

Taking a Break/Time Away Instructions

Teaching children how to “take a break” (not to be confused with Time Out) when they are upset can be an effective way of helping students learn how to regulate their own emotions and behavior. Upon adult suggestion or voluntarily, the child moves away from the group or from others to a place where they can watch the activity (this helps to teach the child self-control and self-monitoring; however, if the child continues to be frustrated, they should be moved to an area where they cannot see/watch the group.) It gives them an appropriate way to express their frustration and to diffuse the potential outburst. A “Break Card” can be used as a visual to help signal to the child (or for the child to signal to the adult) that he/she needs a break.

What does a “time-away” area look like?

- quiet
- comfortable (place a bean, rocking chair, or soft place to sit in this area)
- has 2-3 books in it
- favorite stuffed animal, blanket, soothing item
- free of distractions/high energy items (i.e., toys, games, scooters, etc.)
- walls have limited items on them
- it is helpful for this area to be contained on three sides through the use of walls, partitions, etc.
- timer (to be set initially to help children learn how to regulate how long they use the time-away space for and to prevent children from using this space to avoid other activities.)

What do you say ?

-When an adult suggests time away to a child, the adult can say: “It looks like you are having a tough time (or like you are feeling _____ (frustrated, angry, upset, mad, etc). Sometimes kids find it helpful to give themselves some time to calm down away from others. Would you like to take a break/some time away to do that? “ You may want to pair this statement with a break card. (See attached handout for illustration that can be used for this card.)

-When a child uses the break card, the adult should say: “Great job using your time away card to let me know that you need a break” or provide similar words of praise.

-When a pattern develops where it appears that the child is using the time-away area to avoid doing a certain tasks/engaging in a certain activity, the adult should say: “You’re telling me that you need a break to calm down. We’ll set the timer for 2 minutes, and by then you will have had a chance to calm down. Once the timer goes off, it will be time to join the group again. What will you do when the timer goes off? ...Right, you’ll be ready to join the group again.” **Provide lots of praise when the child reengages in the activity after the timer goes off.

Special Notes

*Children will overuse the time away area when it is first introduced. However, they will begin to use it less when the novelty wears off. Be patient!

*It may be helpful to elicit the child's input when choosing where the space will be located and what items (as long as they follow the guidelines) are a part of it.