

Section:	Safe and Healthy Schools
Title:	Sensory and Calming Rooms

Purpose

Mission Public School District (MPSD) staff recognizes its' responsibility to provide a safe and supportive learning and working environments for all students and staff members. Staff considering the use of a calming room to support self-regulation of students should also review MPSD Policy #180 for Physical Restraint and Seclusion.

The use of a calming room sometimes referred to as a de-escalation room, quiet area, calming space, sensory room, Zen den etc., is based on the concept of reducing environmental and body triggers as a coping strategy for students in elevated and/or depressed emotional states of arousal. Calming areas are widely used in a variety of settings, including schools, homes, therapeutic clinics, and hospitals to support self-regulation. It is important that calming areas are not to be used as places of punishment, seclusion and/or containment.

The Guidelines provide a consistent approach in the use of calming rooms for the purpose of prevention and de-escalation of challenging behaviours.

General Guidelines:

- Self-Regulation strategies that assist students to remain in their regular classroom should be the priority. These strategies are best employed as part of a systematic and comprehensive program such as Zones of Regulation.
- Where in-class strategies are not entirely successful or where they need to be supplemented, the focus moves to providing the student with opportunities to self-regulate through activities such as walking in the school or school yard, performing physical tasks or moving to a different classroom or other learning space.
- The student should be supervised during these activities.
- Self-regulation strategies, including the use of calming rooms, are implemented with the knowledge, understanding and support of the student. The student must understand the purpose of the calming room, how to request the use of the room and how to communicate needs and wants while in the room.
- The parent/guardian should be informed and agree to the use of the Calming/Sensory Room for the student. The parent/guardian should be given the opportunity to see the calming room if requested.

Procedure:

Self-Regulation/Sensory Room Principles

The term calming is used synonymously with the term self-regulation. Some students may experience high levels of frustration, anger, and anxiety while at school as a direct outcome of their exceptionalities. Teaching self-regulation strategies to students is a proactive means of addressing safety issues as well as providing an increased opportunity of independence and success. The use of sensory rooms in MPSD schools is a proactive strategy and will be guided by the following principles:

- In all situations, it is the intent of MPSD to provide the best possible care and to ensure the welfare, safety, and security of all involved.
- Students will access sensory rooms voluntarily as part of a predetermined and documented plan, as outlined in their IEP. Students accessing a sensory room will not be transported physically into or out of the room by staff.
- Sensory rooms will not be used as a disciplinary measure or as punishment for inappropriate challenging behaviour.
- Students will not be restricted in their ability to leave sensory rooms using locks on the doors or by restricting the student's exit (e.g. holding the door, blocking the doorway, etc.).
- Sensory rooms must have a window to allow the student to look out and alternatively, staff to observe if required.
- Students must be supervised and never left unattended in a sensory room under any circumstances.

- Sensory rooms will not be used during an Emergency Lockdown. If a student is in a Calming Room and a Lockdown is implemented, the student should be directed to the nearest safest location, as determined in the school's Emergency Response (Lockdown) Plan.
- If a student escalates and begins to engage in challenging behaviour which poses a safety risk to themselves or others while in a sensory room and/or upon exit, the procedures as outlined in NVCI training and MPSD Policy #180 for Physical Restraint and Seclusion will be followed.
- The use of a sensory room may not be appropriate for all students. This de-escalation strategy should only be employed after less restrictive strategies have been trialed in the classroom and school.

If a separate room is used as a calming room, the following considerations must apply. The room must:

- Be a space that does not cause any further emotional or behavioural escalation,
- Not contain items or fixtures that may be potentially harmful to students in an escalated emotional state,
- Provide a means by which staff can monitor the student at all times,
- Be well ventilated, clean, and well lit,
- Be available to designated student as outlined in their IEP, and
- Not be scheduled for other use throughout the day (e.g. sensory room) where such use would create conflict. However, some students use a sensory room for self-regulation by self-selecting to use the room at times of low escalating emotional states, not just at scheduled times. In such cases, the distinction between sensory and calming rooms is blurred. The important consideration here is the individual student's ability to self-regulate and the welfare and the safety of the student and others.

Definitions:

- **Self-Regulation:** is the ability to employ a variety of strategies to regulate one's emotions and actions in response to a situation occurring in the immediate environment which triggers arousal.
- **Calming Room:** is a room that the student self-selects to remove him or herself to and is one option as pre-determined by Administrators and outlined in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). The main purpose of the room is to support the student in the implementation of self-regulation strategies, resulting in the reduction of challenging behaviours. The calming room may contain materials to assist the student in calming methods (e.g. deep breaths/breathing, squishy balls, visual supports that provide options/instructions, lying down on a mat, listening to quiet music, etc.). A student in a calming room must be always supervised by a staff member.
- **Sensory Room:** is a room utilized for the implementation of a sensory diet/program which addresses a student's identified sensory needs. It is an expectation that a sensory diet/program involving the use of a sensory room is recommended by an Occupational Therapist (OT). The use of scheduling of a sensory room should be explicitly outlined in the student's IEP, must rely on the choice of the students, and must be supervised by a staff member. The sensory room may contain materials as prescribed by an OT (e.g. weighted blanket, body sock, yoga ball, lap snake, etc.).
- **Time Out Room:** MPSD does not support the use of any type of room as a form of involuntary isolation and/or for disciplinary purposes. As well, MPSD does not support physically restricting a student's ability to exit a room except in the case of an emergency in order to protect the safety of students(s) and/or staff from risk of injury (see MPSD Policy #180 for Physical Restraint and Seclusion).

Dated Adopted: July 2022

Date Amended:

Cross Reference: