

Provide a safe calm space for students

Summary

For some students, including those on the autism spectrum, the sensory environment, academic demands, executive functioning requirements and social aspects of school can be overwhelming and make them feel confused and upset. This can lead to what some adults may view as 'inappropriate behaviour'.

To avoid this, students may need support to regulate their emotions. It is important that students are supported in regulating themselves before they are completely dysregulated (unable to regulate their emotions or behaviour). One way of doing this is by providing a safe, or calm space where students can retreat in order to calm down.

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers related to this practice

- 1.6 – strategies to support the full participation of students with disability
- 4.3 - manage challenging behaviour

For further information, see [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers AITSL page](#)

Preparing to Teach

Some students have sensory needs that impacts the amount of sensory input and social interaction that is required from them or that they require for optimal learning. 'Home base' (or a calm space) is a predetermined location where students can go to take a break from situations that they may find demanding or stressful.

The first planning step is to identify students who may become overwhelmed and could benefit from using a calm space.

Be proactive

To implement a calm space it is important to be proactive and not reactive. Meet with the student when they are calm and discuss what options may be appropriate for a calm space. It is important to discuss, clarify and agree on specific points:

- under what circumstances calm space is appropriate
- how the student can request a calm space e.g. handing over a card, raising their hand
- how the teacher can subtly signal to suggest the calm space if they can see the student is struggling
- the location of the calm space. It is important that the student views the calm space as positive and calming so involve the student in choosing the location
- how long the student stays in the calm space
- whether the student is expected to take their work with them.

During this meeting, it is important to:

- teach the student how and when to use the calm space e.g. through modelling and role play
- ensure you include any visual supports or cue cards, such as a break card when the student is learning to use the calm space.

It is essential that everyone involved understands that the calm space is to support the student and not a punishment.

Review regularly

It is important to check in with the student regularly to ensure that the calm space is working for both the teacher and student. It is also worthwhile to consider any adjustments that may be necessary.

Make sure all staff know that the student has approval to use the calm space strategy and how to support them.

It works better if:

- the teacher and student proactively agree on where the calm space is and how to notify the teacher before the student needs to use it
- the student is able to take classroom work with them so the calm space does not become a way of avoiding class work.

It doesn't work if:

- the teacher uses the calm space as a punishment or to exclude the student from classroom activities, as the calm space should have a positive association
- the student is required to ask for permission verbally to use calm space – sometimes students may feel too overwhelmed to verbally ask permission to use the space
- calm space is not located somewhere that is calming for the student
- the student consistently uses calm space to avoid doing classroom work.

In the classroom

How do I do it?

- Identify a student who could benefit from using the calm space.
- Consult with the student and agree on a location for calm space.
- Agree with the student how they will notify the teacher when they need to use the calm space, e.g., break card.
- Decide on other specifics relating to the use of calm space, e.g., the maximum amount of time spent in the calm space and if the student needs to take and undertake classroom work when in the calm space.
- Implement calm space as agreed with the student.
- Reflect on the use of calm space and make suitable adjustments as necessary.



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PRACTICE BRIEF

Materials informing this practice

OCALI, Home Base/ Calming Spot video: <https://www.ocali.org/project/Home-Base-Calming-Spot>

[Examples of break cards](#), Pinterest

