

Time-out

Quick Reference Material

Occasionally, the question arises regarding Idaho's Statute or Rule relating to the use of "time-out". Neither Idaho education laws, rules nor the special education manual address this topic. Usually when this question is posed, the person making the inquiry is interested in one form of time-out, namely "seclusionary time-out". There are three types or degrees of time-out as explained below.

Time-out is a shortened term for "time-out from positive reinforcement". A time-out is a form of punishment for misbehavior. During a time-out the student is denied any tangible or intangible reward that is likely to evoke an undesirable behavior.

There are three types of time-outs. These are: nonseclusionary, exclusionary, and seclusionary.

A **nonseclusionary** time-out allows the student to remain with the other students in the classroom and in the activity center, but the teacher reduces or denies positive reinforcements. Examples of nonseclusionary time-outs are as follows: asking the student to put his/her head on the desk, turning out the lights, turning off the audio/visual equipment, not passing out materials, or sending the student to the periphery of an activity.

In contrast, an **exclusionary** time-out removes the child from the immediate activity and the other students. Examples of exclusionary time-outs would be having the student sit facing a wall, placing a visual barrier, such as a screen, between this student and the rest of the classmates, or sending the student to a "penalty box" on the playground.

The most extreme form of time-out is **seclusionary**. In this case the student is removed from the classroom and/or activity center to a room for total social isolation resulting in total denial of all potential reinforcers from the teacher, other students or the classroom itself.

The latter form of time-out has been the subject of court cases that have numerous issues around due process, unreasonable seizure, duration and features of the time-out room. Based upon court findings here are some sound practices to follow when implementing a seclusionary time-out:

- If the district uses time-out there should be a policy in place which describes how and when it is appropriate to use this disciplinary measure, the procedures to follow and the training that staff will receive. Students with disabilities should not be treated differently than students without disabilities. The policy must apply to all students.

- To be effective any time-out practice should be embedded in a comprehensive positive behavior supports approach that includes prevention, teaching skills and reacting to the target behavior. Please see Idaho Special Education Manual 2001, pages A 205-240.
- If the student is a student with a disability, the IEP should detail how a time-out will be conducted.
- Parents should be part of the decision-making process so they fully understand how and when time-out may be used.
- The time-out room should not be locked.
- The time-out room must have adequate heat, lighting and ventilation.
- The student should be supervised or monitored at all times while in the time-out room.
- Before implementing time-out as a management procedure, students need to know what behaviors will result in the use of the time-out procedure.
- Before using the time-out procedure, the student should be provided a warning so he/she has an opportunity to correct the behavior.
- Once the decision is made that a time-out is necessary, the student should not be provided extra attention as a part of the process (arguing, discussion, reacting to comments made, etc).
- The length of time in the time-out room must be determined by the needs of the individual student and the specific circumstances. Usually this need not be longer than five minutes, but should not exceed fifteen minutes.
- Time-out begins when the student has calmed down.
- Whenever the time-out room is used, a record needs to be made of the following:
 - The student's name.
 - The episode leading up to and resulting in time-out.
 - The time of day when the student was sent to and released from time-out.
- When the time-out is over, the student should be returned to the previous appropriate activity.
- Data should be kept and regularly analyzed regarding the frequency of the target behavior as well as the frequency of the use of the time-out proceed to determine if time-out as implemented has been effective.

Generally, time-out is not considered a form of unreasonable seizure nor does it warrant activating due process procedures as long as the above guidelines are followed. It is recommended that school district personnel consult with their legal counsel before implementing a time-out procedure.

Resources:

Alberto, P. (1995). *Applied Behavior Analysis for Teachers*. Fourth Edition. Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Friend, M. (1996). *Including Students with Special Needs*. Allyn and Bacon.

Gorn, S. (1999). *What Do I Do When...The Answer Book on Discipline*. LRP Publications.

Quinn, M. (2000). *Teaching and Working with Children Who Have Emotional and Behavioral Challenges*. Sopris West.