



CHILL OUT SPACES

Some children have difficulties coping with different situation and events, and in regulating how they feel and how they respond. At times they can struggle to cope because they are overwhelmed, stressed, anxious or frustrated. At these times, it is often ideal to give the child a space in which they can calm down and return to an internal state which allows them to make good decisions and participate.

How do they work?

Chill out spaces aim to provide the child with the right balance of sensory information. They *remove* stimuli that is exciting and/or stressful, and *add in* positive, calming stimuli. Most children and adults can find this balance themselves in their day to day life. We might use sensory based strategies to help us along (e.g. to calm down we might have warm drink, find quiet spot, take deep breaths, do an errand/ move). However some children struggle to cope in different environments and different situations.

What do I put in a Chill Out space?

The nature of the space will vary greatly due to the nature of the child's difficulties and the resources at hand. The main principles are:

- Create a space that is away from the general activity (e.g. corner of room, hallway, separate room)
- Screen out visual distractions. For example, keep the walls blank, use screens/ furniture to create the space, consider using a pop-up tent, stay away from windows.
- Consider the noise levels: if your child is very sensitive consider using headphones either to dampen the background sounds or to listen to music.
- Make the space comfortable and give lots of opportunities for deep touch to the body: beanbags are ideal. Also consider putting in weighted cushions (fill them with approx 3kgs of rice), textured cushions/ fabrics and even blankets/ sleeping bags. These all provide the sensations of being wrapped up, enclosed and 'hugged', which is very calming.
- Add in a small number of items that your child finds calming. These could include:
 1. Things to hold/ squeeze/ manipulate: blue tack, stress ball, key ring,
 2. Things to look at: slinky, lava lamp, book, glitter wand
 3. Things to do with the mouth: straws to chew/ blow with, water bottle to suck on
 4. Things to listen to: relaxation music
- Try to make sure that the space does not have too many exciting objects in it – it is *not* a play area.



When would I use the chill out space?

- The chill out space is a *positive space* that encourages a child to help themselves manage their responses to the world around them.
- It is *not* a 'time out' space and is *not* used as a negative consequence for undesirable behaviour.
- Encourage the use of this space at the first signs of stress, or during times when it typically occurs. It should be used to help PREVENT the build up of stress/ worry/ frustration.
- Explain why you are using the space in a way that is appropriate for the child's level of understanding (e.g. "I can tell you are starting to feel a little stressed, lets spend 3 minutes in the chill out space and then we can come back and finish this off").

Specific considerations for schools

- Develop rules and boundaries around the space so it is used for its correct purpose. You may want to consider:
 1. Outlining what it is for (e.g. to help stay calm so can play/ focus/ be a good friend) and what it is *not* for (e.g. not for play, not *instead* of work)
 2. Agreeing how long the space can be used for (typically 3-5 minutes; children with more severe difficulties may need up to 15 minutes). Using a visual sand-timer work *very well*.
 3. Agreeing how often it can be used (remember we all have bad days!). Often a system of cards/ passes can work well, for example 2 in the morning and 4 in the afternoon.
 4. Agreeing acceptable behaviour in the space – extend class rules.
- Consider implementing this as a class wide strategy
- Consider using this space as an intermediate step to facilitate difficult transitions (e.g. when returning to class from PE/ play/ assembly).



Summary:

- Positive space to encourage keeping calm
- ***NOT*** to be used as time out or punishment

- Somewhere comfortable to sit/ lie
- Choose 3-4 simple things to help calm eg. Stress ball, Walkman, blutak, lava lamp.
- Encourage child to use it when you can see they are getting stressed. Let your child withdraw to it when they feel they need it.
- You may want to use a timer (e.g. egg timer)
- Create rules and boundaries