

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF NON-EXCLUSIONARY AND EXCLUSIONARY TIME-OUT**

with youth 3-21 years old receiving public education services

"Time-out" is a popular phrase used in many different ways by educators, administrators, parents, mental health service providers and other personnel involved with youth in public education settings. The definition may vary, however, from individual to individual. For the purposes of these guidelines, time-out shall be defined in the following ways:

**Non-exclusionary time-out** is defined as the removal of reinforcers (e.g., preferred activity, teacher attention) from the child/youth. There are two levels of non-exclusionary time-out; planned ignoring and removal of reinforcement.

- a. **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 (10-60 seconds)\* when the student engages in undesired behavior.
- b. **Removal of reinforcement** is the removal of materials the student is interacting with for a period of time (1-3 minutes)\*.

**Exclusionary time-out** is defined as the removal of the child/youth from the reinforcing conditions. Non-exclusionary time out is less intrusive and should be tried first. Exclusionary time-out has three levels. Listed from the least to the most intrusive, these include contingent observation, exclusion time-out, and isolation time-out.

- a. **Contingent observation** is the removal of the child/youth from the current environment to another location in the room or setting. The student still observes ongoing or instructional activities but may not participate in them. Optimal time limits are 30-60 seconds\*.
- b. **Exclusion time-out** is the removal of the child/youth from the current environment to another location within the same room where the student cannot observe ongoing activities. Examples of exclusion are sitting behind a partition or sitting in a corner. Time effective in changing behavior will vary according to the age of the student. According to research, the maximum effective time is 2-5 minutes\*.
- c. **Isolation time-out** is the isolation of the child/youth from all probable reinforcers by being placed in a different room under the constant supervision of a qualified staff. Isolation requires a previously defined time duration. The length of time should not exceed one minute per year of age of the student with a maximum of 12 minutes\*.

**Seclusion time-out** is defined as placement of a student alone in a locked room. These guidelines are not intended to address seclusion time-out. Rules around the use of seclusion are defined in the Colorado Code of Regulations at 1 CCR 301-45.

\*Although all times included here are based on research and presented as guidelines, it should be understood that, based on individual student needs, times may vary. In all instances, the briefest, effective time should be utilized.

Time-out, used appropriately with forethought, can provide an effective response to challenging behaviors. However, the use of time-out must be planned and purposeful and not as an act of retribution or respite for the teacher. The following guidelines have been documented as recommended practice in the literature ( Gast & Nelson, 1977; Nelson & Rutherford, 1983; Yell, 1994; Ewing, 1998) and based on federal court decisions.

**1. Time-out must serve a legitimate educational function.**

Classroom management techniques, as well as individual student behavior interventions, should maintain a constructive focus that results in an effective and positive educational environment. The intent of any behavior or discipline intervention is not merely to reduce or control undesired behaviors, but to instruct in the acquisition of appropriate replacement behaviors. It is critical that educators determine if time-out, as with any behavior strategy used, is effective in changing the behavior of concern. If changes do not occur or the behavior intensifies, educators should consider alternative interventions.

**2. Time-out should be used only in a manner commensurate with recommended practice and proportionate to the intensity of the behavior.**

Time-out should never be used as a punishment. Rather, time-out should be considered a technique that may be employed to allow the student time away from the situation to reflect and regain composure. The outcome of time-out should be a reduction in the undesirable behavior.

- Excessive duration of any given time-out is not supported by research and can be counter-productive in reducing challenging behaviors. Therefore, the time, duration and release criteria should be determined before the time-out is imposed. (see page 1 for suggested times).
- The frequency and duration of time-out should be closely reviewed and evaluated to assure that no individual student is in isolation time-out on a chronic basis. If this appears to be happening, then the effectiveness of the procedure with a particular student is highly questionable and alternative behavioral interventions should be explored.

**3. In the case of students who are receiving special education services, the IEP team should be involved in making decision concerning the use of behavior reduction procedures such as time-out.**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) requires that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) 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 IEP team should determine the instruction students need to learn new, more acceptable behaviors (replacement behaviors). In addition, excessive removal from the classroom of a student receiving special education services may constitute a change of placement. This situation requires that the IEP team meet to:

- review the student's supports and services,
- determine adequacy of those supports and services, and
- make the necessary adjustments as needed.

#### **4. Align local policies (district, school, agency) with state guidelines regarding the use of time-out.**

To ensure the appropriate use of time-out, districts and facilities may choose to adopt, meet or exceed the Colorado Department of Education guidelines (*i.e.*, develop guidelines that restrict or prohibit the use of specific levels of time-out). Local policies should include procedures for the use of non-exclusionary and exclusionary time-out. Specific procedures must address the use of isolation time-out and parameters for the physical space to be used.

#### **5. Written classroom procedures should be developed prior to the use of time-out.**

When considering the use of time-out, educators should establish:

- a set of rules, which have been taught to all students, with clear expectations and consequences,
- a hierarchy of planned responses to behaviors of concern, from least to most intrusive,
- identified areas where time-outs will occur, considering locations both in and out of the current setting,
- a process for training other personnel (*e.g.*, paraeducators, volunteers, support staff) in the procedures related to the use of time-out,
- a process for documenting the use and effectiveness of the time-out strategy,
- a process for obtaining parent or caregiver permission prior to the use of isolation time-out,

Note: If parent/caregiver permission has not been obtained, isolation time-out may only be used in an emergency. Emergency is defined as serious, probable, imminent threat of bodily harm to self or others where there is present ability to effect such harm (CRS 26-20-102).

- a process for documenting the use of time-out, including but not limited to date, time, behavior which precipitated the use of time-out, length of time in isolation time-out and results of the procedure,
- an opportunity to allow the student to process with an adult, and
- methods which allow the student to re-enter the setting in a positive way.

#### ***If isolation time-out is used, the following cautions should be considered:***

- Isolation time-out should not be accomplished by forced or physical coercion of a student into the "time-out" area. This often results in a power struggle that serves to initiate or escalate a student's physical aggression, poses an increased risk of harm to both student and staff and could be interpreted by the student that physical control is legitimate.
- A student should not be placed in a time-out area where they cannot be visually observed by a responsible staff person(s) trained in the procedures.
- The specific room used for isolation time-out should meet the following criteria:
  - An adequate opening to view the student
  - Adequate lighting
  - Adequate size (no smaller 6 feet X 6 feet with normal ceiling height)
  - A non-injurious environment, which may include carpeting or padded surface and no loose furniture
  - An **unlocked** door

To conclude, time-out is a safe, legal strategy which can be effective if used with caution, care and concern for the student's welfare. However, greater consideration should be given to the array of positive interventions that can maximize student learning and assist in the acquisition of replacement behaviors.

## References

Gast, D.L. & Nelson, C.M. (1977). Timeout in the classroom: Implications for special education. *Exceptional Children*, 461-464.

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Ewing, T.S. (1998). Time-out: Guidelines for teachers. In A.S. Canter & S. A. Carroll (Eds.) *Helping children at home and school: Handouts from your school psychologist*, pp. 355-357. National Association of School Psychologists: Bethesda, Md.

Yell, M.L. (1994). Timeout and students with behavior disorders: A legal analysis. *Education and Treatment of Children* 17(3), 293-301.