

Use of Calming and Sensory Rooms

RATIONALE:

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) is committed to ensuring safe, accepting, and healthy learning environments which support student well-being.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

All education support services must be administered without discrimination and in a manner which respects, to the degree possible in the circumstances, the student's right to privacy, dignity, and cultural sensitivity and the student's right to inclusion and accommodation.

It is understood that behaviour is a form of communication. Therefore, any response must protect the individual student's, as well as others', privacy, safety and well-being.

Supports as described in this procedure shall be rendered by authorized personnel only (i.e., Board employees who have received pertinent information and instruction). Students and volunteers are not considered authorized personnel.

All strategies and interventions which involve students working outside the classroom for even a short period of time must be consistent with Board policies and procedures.

TERMINOLOGY:

Calming Room: A room that is self-contained and separate from the learning environment in the classroom. It is used by students who are learning to self-manage their behaviours.

Students choose to access the space and may leave at any time. The room may contain objects that assist the student to self-regulate. Employees must always provide supervision and co-regulation and complete a Calming Room Activity Log (Appendix A).

Use of a Calming Room is documented in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) and/or Safety Intervention Plan (SIP).

Sensory Room: A space that uses a variety of auditory, visual, tactile, movement and deep pressure sensations. The space may be calming or activating, depending on the student's sensory preferences/needs and materials accessed in the space.

The use of a Sensory Room is based on an assessment by an Occupational Therapist (OT), and students using it have specific goals which need to be tracked. The room is designed for the student to choose activities at their own pace.

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A Sensory Room should not be equated with a Snoezelen Room which is used in a prescribed type of controlled, multi-sensory therapy developed in the Netherlands, widely used in Germany, and supported by specifically trained personnel.

Safe (Containment) Room: A completely empty room into which a student is forcibly placed and confined by employees for a period of time to ensure the safety of the student and others.

The student is placed in the room and is not free to leave the room without permission. Although the room is empty, it may be padded to assist with the prevention of self-injurious behaviour.

HWDSB does not support the use of Safe (Containment) Rooms.

Calming Space: An area within an existing learning space (e.g., a resource room, learning commons, pod area) accessed by students who are learning to self-regulate their behaviour and emotions.

A Calming Space is used as a proactive strategy.

Self-Regulation: A continuum where a student's cognitive, emotional, social and physical capacity and stage of development are factors in their ability to confidently and independently manage their behaviour(s).

Co-Regulation: The interaction between a student and a caring adult to support the student's development of self-regulation.

Co-regulation involves the presence of a caring adult who can manage their own emotional, cognitive and physical stress in response to a student's dysregulation.

The process of co-regulation involves a caring adult modeling the use of regulation strategies, and coaching students to use these strategies. The caring adult ensures that the environment is safe, with predictable routines and consistent expectations.

Duty of Care: The law recognizes a special relationship between students and their teachers and principals and vicariously with the school board as employer to provide the student with services, giving rise to a duty of care.

Occupational Therapist (OT): Regulated health professionals.

In the context of the school setting, the role of an OT is to promote students' participation in meaningful activities such as completing academic work, participating in classroom lessons, socializing with peers and promoting safety and independence in dressing, feeding and toileting tasks.

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An OT will work collaboratively with students, the school team and their family to assess and understand factors (e.g., physical, cognitive, social/emotional, sensorial, environmental and the demands of the activity) contributing to students' challenges and make recommendations to support participation.

PROCEDURES:

CALMING ROOMS

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 A Calming Room will be used by students who are learning to self-regulate their behaviour.
- 1.2 A Calming Room is used as a proactive means of teaching self-regulation strategies and/or addressing safety issues while providing the students with increased opportunities for independence.
- 1.3 A Calming Room may be used for up to two students at one time, where appropriate.

2.0 Approval

- 2.1 The creation of a Calming Room outside a classroom must be approved by the appropriate Family of Schools Superintendent of Student Achievement (FOS SOSA).
- 2.2 Once approved by the FOS SOSA, a Calming Room must then be approved by Facilities Management to ensure that the room being considered, as well as any equipment to be used in the room, meets building code and fire safety requirements.
- 2.3 Principals will work with their Facilities Operations Supervisor for room consideration and selection. The room must include a window to allow students to look out and for employees to observe.

3.0 Safety Considerations

- 3.1 The Principal ensures:
 - 3.1.1 The room meets programming requirements.
 - 3.1.2 The room continues to meet building code and fire safety requirements.
 - 3.1.3 The Fire Safety Plan, including the Fire Safety Site Evacuation Plan and Emergency Procedures take into consideration the use of the Calming Room.

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- 3.1.4 The creation of a plan to address student safety if a Calming Room is in use when a lockdown is initiated, as part of the school's Emergency Response Plan.

4.0 Use of Space

- 4.1 Use of a Calming Room must be included in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), and Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) and/or Safety Intervention Plan (SIP).
- 4.2 Students access the Calming Room voluntarily, as part of their predetermined and documented plan.
- 4.3 Students are not transported physically into or out of the room by staff, unless there is an accommodation that requires physical assistance.
- 4.4 Calming Rooms are not used as a disciplinary measure, as a punishment for inappropriate or challenging behaviour, for seclusion or for containment.
- 4.5 Students are not restricted in their ability to leave a Calming Room through the use of locks on the doors or by restricting the student's exit.
- 4.6 Students are supervised and never left unattended in a Calming Room under any circumstances.
- 4.7 Use of a Calming Room is documented in a Calming Room Activity Log (Appendix A).

5.0 Responsibilities

- 5.1 School employees:
 - 5.1.1 Complete an Antecedent Behaviour Consequence (ABC) tracker (Appendix B) and/or other behavioural assessments recommended through Specialized Services.
 - 5.1.2 Maintain and evaluate the Calming Room Activity Log and any other relevant information to determine if the Calming Room is effective for the student.
 - 5.1.3 Ensure items in the Calming Room are designated for that space only and are reset every day.
- 5.2 The Principal:
 - 5.2.1 Reviews the use of the Calming Room with employees.

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- 5.2.2 Ensures that the Calming Room is only used for its intended purpose.
- 5.2.3 Ensures that students access the room only for self-regulation purposes.
- 5.2.4 Ensure that initial and on-going assessment and data collection is maintained.
- 5.2.5 Ensures ABC Tracker and/or other behavioural assessments recommended through Specialized Service results are reviewed.
- 5.2.6 Sets goals with the school team to reduce the frequency of Calming Room use.
- 5.2.7 Ensures that the Calming Room Activity Log is stored in the student's Ontario Student Record (OSR).
- 5.3 HWDSB has the responsibility to provide information, instruction, and/or training to all employees assigned to work directly with students with behavioural challenges. This includes:
 - 5.3.1 Instruction on initial and on-going behaviour assessments.
 - 5.3.2 Strategies on the appropriate use of Calming Rooms.
 - 5.3.3 Strategies to support the inclusion of students who are learning to self-regulate.

6.0 Communication

- 6.1 The use and purpose of a Calming Room is discussed with and agreed to by the student and the parent(s)/guardian(s) prior to its use.
- 6.2 The parent(s)/guardian(s) and students are informed about the plan and supporting documentation to use a Calming Room.
- 6.3 Principal and school employees collaborate with parent(s)/guardian(s) to create a plan for ongoing communication related to student use of the Calming Room.

7.0 Privacy and Confidentiality

- 7.1 Personal information on any forms used is collected, used, disclosed, retained and safeguarded in accordance with the [Privacy Policy 1.6](#), and the [Privacy Procedure](#) and [Privacy Breach Response Procedure](#).

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- 7.2 Subject to relevant privacy legislation, HWDSB will collect data regularly, including, but not limited to, data on the number of students using Calming Rooms in their schools. This data will be used as part of a cyclical review of the use of Calming Rooms.

SENSORY ROOMS

8.0 Purpose

- 8.1 A Sensory Room is used by students to meet individual goals based on assessments from an Occupational Therapist (OT) and/or other assessments recommended through Specialized Services.
- 8.2 A Sensory Room contains specific equipment and/or resources identified by the Occupational Therapist in the sensory assessment.

9.0 Approval

- 9.1 The creation of a Sensory Room outside a classroom must be approved by the appropriate Family of Schools Superintendent of Student Achievement (FOS SOSA). A copy of the completed referral to (or a completed sensory assessment by) an OT must accompany the request.
- 9.2 Once approved by the FOS SOSA, a Sensory Room must then be approved by Facilities Management to ensure that the room being considered, as well as any equipment to be used in the room, meets building code and fire safety requirements.
- 9.3 Principals will work with their Facilities Operations Supervisor for room consideration and selection.

10.0 Safety Considerations

- 10.1 The Principal ensures:
- 10.1.1 The room meets programming requirements.
- 10.1.2 The room continues to meet building code and fire safety requirements.
- 10.1.3 The Fire Safety Plan, including the Fire Safety Site Evacuation Plan and Emergency Procedures take into consideration the use of the Sensory Room.
- 10.1.4 The creation of a plan to address student safety if a Sensory Room is in use when a lockdown is initiated, as part of the school's Emergency Response Plan.

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11.0 Use of Space

- 11.1 The use of a Sensory Room is only considered after modifications to the classroom sensory environment (including the incorporation of sensory based regulation tools) have been trialed.
- 11.2 Use of a Sensory Room must be included in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), and Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) and/or Safety Intervention Plan (SIP).
- 11.3 The use of the Sensory Room is scheduled for the student to use at specific times, based on data collected using the Antecedent Behaviour Consequence (ABC) Tracker (Appendix C).
- 11.4 Students access a Sensory Room voluntarily, as part of a predetermined and documented plan.
- 11.5 Students are not transported physically into or out of the room by employees, unless there is an accommodation that requires physical assistance.
- 11.6 Sensory Rooms are not used as a disciplinary measure, as a punishment for inappropriate or challenging behaviour, for seclusion or for containment.
- 11.7 Students are not restricted in their ability to leave a Sensory Room through the use of locks on the doors or by restricting the student's exit.
- 11.8 Students are supervised and never left unattended in a Sensory Room under any circumstances. Employees take an active role in supporting students while in the sensory room by engaging and co-regulating with the student.
- 11.9 Use of a Sensory Room is documented in a Sensory Room Activity Log (Appendix B).
- 11.10 Student use of materials/equipment in the Sensory Room are informed by an Occupation Therapy Sensory Assessment or Sensory Preferences Checklist (Appendix D) completed by school employees.

12.0 Responsibilities

- 12.1 School employees:

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- 12.1.1 Complete an Antecedent Behaviour Consequence (ABC) tracker, (Appendix C), the Sensory Preferences Checklist (Appendix D) and/or other assessments recommended through Specialized Services.
- 12.1.2 Maintain and evaluate the Activity Log and any other information to determine if the Sensory Room is effective for the student.
- 12.1.3 Participate in instruction about strategies to support the student's sensory goals, based on the assessment form the Occupational Therapist and/or other assessments recommended through Specialized Services.
- 12.1.4 Follow strategies that reduce the risk of student exposure to triggers or causative agents in classrooms, common school areas, and extra-curricular activities.
- 12.1.5 Ensure items in the Sensory Room are designated for that space only and are reset each day.
- 12.2 The Principal:
 - 12.2.1 Reviews the use of the Sensory Room with employees.
 - 12.2.2 Ensures that the Sensory Room is only used for its intended purpose.
 - 12.2.3 Ensures that students access the room only for the intended purpose of working on sensory goals.
 - 12.2.4 Ensures that an assessment from an Occupational Therapist and/or an assessment recommended by Specialized Services employees is completed.
 - 12.2.5 Ensures that initial and on-going assessment and data collection is maintained.
 - 12.2.6 Ensures that the Sensory Room Activity Log is stored in the student's Ontario Student Record (OSR).

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- 12.3 HWDSB has the responsibility to provide information, instruction, and/or training to all employees assigned to work directly with students with sensory needs.

This includes:

- 12.3.1 Instruction and/or training on the use of the Sensory Room space and equipment, as indicated by an Occupational Therapist and/or Specialized Services employees.

- 12.3.2 Strategies to support the inclusion of students in their classrooms and sensory space.

13.0 Communication

- 13.1 The use and purpose of a Sensory Room is discussed with and agreed to by the parent(s)/guardian(s) prior to its use.
- 13.2 The parent(s)/guardian(s) are informed about the plan and supporting documentation to use a Sensory Room.
- 13.3 Principal and school employees collaborate with parent/guardian to create a plan for ongoing communication related to student use of room.

14.0 Privacy and Confidentiality

- 14.1 Personal information on any forms used will be collected, used, disclosed, retained and safe-guarded in accordance with the [Privacy Policy 1.6](#), and the [Privacy Procedure](#) and [Privacy Breach Response Procedure](#).
- 14.2 Subject to relevant privacy legislation, HWDSB will collect data regularly, including, but not limited to, data on the number of students using Sensory Rooms in schools. This data will be used as part of a cyclical review of the use of Sensory Rooms.

Calming Room Activity Log

Student	Grade/Class
Room use referenced in: BSP IEP SIP Other:	

Date	Observations prior to entering (1/tired 3/ready to learn 5/high energy)	Time In	Observations while in room (1/tired 3/ready to learn 5/high energy)	Student's preferred activities when in the room	Time Out	Observations after room use (1/tired 3/ready to learn 5/high energy)	Staff

	Log Submitted to Principal	Date:	Initials:
	Log reviewed/filed in OSR by Principal	Date:	Initials:

Sensory Room Activity Log

Student	Grade/Class
Room use referenced in: BSP IEP SIP Other:	

Date	Observations prior to entering (1/tired 3/ready to learn 5/high energy)	Time In	Observations while in room (1/tired 3/ready to learn 5/high energy)	Student's preferred activities when in the room	Time Out	Observations after room use (1/tired 3/ready to learn 5/high energy)	Staff

	Log Submitted to Principal	Date:	Initials:
	Log reviewed/filed in OSR by Principal	Date:	Initials:

ABC Recording

Appendix C

Date/Time	Antecedent What Happened Before?	Behaviour	Consequence What Happened After?	Student's Response Did Behaviour stop, continue or increase?
Date:	Location	What did the student do?	What did others do?	
Start Time:	What was the student doing/saying?	What did the student say?	What did others say?	
End Time:				
Recorder:				

Date/Time	Antecedent What Happened Before?	Behaviour	Consequence What Happened After?	Student's Response Did Behaviour stop, continue or increase?
Date:	Location	What did the student do?	What did others do?	
Start Time:	What was the student doing/saying?	What did the student say?	What did others say?	
End Time:				
Recorder:				

This data sheet should be considered raw data and as such, should not be disseminated or used without the interpretation of a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst or trained professional.

Date/Time	Antecedent What Happened Before?	Behaviour	Consequence What Happened After?	Student's Response Did Behaviour stop, continue or increase?
Date:	Location	What did the student do?	What did you do?	
Start Time:				
End Time:	What was the student doing/saying?			
Recorder:	What did the student say?			
	What were others doing/saying?			

Date/Time	Antecedent What Happened Before?	Behaviour	Consequence What Happened After?	Student's Response Did Behaviour stop, continue or increase?
Date:	Location	What did the student do?	What did you do?	
Start Time:				
End Time:	What was the student doing/saying?			
Recorder:	What did the student say?			
	What were others doing/saying?			

This data sheet should be considered raw data and as such, should not be disseminated or used without the interpretation of a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst or trained professional.

SENSORY PREFERENCES CHECKLIST

Visual Processing

Student seeks input by:

- ☐ Looking at bright colours
- ☐ Watching objects move
- ☐ Engaging with materials that light up
- ☐ Looking at objects closely
- ☐ Squinting their eyes

Student avoids input by:

- ☐ Preferring dark spaces
- ☐ Turning away from bright lights
- ☐ Leaving a busy room
- ☐ Covering their eyes

Student seems to SEEK / AVOID visual input (circle one).

Tactile Processing

Student seeks input by:

- ☐ Manipulating a variety of textures
- ☐ Touching/fidgeting with objects
- ☐ Rubbing items on their skin
- ☐ Running fingers against the wall
- ☐ Reaching to touch others

Student avoids or is sensitive to tactile input:

- ☐ Positions self away from others (in line, group activities)
- ☐ Is agitated by certain textures of clothing/tags in clothing
- ☐ Moves away from tickles/touch
- ☐ Avoids messy play or getting their hands dirty

Student seems to SEEK / AVOID tactile input (circle one).

Auditory Processing

Student seeks input by:

- ☐ Talking loudly, making loud vocalizations
- ☐ Enjoying music
- ☐ Making loud noises with objects
- ☐ Humming to self
- ☐ Completing work/focusing in noisy environments

Student avoids or is sensitive to auditory input:

- ☐ Covering ears
- ☐ Leaving and/or avoiding noisy environments
- ☐ Preferring a quiet room
- ☐ Easily distracted/upset by unexpected sounds

Student seems to SEEK / AVOID auditory input (circle one).

Vestibular Processing

Movement

Student seeks input by:

- ☐ Jumping
- ☐ Running
- ☐ Spinning
- ☐ Rocking/wiggling in their seat
- ☐ Moving around the room

Student avoids or is sensitive to movement input:

- ☐ Avoids tasks that involve moving of body and head up and down
- ☐ Prefers more sedentary activities

Student seems to SEEK / AVOID vestibular input (circle one).

Proprioceptive Processing

Body Awareness

Student seeks input by:

- ☐ Requesting adults for body squeezes/hugs
- ☐ Laying on the floor (especially stomach)
- ☐ Putting heavy toys/materials on body
- ☐ Squeezing self in tight places
- ☐ Engaging in rough play

Student shows sensitivity by:

- ☐ Pulling away from/ avoiding deep pressure (body squeezes/hugs)
- ☐ Avoiding physical play
- ☐ Preferring loose clothing

Student seems to SEEK / AVOID proprioceptive input (circle one).

Sensory Preferences Checklist

How and when to complete

It is important to note that this is not a standardized assessment tool. The responses found in this checklist do not represent a student's sensory processing patterns, but rather invites conversations and observations related to a student's sensory preferences. The information discussed using this checklist can help school teams to consider which sensations they would like to enhance in a student's activities/ environment and those that they may want to limit and/or slowly/thoughtfully introduce. A sensory assessment from an Occupational Therapist is recommended for a complete understanding of a student's sensory needs and their impact on a student's participation in school-based activities.

Using the Sensory Preferences Checklist:

1. Classroom Teacher and/or Educational Assistant identify a student having difficulties participating in classroom-based activities and query a sensory component.
2. Query is brought to Learning Resource Teacher.
3. Learning Resource Teacher provides the classroom team with a copy of the Sensory Preferences Checklist.
4. Sensory Preferences Checklist is completed by all relevant school team members.
5. Learning Resource Teacher and classroom Teacher make a determination of "seek" or "avoid" for each sensory system based on responses and discussion.
6. Information shared with school team (including administration).
7. School team considers student's sensory preferences in the context of the classroom environment and classroom activities.
8. School team makes determination if student use of sensory room can meet student's identified sensory preferences as well as goals outlined in IEP/BSP. If yes, caregiver/guardian consent is obtained for student to access the sensory room.