FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DPS: 2011-145
Date: October 10, 2011

Technical Assistance Paper

Guidelines for the Use of Time-out

Summary:

This technical assistance paper provides guidance for using time-out in school districts, including:

- Definitions
- Types
- Implementation
- When to consider
- When prohibited
- Effectiveness evaluation
- Recommended guidelines
- Monitoring use

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Status:
   X   Replaces existing technical assistance paper: *Use of Time-out in Special Education Programs: Guidelines for Time-out Procedures, FY 1993-3.*

Issued by the
Florida Department of Education

Division of Public Schools
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
http://www.fldoe.org/ese

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A.   Background and Definitions

A-1.   What is the purpose of this technical assistance paper (TAP)?

The purpose of this TAP is to provide districts with information to use in developing effective time-out procedures. Time-out from positive reinforcement is commonly referred to as "time-out," a term that represents a group of intervention strategies that are widely used in a variety of settings, including schools, to decrease the frequency of problematic behaviors (Wolf, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2006). Although time-out can be an effective intervention, it is also an aversive procedure that may adversely impact the classroom learning environment. Of particular concern is its focus primarily on inappropriate, rather than appropriate, behavior and the impact on a student's access to instruction. The use of time-out has also been the subject of litigation, specifically concerning its use with students with behavior disorders (Yell, 1994).

There are no current State Board of Education Rules that define time-out procedures or requirements. Each district that uses time-out as an intervention strategy should develop procedures that are educationally appropriate and ensure a safe educational learning environment at all times. Consequently, the information in this TAP is a guide for the development of time-out procedures and strategies based on best practices.

A-2.   What is time-out?

For the purpose of this TAP, the definition of time-out is a procedure in which access to varied sources of reinforcement is removed or reduced for a particular time period contingent on a response. As indicated in this definition, time-out does not necessarily require the physical removal of the individual from the setting. Time-out is ***not*** a place. As a behavior reduction technique, the focus of time-out is on those behaviors deemed to be problematic and in need of reduction or elimination. It does not specifically target the increase of appropriate or pro-social behaviors.

The term "time-out" has been applied to other strategies that may be used in classroom settings. Examples of such strategies include: offering a student the opportunity to "cool-off" when feeling frustrated or agitated by going to a quiet area, using the technique known as the "antiseptic bounce" by sending a student out of the room to go on an errand when showing early signs of frustration or agitation, or allowing a student to voluntarily opt to remove herself from a setting or activity in order to regain self control. These examples, which allow students to leave a tense or upsetting situation in a positive manner, are often referred to as "time-out." Although the examples cited here may be effective intervention strategies, they are *not* examples of time-out according to the definition used in this TAP.

A-3. What is positive reinforcement?

Positive reinforcement is often viewed as simply a reward for exhibiting or engaging in a desired behavior. However, the definition of positive reinforcement is more complex. Positive reinforcement occurs when a consequence (a positive reinforcer) follows a behavior and results in an increased likelihood that the behavior will occur again in the future. The most common types of positive reinforcement are praise and tangible rewards. Less obvious types of positive reinforcement may include gaining teacher attention or peer reaction.

It is critical to understand that what is positively reinforcing (e.g., a pat on the back) to one student may not be to another and that a stimulus that one might consider aversive or punishing (e.g., yelling) may indeed be reinforcing to other students. What a student finds reinforcing is subject to change over time, so ongoing assessment of what is reinforcing is necessary. Two processes available to assist in determining what is reinforcing to a particular student include using a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and using a reinforcement survey.

B. Time-out

B-1. What are the different types of time-out?

Time-out strategies can be categorized based on their level of restrictiveness, with restrictiveness referring to the level of access the student has to the classroom setting. For the purposes of this TAP, two categories will be discussed in order of restrictiveness, from least to most restrictive.

Non-exclusionary time-out

A non-exclusionary time-out occurs when a student does not have the opportunity to receive reinforcement for an inappropriate behavior for a specified period of time without removing the student from the setting or the activity. The advantage of this type of time-out is that it attempts to keep the student engaged in the ongoing activity in the classroom.

Planned ignoring is the least intrusive form of non-exclusionary time-out. It involves deliberate withholding of attention, verbal interaction, and physical contact for a short duration as a consequence of an infraction—a mild form of time-out in that the opportunity to obtain various types of reinforcers is removed for a brief period of time. Generally, this is the removal of teacher attention from the student when the student exhibits inappropriate behavior. Attention to the student resumes after the specified brief interval. This technique is most effective when teacher attention is the goal/function of the problem behavior. It is not effective when other reinforcers are available (e.g., attention from other students). An example of this is a student calling out during a group instructional activity. Planned ignoring would involve not responding to that student while reinforcing (e.g., praising) those students who are raising their hands to receive attention or respond to a question.

Contingent observation is a slightly more intrusive form of non-exclusionary time-out in which the student must sit on the periphery of the ongoing activity for a brief period of time and observe the appropriate behaviors of her or his peers being reinforced while losing the opportunity to participate and be reinforced. This form of time-out might be used with a student who is touching or otherwise bothering another student during a group activity. As a result, she may be placed on the outside of the group for a few minutes while the other students are praised and rewarded for participation.

Exclusionary time-out

An exclusionary time-out involves removing a student from an activity for a period of time but not from the room or area of activity. Unlike *contingent observation*, the student is not allowed to view or be involved in any activity for a specified amount of time. The student may sit in a study carrel or in some other excluded area of the educational setting but remains in full view of instructional staff.

B-2. Are there different school district requirements for time-out and seclusion?

Yes. This TAP provides guidance on time-out and, based on a review of literature, provides recommendations for best practices. However, time-out is not specifically addressed in Florida Statutes (F.S.) or State Board of Education Rules.

If seclusion occurs with students with disabilities there are documenting, reporting, and monitoring requirements. Section 1003.573, F.S., *Use of seclusion and restraint on students with disabilities*, establishes documentation, reporting, and monitoring requirements on the use of seclusion and restraint for students with disabilities.

In Florida, any incident in which a student is involuntarily confined alone in a room or area from which he or she is physically prevented from leaving (alone in a room that is closed, locked, or blocked) must be reported as a form of seclusion. Although not all school districts allow the use of seclusion, for districts that do allow it, a seclusion room must be lit and meet the requirements identified in Rule 69A-58.0084, F.A.C., *Seclusion Time-out Rooms* (see Appendix B).

B-3. Is time-out an appropriate and effective intervention?

Time-out can be an effective intervention, but it can also be counterproductive if used excessively or improperly. Time-out has the potential to be misused and abused if staff are untrained and implementation procedures are inconsistent (Merrell, 2000). There is not a great deal of research available regarding the effectiveness of isolation time-out, and the studies that have been done have shown mixed results (Ryan, Peterson, & Rozalski, 2007).

Time-out should never be the primary classroom management strategy. The instructional setting must be rich in opportunities for students to be engaged and

positively reinforced. The use of behavior reduction procedures cannot be substituted for a positive, pro-social classroom environment and good instruction. Time-out should be considered for use only in instructional settings where the time-in period (e.g., the classroom activity) is significantly more rewarding than the time-out period and where there are clear behavioral expectations that students understand. For time-out to be an effective tool, its use must be considered in the context of an overall system of positive behavioral supports.

Positive behavior interventions are designed to include antecedent and preventative strategies as well as replacement skills that match the function of the problem behavior, including teaching pro-social skills, rather than focusing on developing consequences for inappropriate or disruptive behaviors.

B-4. What are the important steps to take when implementing time-out as an intervention?

For time-out to be an effective and instructive intervention, the following should occur:

- *Define the behaviors targeted for time-out.* Define the behaviors in terms that the student, teacher, family, and all who will implement the procedures understand. Develop procedures for ensuring that the student understands the purpose of time-out and the rules.
- *Match the time-out to the function of the behavior.* Analyze the situations in which the defined behavior may occur. Intervene early with a less-intrusive intervention by developing strategies that enable the student to change to an acceptable behavior before time-out becomes necessary.
- *Determine initiation, duration, and termination of time-out procedures.* Depending on the circumstances—the student's age and intellectual ability, setting, etc.—time-out is often effective when used for under five minutes. However, some situations may require more time, but time-out should never exceed 15 minutes.
- *Clearly, calmly, and positively state the expectations for behavior during the time-out period.* It is best for these expectations to be clear to students before using time-out (i.e., part of the overall understanding students should have about classroom expectations) rather than explaining them during a time-out period.
- *Teach replacement behaviors and determine a plan for reinforcing their use/demonstration.* Absence of problem behaviors does not necessarily indicate the student has learned acceptable alternative behaviors. To aid in the acquisition and maintenance of behavioral skills, reinforcement of desired behaviors should be provided in a deliberate, consistent manner.
- *Plan for the positive and supportive return of the student from exclusionary time-out to the regular instructional routine.* This process may include a discussion with the student to ensure she understands why time-out occurred and how it may be avoided in the future. Rehearsal or practice of replacement behaviors may be beneficial at this time as well.

- *Implement procedures for recording, frequent monitoring, and evaluating the time-out intervention.* These procedures should include an assessment as to whether the disruptive behavior is decreasing in intensity and/or frequency. All decisions concerning behavior interventions should be informed by data collected.

B-5. When should time-out not be used?

Time-out is ineffective and not appropriate if the time-out period allows the student to avoid activities or situations that the student finds aversive or unpleasant or if time-out provides opportunities for the student to engage in other problem behaviors (e.g., self-stimulatory behaviors). Time-out is not an effective intervention for behaviors that an FBA determines serve as escape or avoidance functions. When used in such circumstances, time-out will likely be counterproductive and result in an increase in the undesired behavior. Time-out is generally not appropriate when the student's behavior has already escalated to extreme levels of acting out.

B-6. How can staff know if time-out is an effective strategy for a particular student?

Schools should evaluate the effectiveness of using time-out by collecting and frequently reviewing student data. If time-out is an effective intervention strategy, it will result in a reduction of inappropriate behavior. If data show that a student is frequently in time-out, it is a clear sign that time-out is probably not an effective strategy and may be inappropriately reducing a student's access to instruction as well as increasing behavior problems.

B-7. What guidelines are recommended relative to using time-out in Florida's schools?

Recommended guidelines for school districts using time-out are as follows:
- *Districts should have written procedures concerning the use of time-out.* Parents or guardians and students should be informed of the possible use of time-out and what behaviors will lead to the use of the intervention. Rationale for the use of time-out, rules of time-out, length of time-out, and release from time-out should be explained in writing. Teachers should be required to ensure that these procedures are followed.
- *The individual educational plan (IEP) team should be involved in making decisions concerning the use of time-out.* If a student's IEP team determines that using time-out is appropriate, it should be noted on the IEP.
- *Time-out must serve a legitimate educational function.* This includes reducing dangerous or disruptive behavior while simultaneously teaching adaptive behavior and protecting the educational environment from disruption. Exclusionary time-out interventions should be used only if less-restrictive interventions have failed to reduce the problem behavior. Teachers should simultaneously identify a desirable behavior to replace the behavior to be

reduced and institute an intervention to teach and increase the desired behavior.

- *Time-out must be used in a reasonable manner*. Teachers should consider time-out lengths dependent on individual circumstances, including the student's age, intellectual ability to understand what the time-out period means, setting, etc. The literature indicates that short time-out periods can be effective with all ages; therefore, it is recommended that time-out periods not exceed 15 minutes. There is no empirical evidence indicating that longer periods of time-out net different results. Time-out should not be used in a harsh or severe manner and should be proportionate to the offense committed and the age and physical condition of the student. All staff implementing time-out should be thoroughly trained in the use of the procedure.

- *Maintain documentation on the use of time-out*. As with any behavioral intervention, data on the use of time-out should always be collected and reviewed periodically to determine if it is effective and achieving the desired results. Schools should continuously monitor student progress to determine if interventions are effective in meeting the needs of students. Instructional staff are also accountable to supervisors and parents to provide follow-up to the problem-solving team and to ensure that the interventions were implemented appropriately. It is imperative that teachers monitor and evaluate the results of time-out for every student individually.

Appendix A: References

Merrell, K. (2000). *Effective use of time-out procedures to reduce child misbehavior*.
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    seclusion timeout in schools. *Education and Treatment of Children, 30*(4),
    215–239.

Wolf, T. L., McLaughlin, T. F., & Williams, R. L. (2006). Time-out interventions and
    strategies: A brief review and recommendations. *International Journal of Special
    Education, 21*(3), 22–28.

Yell, M. L. (1994). Time-out and students with behavior disorders: A legal analysis.
    Education & Treatment of Children, 1(3), 293–301.

Appendix B: Rule 69A-58.0084, Florida Administrative Code

Rule 69A-58.0084, F.A.C., Seclusion Time-out Rooms.

(1)   Egress. Secured seclusion time-out rooms, when provided, shall be equipped with doors which allow egress at all times in the event of an emergency.

(2)   Locking devices.

(a)   Locking devices on secured seclusion time-out rooms are permitted only when such room is in full compliance with the criteria in this section.

(b)   An electro-magnetic locking device is the only approved device to secure a secured seclusion time-out room. The lock shall remain engaged only when the human hand is in contact with it placing pressure on it.

  1. Upon release of pressure, the door shall unlock. The locking device shall be designed, and shall be operated, so that it cannot be engaged by leverage of an inanimate object or in any manner except by constant human contact.
  2. The push button shall be recessed from the face of the unit housing, or in some other way designed to prevent taping or wedging the button in the engaged mode.
  3. The device shall have an interface with the fire alarm system and shall automatically release and disengage upon activation of the fire alarm. The locking device shall automatically release and disengage in the event of power failure.
  4. A timer shall not be used on the locking device.

(3)   Door Requirements. The door shall have only a push panel exposed on the interior of the room. A vision panel shall be provided in the door, and it shall be no larger than 12″x12″ (144) square inches. The view panel shall consist of clear one-quarter (1/4) inch thick unbreakable plastic panel, flush with the face of the door on the inside. The view panel shall be positioned in the door to allow a staff member to continuously keep the student under observation. The view panel shall not be covered with any material.

(4)   Finishes and materials. The ceiling, floor, and walls must be free of any loose, torn or potentially hazardous materials. All surfaces must be kept smooth and free of any hooks, outlets, switches or similar items. Construction materials shall meet all applicable provisions of the Florida Fire Prevention Code and the Florida Building Code. Each secured seclusion time-out room must be identified with a permanently mounted room number.

(5)   All secured seclusion time-out rooms must have natural or mechanical ventilation.

(6)   The division and the local fire official are permitted to conduct unannounced inspections of all secured seclusion time-out rooms to ensure compliance with this rule chapter. A written record of each inspection must be made and a copy of same must be provided to the school administrator or designee.

(7)   During each unannounced inspection, the division or the local fire official is permitted to inspect secured seclusion time-out rooms, interview staff, and review staff development activities to ensure compliance with this rule chapter.

(8)   If during any fire safety inspection a secured seclusion time-out room is found in violation of this rule chapter, the board or the local fire official shall immediately report the deficiency to the division in accordance with Section 1013.12(1)(c) or 1013.12(5), F.S., and the secured seclusion time-out room shall be immediately withdrawn from use.

Specific Authority 1013.12 FS. Law Implemented 1013.12 FS. History–New 11-26-06.