



Bureau of Special Education

Back-to-School Meeting

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Use of Time Out in Schools

“Time out” is a popular phrase used in many different ways by educators, administrators, parents, mental health service providers, and other personnel involved with students in both public and private education settings. The definition may vary from individual to individual or setting to setting, however, for the purposes of these guidelines, “time out” shall be broadly defined as a set of procedures that can be used to reduce inappropriate student behavior as a result of the student being denied access to the opportunity to receive reinforcement for a fixed period of time.

Using this definition, “time out” can take on a variety of forms. For example, the use of *planned ignoring* is **the removal of social reinforcers** such as teacher or classmate attention, physical contact, or verbal interaction for a brief period of time when the student engages in undesired behavior. *Removal of reinforcement* could be the **removal of materials the student is interacting with for a short period of time**. These less intrusive “time out” strategies should always be used first and data should support their level of effectiveness.

“Time out” can also be exclusionary in nature such as **when the student is removed from the reinforcing conditions**. Examples might include the following: **removal of the child/youth from the current environment to another location in the room or setting**. The student continues to observe ongoing or instructional activities, but may not participate in them. A more restrictive “time out” strategy might include **the removal of the student from the current environment to another location within the same room where the student cannot observe ongoing activities**. Examples might include: sitting behind a partition or sitting in a position facing away from the activities. The amount of time necessary to effect a change in behavior will vary according to the age of the student and again the continuation of such a strategy should be data driven.

The most restrictive type of time out, “**exclusionary time out,**” means a temporary, continuously monitored separation of a student from an ongoing activity in a non-locked setting, for the purpose of calming such student or deescalating such student’s behavior. Exclusionary time out is characterized by **the removal of the student from all probable reinforcers by being placed in a different location where the student is under the constant supervision of a qualified staff or may be engaged in de-escalation exercises or restitution procedures with a staff member**. However, in such a situation the student cannot be prevented from leaving the space, room, or area. **Should the student NOT BE PERMITTED to leave the space by the adult, the procedure no longer meets the criteria of a “time out,” rather the incident becomes a “seclusion” as defined in Connecticut state statute and staff must follow the required documentation, notification, and protocol procedures.** (see [restraint and seclusion guidance](#) document)

Remembering that the intent of any behavior intervention is not limited to reducing or controlling an undesirable behavior, but should include an instructional component to teach a new, acceptable replacement behavior. The use of any “time out” procedures must serve a legitimate educational purpose and be determined appropriate to the desired behavior change. “Time out” is not to be used as a punishment. Rather, it is a classroom management tool that may also be used by the student as a time away from a situation to reflect and regain composure. Maintaining data around the impact of the use of any type of “time out” procedure is essential to ensure that the outcome of the strategy is in fact the reduction in the undesirable behavior.

Best practice also speaks to monitoring the duration of any adult-imposed or student-initiated timeout. The frequency and duration of a timeout should be predetermined and not chronic in nature. If the “time out” procedure is required at a high rate of frequency, the effectiveness of such a response to behavior may not in fact produce the desired result. The use of “time out” should be closely monitored by child study teams or grade level teams to ensure that “time out” as an intervention is not overused or implemented inappropriately. If upon examination of the data it is determined that the use of “time out” as an intervention for an individual student is not effective in reducing the inappropriate behavior and does not encourage learning of new and appropriate behavior, the team should consider looking closely at the function of the student’s behavior and develop alternative intervention(s). As with any other behavior intervention that is designed to reduce a targeted behavior and teach a replacement behavior, the use of “time out” with an individual student should be documented and clearly defined. Documentation should include the nature of the “time out,” the duration, the location, and any other procedures or conditions necessary to achieve the desired outcome. Such information can be documented in a behavior support plan or a behavior intervention plan (BIP).

In the case of students who are receiving special education services, the planning and placement team (PPT) should be involved in making decisions concerning behavior interventions and the use of behavior reduction procedures such as “time out.” The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2014, requires that the individualized education program team consider positive behavior support for a student whose behavior impedes his/her learning or the learning of others. When behavior reduction strategies are being considered, the PPT should determine the instruction the student requires to learn new, more acceptable behaviors (replacement behaviors). In addition, the excessive removal from the classroom of a student receiving special education services could constitute a change of placement. This situation requires that the PPT meet to review the student’s current supports and services and make any necessary adjustments. If previously developed, the PPT must review the current functional behavior assessment (FBA) and BIP and make the appropriate revisions. If an FBA and/or a BIP have not been conducted in relation to the current interfering behavior, the PPT should recommend that an FBA be conducted and request parental consent for this evaluation. The results or revisions to the FBA should drive the appropriate development of a BIP, the implementation of which must be closely monitored to ensure the reduction of the behavior of concern, and the learning of new/appropriate replacement behaviors. (see [*Guidelines for Identifying and Educating Students with Emotional Disturbance*](#))