class or take place in another supervised area (e.g. the office). The student must be supervised by an adult.
- 1.5 Time Away Strategy: some students, as part of an IEP, may have an opportunity to 'take a break'. Examples of the implementation of the Time Away Strategy are: the student may have a 'break card' and put his/her head down on her desk; or, the student places a red card on his desk and goes to another location in the school (e.g. Learning Centre, buddy class, office). The student must be supervised by an adult.
- 1.6 Safety Plan: is a predetermined plan of action developed by staff in consultation with parents and anyone else involved with the student. A Safety Plan is created based on behaviour data collection and outlines the necessary response 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 Behaviour Management Systems Training. The Safety Plan is not a plan for remediating behaviour. Its focus is maintaining safety. It is expected that other documents such as the Individual Education Plan will address and evaluate behaviour change strategies.
- 1.7 Behaviour Plan: is an alternative program page on an Individual Education Plan. A Behaviour Plan may be titled "self-regulation," "behaviour," or another term designating its purpose. This program page is created and assessed by collected behaviour data, outlines what skills the student needs to learn in order to reduce challenging behaviours and how the staff will teach/support the student in learning the new skill. A behaviour plan is created in collaboration with parents and anyone else involved with the student.

## **2. Purpose**

The Simcoe County District School Board recognizes its responsibility to provide a safe and supportive environment for all students and staff. Administrative Procedures Memorandum A7630 Code of Student Conduct addresses many issues related to safety. Administrative Procedures Memorandum A1440 Physical Containment addresses the use of Physical Containment.

This Guideline for Use of Calming Rooms provides a consistent approach in the use of calming rooms and their role in the prevention and de-escalation of challenging behaviours.

### **3. Fire Safety and Calming Rooms**

- 3.1 The creation of a calming room and/or sensory room must be first approved through the SCDSB Facilities and Instructional Services departments to ensure the room meets building codes and fire safety regulations. Temporary or makeshift rooms are not permitted.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 For calming rooms or sensory rooms built after August 2009, pilot lights will be installed outside the room and in the nearest hallway to indicate that a student is using the room. It is the supervising staff's responsibility to switch on and off the light to indicate use of the room.

### **4. Calming Room Principles**

In this memorandum, the term calming is used synonymously with the term self-regulation. Some students regularly experience high levels of frustration, anger and anxiety. Teaching calming strategies to these students is a proactive means of addressing safety issues but also provides the student with a greater level of self-control.

Self-regulation programs represent a continuum of strategies including, but not limited to the student recognizing areas of frustration and/or beginning feelings of anger or anxiety and then self-employing strategies for managing these feelings. The focus should be on teaching and implementation in the classroom, wherever possible. However, with some students, the self-regulation strategies may need to be implemented in another environment. In such cases, walking through halls accompanied with an adult, gross motor activities, use of a buddy class, time in the office, or use of a calming room may assist in the de-escalation. The use of a calming room allows the student to de-escalate in a safe and private environment.

The use of calming rooms in Simcoe County District School Board schools is a proactive self-regulation strategy and will be guided by the following principles:

- 4.1 In all situations, it is the intent of the Simcoe County District School Board to provide the best possible care and to ensure the welfare, safety, and security of all involved.
- 4.2 Students will access calming rooms voluntarily as part of a predetermined and documented plan.
- 4.3 Calming rooms will not be used as a disciplinary measure or as punishment for inappropriate behaviour.
- 4.4 Students will not be restricted in their ability to leave calming rooms through the use of locks on the door or adults restricting the student's exit (e.g. holding the door, barring the door way, etc.)

- 4.5 Calming rooms must have a window. If the student chooses to close the door, the window must allow the student to look out and adults to observe.
- 4.6 Students must be supervised and never left unattended in a calming room under any circumstances.
- 4.7 Calming rooms will not be used during a Code Red. If a student is in the Calming Room and a Code Red is implemented, the student should be directed to the nearest classroom.

If a student escalates and begins to engage in behaviours which pose a safety risk to themselves or others while in a calming room and/or upon exit the procedures as outlined in Behaviour Management Services (BMS) training and APM A1440 should be implemented.

The use of a calming room needs to be tracked via the “Calming Room Log” (FORM 1) to refine and determine the effectiveness of the strategy. Please refer to the documentation section for more information.

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.

## **5. Guidelines**

### **5.1 Staff Training on De-escalation**

Both Behaviour Management Systems (BMS) training and professional development on the creation and implementation of Safety Plans focus on preventative strategies and de-escalation interventions. Both professional development opportunities are offered throughout the year and are open to all school board staff. Each session will include a component on the use of calming rooms as they can provide a proactive vehicle for allowing students to self-regulate and avoid the escalation of behaviours.

#### **Calming Room as part of an IEP alternative curriculum plan**

- 5.1.1 Strategies that assist the student to remain in the classroom should be trialed first.
- 5.1.2 The use of a calming room as a proactive strategy should be used as part of a comprehensive behaviour plan when supported through behaviour tracking (e.g. ABC and frequency tracking)
- 5.1.3 The IEP should explicitly state when and for what purpose the calming room will be used by the student.
- 5.1.4 The IEP and Safety Plan should document how and when the student will access and leave the calming room, including clear and consistent language to be used by all staff who are instructing the student.
- 5.1.5 In rare circumstances, the calming room may be used by a student as a temporary measure. In such cases the student may not have an IEP.

The parent should be informed and agree to the use of the Calming Room for the student. If documentation supports the calming room as a successful strategy over a period of time, an IEP should be developed.

- 5.1.6 The "Calming Room Log" must be completed for all students who use the room.
- 5.1.7 The use of a Calming Room is not a long-term strategy. It needs to be re-evaluated in each assessment cycle. Other self-regulation strategies should be implemented and translated into the classroom environment.

## 5.2 Type of Space

- 5.2.1 In some situations a calming room may be self-contained, or it may be a designated space in the classroom or school.
- 5.2.2 Ideally a calming room is a space that does not cause any further distress or provide opportunities to promote further escalation of behaviour.
- 5.2.3 Considerations for the type of space for the calming area should: not contain items or fixtures that may be potentially harmful to students; not have dual purposes; provide a means by which adults can monitor the student both visually and audibly at all times; be well ventilated, clean and well lit.
- 5.2.4 A calming room should be available to designated students as outlined in their IEP. It should not be a room that has scheduled uses throughout the day (e.g. sensory room) where such use would create a conflict.

## 5.3 Logging Use of Calming Room

- 5.3.1 The Calming Room Log needs to be completed during/post each use of the calming room.
- 5.3.2 Calming Room Logs should be reviewed on a continual basis to inform instruction and effectiveness of the strategy in Strengths and Needs Committee (SNC) format.

## 6. Parent/Guardian Involvement

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

- 6.1 Individual Education Plan (IEP) development;
- 6.2 Safety Plan development;
- 6.3 SNC documenting the increase or change in the frequency of use of the calming room.

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

- 6.4 Contact the Regional Principal of Special Education for proactive programming support;
- 6.5 Referral to the Area Special Education Team for assistance in assessing the situation;
- 6.6 Inclusion of community agencies for assistance in creating a proactive behaviour plan.



## **7. Documentation**

- 7.1 Documenting the use of the 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 in SNC format, monitored by the school principal, to discuss the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the proactive strategy. It should be shared with the parent/guardian.

*<sup>1</sup> In circumstances in which the student’s and/or other’s safety is in imminent and acute danger and containment of the student is not an option, a Calming Room may be used for Time Out Room purposes. Under these rare circumstances, the Calming Room will be viewed as a form of containment and should be documented and debriefed as per guidelines in Administrative Procedures Memorandum A1440.*

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***Issued under the authority of the Director of Education***

