

#emotionalhealth
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CREATING A CHILL OUT ZONE

When children feel overwhelming frustration, anger, sadness or anxiety, they become confused and may be unsure or unable to control their emotions.

By providing them with a quiet place to calm themselves, children are able to regain control. A “chill out” zone provides opportunities for diffusing a negative emotion or situation before it escalates. Setting up a ‘chill out’ corner in the classroom gives the children the responsibility of self-regulating their own emotions in a peaceful safe place.

What part of the classroom can be used for a chill out zone?

Chill out zones don't have to take up a lot of space, and they don't have to be filled with expensive equipment either. However, if your pupils are able to access the calming, sensory input they need then everyone could benefit. The best chill out zones are located in a corner or separate section of your classroom, away from the rest of the class.

How should it be decorated?

Calming colours, such as blues, greens, purples and greys should be used to theme the chill out corner. (colours like red and orange can increase negative emotions)

By using a light colour scheme, the chill out corner becomes a visible reminder to all children that it is a safe and peaceful place in their school for calming down.

Ensure furniture is comfortable and relaxing. Use a rug to cover the floor and decorate the area with bean bags, balance cushions, weight blankets.

Ideally, your classroom's chill out zone should have low lighting, and if possible be situated away from artificial lights.

Naming your area?

This is something you may want to do with the children although here are some ideas:

Calm Corner, Cool Down Zone, Cool Down Cushion, Calm Down Corner, Calming Caddy (box with tools in) Cosy Corner, Peace Corner, Take A break, Think Space, Quiet Corner and Brain Break Area.

Items to include in your chill out zone?

Calm down tools are items that provide some emotional rescue through all our different senses.

PRESSURE - Proprioceptive Support: A heavy blanket, mini massager, a weighted stuffed animal.

TOUCH - Items to squeeze and keep hands busy: Playdough, slime, fidget cubes, stress balls, bubble, wrap or a Rubik's cube.

BREATHING - Items to support breathing and relaxation: Pinwheels, breathing activities, bubbles, or straws.

HEARING - Items for auditory sensory support: Sound blocking headphones, relaxing music.

TASTE - Items for oral sensory support: Snacks with a variety of textures, water or a harmonica.

RELAXATION -Items that give pupils brain a break: books, photos, colouring books, paper, pens and easy puzzles.

SMELL - Items for olfactory sensory support: Lavender is a natural remedy for releasing stress. To help calm children down place a lavender plant, oil on pieces of material, scratch and sniff stickers.

SIGHT - Visual calm down cards, glitter jars, snow globes, or a kaleidoscope.

MOVEMENT - Yoga cards, bat and ball, bouncy ball.

Set rules and expectations for the chill out corner with your class for the children to respect and follow.

For example: Chill Out Zone Rules

1. You can sit down with your legs crossed or lie down
2. Set the timer for 5 minutes
3. Take 10 deep breaths
4. Think about how you are feeling
5. When the timer goes off return to the class activity

Introducing the area to your class

Talk about times when we feel too sad, upset or angry to think or concentrate

Begin by talking with the children about times when we're too sad or upset to think. Tell them that everyone feels that way sometimes and that by taking some time alone, we can help ourselves feel better. Then, when we feel better, explain that we will make better decisions about taking care of ourselves and others.

As a group think about what the space will look like and 'what might we put there?'

Young children tend to like enclosed, private spaces. Ideally prepare the space ahead of time. And then you can all get together to plan its contents.

If the purpose of the quiet place is to help us feel better, what might we put there? Pillows, stuffed animals, books, and drawing materials are usually the first things children mention. After gathering some of the materials the children name, ask them to help arrange the items in the space.

Talk about the specific reasons why someone might use the area

Although you may sometimes suggest that a child goes to the chill out place never tell or insist that they go. The goal is for children to recognize themselves when it would benefit them. Once the quiet place is set up, you can talk about some specific reasons why someone might use it. The typical causes of distress for children may differ depending on their age. Here are some examples:

Reception child - "You might feel sad because you miss your mum,"

Year 1 or 2 child - "You might be upset because someone cheated at a game"

7 year old might suggest - "You might feel mad because someone wouldn't sit with you at lunch."



10 year old might suggest - "You might feel angry because you couldn't play football at break."

Talk about how to go, how to be in it, and how to come back to class

All without disturbing others in the class, name specific actions: walk in a normal, calm way; keep our hands to ourselves when we walk to the spot and back; keep our mouths quiet or only humming softly while we're there; and so forth.

Demonstrate what expected behaviours look like

For younger children talking may not be enough. Children may also need to see what these expected behaviors look like and experience what they feel like. So after you have named the behaviours, model them. First demonstrate going to the quiet place, staying there a while, and coming back. Then let the children demonstrate. Allow plenty of time so that everyone who wants to demonstrate can do so. Because children will be using the space when they're upset, this rehearsing is especially important.

Additional tips for effective use

Teach children how long to stay in the quiet place.

Using a timer is good but explain that after this time "you will feel calm" or "until you feel you can take care of your problem." This usually translates to a five- to ten-minute stay.

Make sure children don't use the quiet place to avoid doing something.

Some children may use it to avoid doing a hard assignment, working with a certain partner, or sitting through a meeting. In these cases, never tell children they can't go to the quiet place but that they will have to make up the work they miss perhaps during break. Usually, the children feel better very quickly and return to the task at hand.

Watch for children who are very reluctant to use the space.

Occasionally, if you suggest that a child use the quiet place, the child may refuse or will only go if you go with him/her. There are many possible reasons for this. Whatever the reason, it will take longer for these children to learn to comfort themselves. To help them along in the process, come up with some interim steps, such as bringing a comfort item to their seat or coming to sit next to you when they're upset.

Have a plan in place for children who are too upset to use the quiet place.

Sometimes a child is too distressed to use the quiet place: the child might need one-to-one attention from an adult or might not be able to use the quiet place without disturbing other children. In this case, it's important to have another plan that provides for the child's safety and minimises disruption to the rest of the class.

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