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ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE 354

SECTION: STUDENTS

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CALMING ROOMS AS A PROACTIVE REGULATION STRATEGY

BACKGROUND

The Ontario *Human Rights Code (Code)* guarantees the right to equal treatment with respect to educational services, without discrimination on the basis of protected grounds, including disability. The Renfrew County District School Board’s (RCDSB) duty under the *Code* is to accommodate a student’s disability, to the point of undue hardship, in a manner that creates a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person.

PURPOSE

In accordance with its duty under the *Code*, and its commitment to providing students with an inclusive educational environment, the RCDSB does not allow the use of spaces for the purpose of restraint, containment or seclusion.

However, there may be specific and rare circumstances where a student requires the accommodation of access to a calming room as an individualized space where they can self-regulate or co-regulate during periods of high-impact dysregulation, in a manner that maintains their safety and dignity. When this is the case, the parameters outlined in this Administrative Procedure will apply.

The use of a calming room must be part of an Individual Education Plan (IEP), Safety Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan for a student, developed in consultation with Student Services Departments, and approved by the Family of Schools Superintendent in accordance with this Administrative Procedure. This procedure applies to all RCDSB elementary and secondary school schools. It does not apply to programs operated through Education and Community Partnership Programs (ECP).

Staff considering the use of a calming room to support regulation of students with special education needs should also review AP 140 Code of Conduct and AP 355 Physical Intervention in order to address issues related to the safety of our students and staff members.

Calming rooms are not to be used as places of punishment, seclusion and/or containment, and may only be used with a student’s willing participation.

DEFINITIONS

Calming Room: is a specifically designed, designated and approved room used for the purpose of supporting a student in the implementation of self-regulation or co-regulation strategies, resulting in the reduction of concerning behaviors. It is a room that the student self-elects to

remove themselves to and is one option as predetermined by administration and outlined in the student's IEP and/or safety plan.

Calming Spaces: Within a classroom or other shared space within the school community, educators may create spaces which are designed for all students to access as part of self-regulation or co-regulation strategies. Such spaces are fully inclusive and accessible with or without a safety plan. The use of such spaces may be incorporated into a safety plan and/or IEP, but this is not necessary. Such spaces are different from Calming Rooms, which are intended as individual spaces in the rare circumstance that this is required.

Co-Regulation: is the process through which children develop the ability to soothe and manage distressing emotions and sensations through connection with others. Co-regulation involves various types of responses, including but not limited to: a warm, calming presence and tone of voice, verbal acknowledgement of distress, modeling of calming strategies, and the provision of a structured environment that supports emotional and physical safety.

Personal Learning Space: A personal learning space is a specifically designed space from which a student may participate in their school day with the guidance and supervision of educators. When planning for an individualized personal space whether for the entire school day or part of it, it is always a temporary solution to support students who are facing extreme challenges in safely accessing education within the regular classroom setting. The plan should focus on developing the lagging skills required for the student to safely reintegrate into the regular classroom as soon as possible.

Safety Plans: is a plan developed for a student whose behaviour is known to pose an ongoing risk to themselves, other students, workers or other people in general. It can serve as a crisis-response plan that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the workers in dealing with specific problem behaviours but primarily it outlines the necessary response recommended for preventing the agitation levels of a student from rising. The development of a student safety plan involves all workers who work on an ongoing basis with a student, as well as parents/guardians and the representatives from any community agencies working with the student/family. The RCDSB uses this [Safety Plan Template](#) for all safety plans (not including medical plans).

Self-elect: The process through which a student self-elects the use of a calming room will be determined based on what is appropriate for the individual student. The self-election may occur verbally or non-verbally, and the detailed plan of the look-fors should be documented in the student's IEP and/or Safety Plan.

1. CALMING ROOM PRINCIPLES

- 1.1. In this procedure, the term calming is used synonymously with the term self-regulation or co-regulation. Some students may experience high levels of frustration, anger and anxiety while at school as a direct outcome of their lagging skills.

Teaching self-regulation or co-regulation strategies to these students is a proactive means of addressing safety issues and also providing the student with an increased opportunity for independence and success.

- 1.2. The use of calming rooms in RCDSB schools is a proactive self-regulation/ co-regulation strategy and will be guided by the following principles:
- In all situations, it is the intent of the RCDSB to provide the best possible care to ensure the welfare, safety, and dignity of all involved.
 - Students will self-elect to use calming rooms voluntarily as part of a predetermined and documented plan, as outlined in their safety plan. Students accessing a calming room will not be transported physically into or out of the room by staff.
 - Calming rooms will not be used as a disciplinary measure or as punishment/consequence for challenging behaviour.
 - 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 doorway, etc.).
 - If a student escalates and begins to engage in concerning behaviour which poses a safety risk to themselves or others while in a calming room and/or upon exit, the procedures as outlined in BMS training and [AP 355 Physical Intervention](#) should be implemented in accordance with the student's Safety Plan if applicable.
 - The interior of calming rooms is visible at all times from the exterior (open door, clear window on the wall or in the doorway). If a student chooses to close the door, the student must be able to look out and alternatively for staff to observe if required.
 - Students must be supervised and never left unattended in a calming room under any circumstances.
 - 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 safe location, as determined in the school's Emergency Response (Lockdown) Plan.
 - The use of a calming room must be tracked via a Calming Room Log (see Appendix A) in addition to IEP goal tracking, to assist in determining the effectiveness of the strategy.
 - The use of a calming room may not be appropriate for all students and should be the choice of the student. This de-escalation strategy should only be employed after more inclusive strategies have been tried in the classroom and school. A list of questions to consider before exploring the use of a calming room are attached to this procedure. See Appendix B: Questions to Consider Before Exploring the Use of A Calming Room.

- In the development of plans and design of spaces for calming rooms, consideration will be given to the identity of a student and how that may impact regulation and co-regulation strategies, including the incorporation of culturally appropriate strategies for that student.
- In the development of plans and design of spaces for calming rooms, careful consideration should be given to creating an age appropriate as well as safe, friendly, and comfortable environment. Sensory needs should be taken into consideration. All staff and partners involved with the support of the student should be consulted in this process so that they may provide recommendations unique to the student who will access the space.
- Calming rooms should be designed to be a minimum of sixty-four (64) square feet, but larger spaces are preferred in order to incorporate resources, seating etc. that are required. Consideration should also be given to the design in terms of safety from a facilities perspective (i.e., access to outlets, light switches, etc.). Schools should consult with the Facilities Department with any concerns or questions in connection to safety or design from a building perspective.
- Strategies that assist students to remain in their regular classroom should be the first priority. The Questions to Consider Before Exploring the Use of a Calming Room (Appendix B) can assist school teams to ensure they are employing a systematic and comprehensive process.
- The IEP and/or Safety Plan should state when and for what purpose the calming room will be used by the student and how the student will self-elect its use.
- The use of a calming room is implemented with the knowledge, understanding, and support of the student, including how to request the use of the room and how to communicate needs and wants while in the room.
- Parent/Guardian communication is critical in developing strategies as well as plans for safety. In that ongoing communication, if a calming room is to be used, the parent/guardian must be consulted with 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 as well as to have input into the creation and ongoing implementation and revision of the plan.
- The use of a Calming Room is not a long-term strategy and needs to be re-evaluated on an ongoing basis.

2. PARENT AND GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT

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

- IEP development
- Safety Plan development
- The School Team meetings and records documenting the increase or change in the frequency of use of the calming room.

3. CENTRAL STAFF INVOLVEMENT

- 3.1. Central supports should be informed and utilized in the planning process for the use of a calming space:
- Contact the Student Services Department and Tiered Supports Team for proactive programming support.
 - Referral for Professional Services Support as appropriate (e.g., SLP, Social Work).
 - Involvement of appropriate community supports.

4. FIRE SAFETY AND CALMING/SENSORY ROOMS

- 4.1. The new construction of a separate, self-contained calming and/or sensory room must first be approved through the RCDSB Facilities Department, the Health and Safety Department and the Superintendent of Student Services, to ensure the room meets building codes, fire safety regulations, as well as program requirements.
- 4.2. 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 AP 312 Emergency Response.

5. DOCUMENTATION

- 5.1. Documenting the use of a calming room is necessary for planning, effective usage and accountability. The Calming Room Log will be completed for all situations in which the calming room is used and reviewed on a regular basis.
- 5.2. The Calming Room Log should be completed for each individual student who uses the room and kept in a secure location to ensure privacy.

LEGAL REFERENCES

[Ontario Human Rights Code: Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities](#)

RCDSB REFERENCES

AP 140 Code of Conduct
AP 312 Emergency Response
AP 355 Physical Intervention
RCDSB Safety Plan Template

APPENDICES

[Appendix A: Calming Room Log](#)

[Appendix B: Questions to Consider Before Exploring the Use of A Calming Room](#)

Procedure History

Approved:	June 2024
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