**Time Away - A Self-Regulation Strategy for the Classroom**

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Almost every classroom has one or two (or sometimes more) students who are very good at avoiding work and activities that they are unwilling or unable to do. They may engage in acting out behaviours that interfere with the learning of others and result in being removed from class or passively but defiantly sit and not complete the work. Either way, the work does not get done and learning does not take place.

There are many reasons why a student is not able to work at a particular moment. Having a classroom strategy in place to handle those times will be helpful.

Most teachers have at least heard about or used Time Out. Time Out can either mean that the student is removed from the class or that reinforcement is not available to the student for a period of time. In either situation, the teacher decides when a Time Out is needed and is considered punishment for inappropriate behaviour. During the most common, Time Out from the class, a student is placed in the hall, another teacher's classroom or sent to the office. Time Out from reinforcement occurs when a student is not allowed to participate in a classroom management system that rewards appropriate behaviour with points. Time Out occurs after inappropriate behaviour happens.

Time Away is different. Used as a preventative measure to support self-regulation, Time Away is an agreement between a student and a teacher that the student can decide a particular activity or learning task is too difficult or that he or she cannot complete it at that time. Rather than engaging in disruptive behaviour, the student has the option to leave the task or activity and move to a spot in the classroom which has been set up for such times. The student stays in that spot until they feel they are ready to start on the task, at which time they move back to their desk.

Time Away can also be called "cooling off", "calming down" or "taking a break". The specific place in your classroom can also have a name such as the "Peace Place", "Calm Zone" or Cool Down Corner.

Using the Time Away strategy should be discussed and taught in the similar manner as other classroom routines.

1. During a class meeting or large group instruction time, explain that sometimes, even after they have asked for and received help, some students feel too upset, worried or angry to do the work. It could be because of a problem with the work, at home, or with a friend.
2. Ask your class for the physical signs that they might feel in their body such as heart beating faster, stomach feeling weird, or their face turning red.
3. Discuss possible actions that could happen when they feel this way, such as not being able to think clearly, yelling or even pushing or throwing things.
4. Brainstorm different ways to help change the way they are feeling. List them on the board. Have students identify which ideas they could use in the classroom. You might have students draw themselves using one of the strategies.
5. Tell the class that you are going to have a spot in the class that they can quietly go to when they are feeling upset before they do something that might get them in trouble or disrupt another student's learning. You can either have the group choose a name or have one ready.
6. You might want show a basket or box with items that they can use such as a fidget, stuffed animal, paper and crayons or magazines. Point out that these are not toys, they are tools to help them get back to learning.
7. Explain to the class that Time Away is to be done by themselves, using a tool to help themselves feel better and able to work with you to find a solution to their problem.
8. Emphasize that when they feel decide they are feeling better they can come back to their desk and you will come over to check in with them and make a plan.
9. Roleplay quietly going to the Time Away spot and coming back to join the class. Talk about potential problems such as what to do if it is already being used, or the bell goes. Be clear that the work needs to be finished and have students come up with some options as well as your own. This could be finishing at recess or lunch, during free time or sent home as homework.

Once you have all the pieces in place, practice your own words. According to Diana Browning Wright (2008), teacher, psychologist and behaviour analyst, the conversation that you have with a student who needs some "Time Away" could sound like this,

"Sarah, I am really pleased that you came in from recess on time and sat down in your desk. However, I have noticed that you seem very upset and unable to get started on your math work, even though we talked about the problem at recess and I have helped you with a few questions. You know that when you aren't feeling like you can do school work you can always move to the Chill Zone. Take a minute and think about your two choices, 1) start your work or 2) chill out for a while. I'll be back in a minute to see what you have decided."

It is important to call the student by name and mention positive behaviours they have already displayed. Point out the problem behaviour and remind the student that you have already tried to work together. Give the student the power to pick between two acceptable choices and time to think. If the student chooses Time Away, be sure to provide a positive acknowledgement and assistance if required when they return to their desk.

You could have a sign in sheet for students who use the Time Away space or just keep track for yourself. If a student is spending a lot of time, a call home to discuss the behaviour is definitely in order. Review of the academic demands and support in place for the student may be necessary as well.

The Time Away strategy works best in a classroom with effective classroom management and a positive, respectful and trusting relationship between students and adults. There are many examples of Time Away on the internet which provide pictures and resources. Time Away can provide a safe and appropriate option for students who struggle with self-regulation without disrupting the learning taking place in your classroom.

Also available in the Fall 2016 MyPITA Newsletter

Reference:

Wright, D. B. "Time-Away: A Procedure To Keep Task-Avoiding Students Under Instructional Control." Pent Forum (2008):29-33. Positive Environment Network of Trainers (PENT), California Department of Education Diagnostic Centre, Southern California, 2008. Web. 17 Mar. 2016. <http://www/pent.ca.gov/beh/rst/timeaway.pdf>