# How to use a quiet spot to foster self-control

**Agenda**

What is a quiet spot?

* *Activity: Why use a quiet spot?*

How is a quiet spot set up?

How is a quiet spot used?

* *Activity: How does a quiet spot differ from time out?*

How is a quiet spot individualized for children who are:

* Seeking attention?
* Seeking power or control?
* Seeking revenge or justice?
* Seeking validation of inadequacy?
* Seeking acceptance?
* Avoiding an activity, event or person?
* Escaping an activity, event or person?
* Regulating their energy level?
* Regulating their central nervous system, or senses?

Ways children may react to a quiet spot and potential solutions

When is a quiet spot working?

What accreditation criteria of the National Association for the Education of Young Children support   
the use of a quiet spot?

# What is a quiet spot?

A quiet spot is a small learning center designed for one child to use at a time to help that child recognize and label his or her emotions, discuss his or her emotions, and/or learn ways to appropriately respond   
to his or her emotions.

# How is a quiet spot set up?

Create a learning center for one at a time.

* Make a quiet spot a learning center. Treat this like other centers by making this a place   
  a child may choose to go to when choosing centers.

Locate the quiet spot in a quiet area of the class.

* Consider putting the quiet spot between other quiet areas, such as the book area and table toys.

Enclose the space.

* Create a small, cozy space that is enclosed on three sides. Make it within view of wherever large group activities take place as this is an activity that children may choose to opt out of.

Make it sturdy.

* Consider locating a quiet spot in a corner and use a heavy bookshelf or file cabinet to create   
  a third side. Consider bolting the bookshelf or file cabinet to the wall.

Provide soft elements.

* A quiet spot should offer only a large pillow, sturdy rocking chair and/or a large stuffed animal. Consider having children name the stuffed animal or choose what kind of chair   
  or pillow to put in it.

Label the area.

* Label the area and add a picture to the label.

Provide pictures and written expectations.

* Guide children to agree on the rules for its use. Help children identify expectations, such as one child at a time and toys stay outside. Have the children help make these rules in picture and written form and post them at the quiet spot.

# How is a quiet spot used?

**Introduce the quiet spot**

Explain the quiet spot is an area for one child to go to for some alone time. Explain that everyone needs alone time for different reasons. Give examples and ask children to give examples of times when people want time to themselves.

**Model how to use a quiet spot**

Demonstrate how to use a quiet spot by appearing frustrated, angry, sad or in need of time alone. Explain you want to go to the quiet spot. For example, during a particularly loud circle, try saying, “Wow, I need some quiet time. Things are too busy in here.” Then go to the quiet spot, sit down and take a few deep breaths. Explain that you feel like being with the group again and return.

**Teach children how to use a quiet spot**

1. Calmly label the child’s feelings (e.g., “You seem angry.”).
2. In a supportive and caring manner, offer a way for the child to maintain or regain self-control (e.g., “Let’s go to the quiet spot until you are calm.”).
3. Go with the child to the quiet spot until the child is able to go alone.
4. Stay with the child and encourage him or her to respond with words in the future. Or, if the child prefers to be alone or was seeking attention through misbehavior, invite the child to rejoin the class when ready (e.g., “When you’re calm we want you to come back.”), and quickly leave.
5. Let the child decide when to return to the group. If a child does not want to return, consider having a different adult invite the child back to the group or set up a novel activity and invite   
   the child back to the group.
6. Welcome the child back to the group.

# Differences Between a Quiet Spot and Time Out

| Quiet Spot | **Time Out** |
| --- | --- |
| A learning center designed to help children recognize and label their emotions, discuss their emotions, and learn ways to appropriately respond to their emotions. | A time away from stimulation. |
| * The child stays for a child-determined time. | * The child stays for a teacher-determined time. |
| * The teacher may stay and talk with  the child. | * The child stays alone. |
| Teacher interactions may be warm, supportive, and nurturing or neutral depending on the underlying function  of the child’s behavior. | * Teacher interactions are neutral. |
| While in the quiet spot or after leaving, the teacher and child may brainstorm other ways the child could handle the situation next time. | After time out, there is no discussion about the inappropriate behavior or what to do instead next time. |
| * Viewed by the child as a learning center. | * Typically viewed by the child  as punishment. |
| * Used before or after a child uses inappropriate behavior. | Used after a child uses inappropriate behavior. |

# How is a quiet spot individualized?

Children use behavior to communicate various underlying needs. Sometimes they use one behavior   
to communicate several needs, while other times they use different behaviors to communicate a single need. As a teacher, it is important to teach children skills to use to get their underlying needs met.

Consider if a child is:

* Seeking power or control?
* Seeking revenge or justice?
* Seeking validation of inadequacy?
* Seeking acceptance?
* Avoiding an activity, event, or person?
* Escaping an activity, event, or person?
* Regulating his/her energy level?
* Regulating his/her central nervous system and senses?

# Ways children may react to a quiet spot and potential solutions

**When a child refuses to go to the quiet spot, ask yourself if the child thinks you’re punishing   
him or her.**

Consider giving the child two choices of ways to go to the quiet spot. For example, “Do you want to walk by yourself or hold my hand?” If the child has no response, repeat the choices one time. If the child still does not respond, explain to the child that because he or she is having trouble making a choice you will make a choice for the child and physically assist the child to the quiet spot.

**When a child refuses to stay in the quiet spot**

Consider stating your expectations by saying, “Remember, calm means you walk out quietly with your hands down.” Younger children may run out while still angry. If so, assist the child back to the quiet spot and say, “When you’re calm you may come back. Calm means you walk out with your mouth closed and your hands down.”

**When a child refuses to leave the quiet spot**

If a child refuses to leave the quiet spot, wait and see if it lasts. If so, set a time limit   
and redirect the child to an activity.

If a child goes to the quiet spot frequently, make sure he or she is using it as a place   
to regain control. If not, then begin requiring the child to pay back the time spent in the quiet spot. Explain to the child that, “You owe me x amount of time working because   
you used that amount of time in the quiet spot.”

Emphasize to the child that the quiet spot should no longer be needed by the end of the school year. Make the expectation be that self-selected group removal is a short-term solution; the goal is for each child to learn to use words and choose appropriate outlets   
to express his or her emotions.

# What Accreditation Criteria of the National Association for the Education

# of Young Children Support the Use of a Quiet Spot?

A-6a. Teachers facilitate the development of responsibility, self-regulation, and self-control   
in children. …

A-8. Teachers support children’s emotional development, assisting children to be comfortable, relaxed, happy and involved in play and other activities. Teacher’s help children deal with anger, sadness and frustration by comforting, identifying and reflecting feelings and helping children use various strategies to express emotions and solve social problems. Children are encouraged to verbalize feelings and ideas. Teachers intervene quickly when children’s responses to each other become aggressive, unacceptable,   
or harmful, discuss the inappropriateness of such responses and help children develop more positive strategies.

B-3a. Teachers have clearly defined goals for individual children that guide curriculum planning. …Teachers identify children who experience difficulties in behavior or development and develop   
a plan to help children acquire acceptable behavior or develop skills as needed. Teachers adapt plans   
in response to the needs, strengths, or interests of individual children. Teachers are prepared to meet identified special learning or developmental needs of individual children, including children with disabilities.

B-8. Teachers provide materials and time for children to select their own activities during the day. Children may choose from among several activities that the teacher has planned or the children initiate. Teachers respect the child’s right to choose not to participate at times.

C-3. Teachers work in collaborative partnerships with families, establishing and maintaining regular, ongoing two-way communication with children’s parents to build trust and mutual understanding. …

C-6. Teachers and parents work together to make decisions about how best to support children’s development and learning or to handle problems or differences of opinion as they arise. Teachers solicit and incorporate parents’ knowledge about their children into ongoing assessment and planning. …

G-6. Private areas are available indoors and outdoors for children to have solitude.

# Ways to Use a Quiet Spot to Support Children Who Use Behavior to Communicate an Underlying Need

**Escape activity, event, or person**

1. Providing **models** that show the child what to do. For example, if a child is trying to escape   
   an activity, try pointing to a picture of a child sitting in the quiet spot and say, “Say, ‘break please.’”
2. Providing **physical assistance** by assisting the child to do something. If a child is trying to escape an activity, try placing your hand over the child’s and have the child point to a picture   
   of the quiet spot and say, “Say, ‘break please.’”
3. Using **props**. If a child is trying to escape from an activity, give the child a picture of a child sitting in the quiet spot with the words “break please” below and have the child hand it to you.   
   If the child has difficulty transitioning, it may help to give the child something to carry that represents something he enjoys doing while in the quiet spot. If a child frequently covers his eyes with his hands, try having him wear a baseball cap. If a child frequently picks up items with unusual textures, try giving him an item he can fidget with while in the quiet spot such as a squishy ball.
4. Providing **physical assistance** to prevent the problem behavior and going to the quiet spot. For example, put your hand on a child’s hand to prevent her from throwing the block. Next, point to a picture of a child sitting in the quiet spot and say, “Say, ‘break please.’” Provide physical assistance and guide the child to the quiet spot.

**Regulating his or her energy level**

1. Providing **models** that show the child what to do to lower his or her energy level. For example, pointing to a picture of a child sitting in the quiet spot and doing a calm activity and say, “Say, ‘break please.’”
2. Providing **physical assistance** by assisting the child in lowering his or her energy level. Try placing your hand over the child’s and have the child point to a picture of the quiet spot and say, “Say, ‘break please.’”
3. Using **props** to assist the child in lowering his or her energy level. Give the child a picture of a child sitting in the quiet spot with the words “break please” and have the child hand it to you.   
   If the child has difficulty transitioning, it may help to give the child something to carry that represents something he enjoys doing while in the quiet spot. If a child frequently covers his eyes with his hands, try having him wear a baseball cap. If a child frequently picks up items with unusual textures, try giving him an item he can fidget with while in the quiet spot such as a squishy ball.
4. Providing **physical assistance** to assist the child in lowering his or her energy level and going to the quiet spot. For example, put your hand on a child’s back to prevent her from jumping. Next, point to a picture of a child sitting in the quiet spot and say, “Say, ‘break please.’” Provide physical assistance and guide the child to the quiet spot. Help the child engage in a quiet activity if needed.

# Techniques to Prevent Inappropriate Behavior

**Ignore minor inappropriate but not harmful or destructive behavior.** Some children misbehave because they need attention. When the behavior is annoying, but not harmful, it may be best to ignore it. For example, children often find that foul language gets them immediate attention. If you ignore the cursing, the child may initially curse more but will eventually see there is no gain in using that language and stop.

**Redirect children from potential problems.** The pictures of steps within routines could include steps to prevent a child from engaging in inappropriate behavior. Then you could try ignoring inappropriate behavior and interrupt it by redirecting the child to complete the next step. For example,   
if a child attempts to flush a toilet repeatedly, interrupt the flushing by having him point to the next step in toileting. Or, if eating too fast is a problem, picture cards of the steps in eating lunch could include a “look around” step to prompt a child to slow down while eating. If eating too fast means the child ends up waiting for others to finish, a final picture card could be of magazines. When the child finishes lunch, prompt him to obtain and look at a magazine from a magazine rack in the cafeteria while he waits for others to finish eating.

**Distract children from potential problems** When a child tries to leave an activity, ask her to get a tissue for you. If a child is yelling, whisper something in his ear. In general, be ready to step in, to shift a child’s attention or to add a new activity to avert a problem before it gets out of hand.

**Remind children of rules before they break them.** When a child is about to hit another child, you can sometimes stop the action before it happens by calmly pointing to the class rule and saying, “Remember, use your words/signs/picture cards.” You may also need to give the child the word needed such as “Move” or “Stop” before the child hits.

**Give two alternative appropriate choices before the inappropriate behavior occurs.** For example, offer the choice of having the child work with the teacher or the teaching assistant. Provide choices of conversational topics or offer choices between chores. When a child is about to take another child’s ball, show the child two choices regarding what he can do with toys other than the ball and say, “You can shovel sand or slide down the slide. Which do you want to do?”

**Comment on good behavior.** Catch children when they are sharing, helping other children with hard tasks, or dealing well with frustration and immediately compliment them. You might say, “You helped Ben with his coat. I bet that makes you feel good to help Ben,” or “You left the workbook when you were frustrated. You must have felt great when you then went back to it again when you were calm.” This way the desired behavior is made very clear to the child.

# Non-directive Techniques

**Identify the problem** between two children in conflict, such as, “You both want to use the computer.”

**Identify the consequences** of the child’s or children’s actions by explaining, “There is only one computer. One of you will have to wait for a turn.”

**Ask a “What can you do?” question,** such as, “What can you do while you wait for your turn   
on the computer?”

**Remind children of rules after they break them.** If a child hits another child, the adult says, “Hitting hurts. Use your words,” or gives the child the words/sign/picture cards by saying, “Hitting hurts. Say, move.” Then help the child see the consequences of the misbehavior. For example, “His face is red and he is crying because hitting hurts.”

**Give two appropriate choices** or alternatives to the misbehavior. If the adult says to the child, “It’s time to go inside,” and the child begins to tantrum, saying, “No, I don’t want to,” the adult says and gestures, “Would you like to carry my clipboard or push Joe’s wheelchair inside?” The off-limits choice is excluded, but the child still gets to choose. This not only avoids a struggle, but encourages children to make decisions about their lives.

**Provide a quiet spot** for children to go to and be by themselves when they are upset. Sometimes children lose control of themselves and they need to cool off and go to a quiet place. This time away should last as long as the child feels is needed to calm down. The key is to avoid being punitive and instead to turn this quiet time into a learning experience by not leaving the child alone unless she or   
he wants to be. After the child has calmed down, the adult and child can talk about the child’s feelings   
or the adult can redirect the child to another activity. *See attached handout.*

When the child communicates non-verbally, be sure to **recognize his communication attempt** by describing it to him. For example, say to the child, “You are throwing the ball to me.” Second, **identify the purpose** of his communication attempt by saying, “You want me to throw it to you,” or “You want me to take turns dribbling with you.” Third, **give a clear answer,** such as, “Yes, I’ll play catch with you.” Lastly, **act according to your answer** and take time to follow through with what has been communicated.

# Teach Replacement Skills

**Use an “If...then”** **statement** that rewards the child with a preferred activity following participation   
in a required activity. Use an “if…then” sentence paired with objects or pictures. For example, if you want him to bowl, say “If you bowl then you can dribble” and point to both balls as you speak.

**Shape approximations of appropriate behavior.** When a child reaches for someone’s hair, tell   
the child to say, “Hi!” and help the child wave.

**Teach alternative, acceptable behaviors** that serve the same function as the misbehavior. Decide what new skills a child needs to learn and pick an appropriate behavior to teach the child that will result in as quick and consistent an outcome as the inappropriate one. Tell, show, or physically assist the child with replacing the challenging behavior with the new skill. For example, the pictures of steps within routines could include steps to prevent a child from engaging in inappropriate behavior. Then you could try ignoring inappropriate behavior and interrupt it by redirecting the child to complete the next step. For example, if a child attempts to flush a toilet repeatedly, interrupt the flushing by having him point to the next step in toileting. Or, if eating too fast is a problem, picture cards of the steps in eating lunch could include a “look around” step to prompt a child to slow down while eating. If eating too fast means the child ends up waiting for others to finish, a final picture card could be of magazines. When the child finishes lunch, prompt him to obtain and look at a magazine from a magazine rack in the cafeteria while he waits for others to finish eating.

If a child appears to enjoy sensory input, rather than eliminating these behaviors, try to find acceptable or normal alternative behaviors for him to use. For example, when the child reaches for someone’s hair, he could be redirected to stroke a rabbit’s foot that he carries in his pocket.

**Reward displays of the new skills** by verbally praising a child that uses the new skill.

# Respond Consistently to the Old Form of Behavior

**Prevent the behavior if at all possible.**

**Stop the behavior.** Remember that a strong reaction sets the stage for a power struggle. Instead,   
try to speak softly, move quickly, stay calm and neutral, and be consistent. Quickly identify the child’s feelings, and intervene quickly and calmly.

**Remind the child of the rules and consequences.** Provide a reminder of the rule and consequences of the child’s actions. For example, explain,“There is only one computer. One of you will have to wait for a turn. If you cannot wait your turn, you will not be able to play on the computer.”

**Redirect the child.** Interrupt and redirect the child to complete the next step of the activity. For example, if a child attempts to flush a toilet repeatedly, interrupt the flushing by having him point to the next step in toileting. If the child is getting upset while waiting his turn for the computer, redirect him to the fort he was building.

**Ask a “What can you do?” question.** For example, ask, “What can you do while you wait for your turn on the computer?”

**Remind children of rules after they break them.** If a child hits another child, the adult says, “Hitting hurts. Use your words,” or gives the child the words/sign/picture cards by saying, “Hitting hurts. Say, move.” Then help the child see the consequences of the misbehavior. For example, “His face is red and he is crying because hitting hurts.”

**Direct to a quiet spot.** Walk with the child to the quiet area while saying, “You are (label emotion). Let’s go to the quiet area until you are calm.” Say, “When you are calm, you may return to the group/activity. As soon as the child is calm, invite the child back to the group or activity.

**Use planned body language.** Plan whether to touch the child, get on the child’s level, smile, etc. Also, think about the distance to keep between you and the child.

**Use few words.** It is very difficult for an angry child to hear what you’re saying. Be clear and concise and focus on what you want the child to do instead.

**Use agreed-upon strategies** to respond to, reduce, and replace the challenging behavior. Consistency is the key to success. Make sure everyone that interacts with the child agrees that the techniques have merit and that they will use them consistently to prevent and/or respond to the behavior.

**Reward.** Praise the child for calming and demonstrating appropriate behavior.

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