INFORMATION PAPER

Research to Inform Practice

Current Research Regarding Time-out

"Quiet corner" . . . "thinking spot" . . . "cool-down area" . . . "calming room" . . . "time-out" . . . "seclusion" . . . A review of guidelines and protocols across North America for addressing challenging or potentially dangerous behaviour reveals a variety of terms, ranging from those that sound fairly benign to those that have the potential to invoke unpleasant, even distressing images in the minds of children, parents, and educational professionals alike.

These terms often refer to procedures intended to:

1. reduce problem behaviour by removing access to all sources of positive reinforcement as a consequence of a specified behaviour, or
2. maintain safety by preventing a student from causing physical harm to himself/herself, peers, or adults, or serious damage to property.

Time-out procedures are reported to be used in schools in response to such behaviours as verbal aggression, physical aggression, refusal to work, failure to follow directions, inappropriate language, property damage, and failure to complete work. In spite of the efforts of educational systems to develop policies, guidelines, and protocols regarding its use, limited information is available about how frequently time-out is used in schools, and debate over its use continues.

Perhaps at the heart of the debate is the fact that, although there is much confusion about what time-out is, when it may be an appropriate strategy, and how it should be carried out, there is research to support its use in some situations. There exists a body of scientific literature, much of it in the well-researched field of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), which demonstrates that time-out is a procedure which may

Information Papers provide topical research summaries and recommendations based on empirical evidence in the field of Autism Spectrum Disorders. It is our aim that the information will guide thoughtful educational planning within the context of informed evidence-based practice and build awareness of potential benefits and risks for any intervention implemented.

Disclaimer

This document synthesizes current knowledge and offers recommendations for consideration.

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be effective in reducing problem behaviours in individuals with a range of behavioural difficulties, including those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Campbell, 2002) and behaviour disorders (Mace et al, 1986).

Time-out has been used effectively for individuals who engage in a range of problem behaviours that may be challenging or disruptive in the home, school, or community (Donaldson et al, 2011; Kostewicz, 2010; Vegas et al, 2007). The unfortunate reality is that some students exhibit challenging or potentially dangerous behaviours in schools, and educational professionals must find effective ways of addressing those challenges. However, there have also been lawsuits in both Canada and the United States resulting from the use of more intrusive types of time-out procedures in schools, and educators themselves have expressed professional and ethical concerns around the potential misuse of time-out. It is this ongoing debate, as well as the misconceptions about "time-out" - both the term itself and the behavioural procedure - that has prompted both researchers and practitioners for many years to call for policies and guidelines around the appropriate use of time-out procedures (Gast et al, 2001; Nelson, 1997; Rozalski et al, 2006; Ryan et al, 2007; Shriver et al, 1996). A number of professional associations, including the Association of Professional Behaviour Analysts (2009), the Council for Exceptional Children (2009), and the Association for Behaviour Analysis International (2010) have released position statements on the use of restraint and seclusion, two procedures that are sometimes confused with time-out, and that may be frequently misunderstood or misused.

Understanding time-out

What Time-out is:

The term "time-out" is often used in a variety of ways, but the proper use of the term refers to a procedure which is more accurately called time-out from positive reinforcement. In behavioural terms, it is a punishment procedure – a procedure in which a consequence is applied immediately following a behaviour and the result is a decrease in that behaviour in the future (Cooper, 2007). The purpose of time-out is to remove access to the reinforcement that may be maintaining undesirable or challenging behaviours, thereby reducing or stopping the behaviour(s). Time-out is considered an intrusive behaviour reduction procedure because it interrupts a student's instructional program (Nelson, 1997). However, contrary to some popular thinking, time-out does not require removal of a student to an isolated or secluded setting. Time-out might more appropriately be viewed as belonging to a continuum of strategies to reduce problem behaviour (Horner and Sugai, 2009; Cooper et al, 2007; Ryan et al, 2007; Nelson, 1997). According to most descriptions there are 2 **main types** of time-out: 1) non-exclusion (or inclusion) time-out, and 2) exclusion time-out.

Non-exclusion time-out does not involve removal of the student from the learning environment. This strategy can be applied in a variety of ways. It may involve an approach as simple as a staff member turning away from a student for a few seconds and not providing attention when the student is engaging in an undesirable behaviour in order to avoid reinforcing the behavior. This strategy is referred to as "**planned ignoring**." Non-exclusion time-out could also involve removing a preferred item or activity from the student for a period of time (**withdrawal of**

materials). For example, if an elementary school student is playing with blocks and begins throwing the blocks, he may lose access to those items for a brief period. Similarly, if a middle school student is using a computer to do a numeracy activity and begins speaking loudly and rudely, she may lose access to the computer for the rest of that activity.

Another example of non-exclusion time-out is known as "**contingent observation.**" This strategy involves preventing the child from participating in an activity, but still allowing him or her to observe the activity. For example, if a student is participating in a game of basketball in a Physical Education class and begins pushing and shoving his classmates, the student may be required to sit at the side of the gym for a period of time and watch the game, but may not participate again until the "time-out" period has ended. Non-exclusion time-out is a strategy used by many educators to address low-risk problem behaviours that may occur in the learning environment on a day-to-day basis.

If an **exclusion time-out** procedure is used, the student is removed from the reinforcing activity and is not allowed to participate in or watch the activity. This might mean that the student is placed in a location in the same room or area, but around a corner or on the other side of a partition where he cannot see his classmates participating in the activity. In most cases, the physical setup of a classroom does not allow for an exclusion time-out to be carried out in the same area where the activity is happening. In the majority of cases, the student is removed to another supervised location within the school. For example, if the student who has been pushing his classmates during the basketball game and asked to sit at the side of the gym continues to engage in those behaviours, he may be required to leave the gym and go to the principal's office or to another supervised area. Exclusion time-out is a more restrictive procedure than non-exclusion time-out.

What Time-out is Not:

Although it is important to understand what time-out is, it is equally important to understand what time-out is not. There are many misunderstandings about the term "time-out" and about the use of this procedure. There may be many reasons why a student may be located in an environment away from his or her peers for periods of time, and ***many of these do not constitute time-out***. For example, some learners may require

Key Terms

***Time-out**: access to reinforcement is removed for a period of time following the occurrence of an identified problem behaviour in order to reduce or stop that behaviour.*

***Non-exclusion time-out**: when the problem behaviour occurs, access to reinforcement is removed for a period of time, but the individual remains within the setting; results in a reduction in the problem behaviour.*

***Planned ignoring**: involves withholding any attention, verbal interaction, or physical contact for a period of time following the occurrence of a problem behaviour.*

***Contingent observation**: the individual is placed in an area where he/she can see the activity that is happening but can not participate for a period of time after engaging in a problem behaviour.*

***Exclusion time-out**: when the problem behaviour occurs the individual is removed from the setting for a period of time and cannot participate in or watch the reinforcing activity; results in the reduction of the problem behaviour.*

***Seclusion**: an individual is placed alone in a separate area often as an emergency procedure to maintain safety, under adult supervision; may or may not result in a reduction of a specific problem behaviour.*

a distraction-free environment for short periods of time and for specific purposes. This would not constitute a time-out. Some students may require periods of individual, one-to-one instruction or practice in order to build specific skills before those skills can be generalized into the classroom or another learning environment. These types of situations are not examples of time-out. The purpose of a time-out procedure is to reduce or stop problem behaviour by removing access to reinforcement for a period of time. Individual or small group instruction or independent work in a quiet environment in order to minimize distractions and supporting student learning do not fit with the intent or the definition of time-out.

> There may be a variety of reasons why a student may be located in an environment away from his or her peers for periods of time, and many of these do not constitute time-out.

Keeping in mind that the intent of time-out is to prevent the individual from accessing reinforcement, in most cases sending a student into the hallway or to the principal's office would also not be an example of time-out. Although a teacher may intend to reduce a student's problem behaviour by sending him or her out of the classroom, most often the student is able to access a great deal of reinforcement in the form of adult or peer attention, or both, when sitting in the hallway outside the classroom or when going to the principal's office and interacting with a member of the administration team. For some students the experience of going to the office may be unpleasant, which may result in a behaviour change for that individual; however, most often there may actually be increased opportunity to access reinforcement when these situations occur. Therefore, in most cases, this would not be considered time-out. If a "time-out" procedure does not reduce the behaviour for which the intervention is imposed it would not qualify as a true time-out.

What does the research tell us about the use of time-out?

The use of time-out procedures as an effective method of reducing a wide variety of disruptive behaviours in children, when implemented correctly, is well documented in the professional literature (Turner, 1999). In research studies conducted over the past several years, the use of time-out procedures has been demonstrated to be effective in reducing aggression and disruptive behaviour in preschool-aged children; reducing disruptive behaviour of typically-developing children and children with diverse learning needs in elementary school classrooms; reducing problem behaviour in children with autism; reducing aggressive behaviour in elementary-aged students with significant delays; and reducing aggression, self-injury, tantrum behaviour, and running away in children, youth, and young adults with learning and developmental delays (Kostewicz, 2010; Vegas et al, 2007; Donaldson & Vollmer, 2013). However, a review of one hundred and seventeen studies of behaviour interventions representing nearly two hundred individuals with autism between the ages of 2 and 31 also demonstrates that behavioural interventions, including time-out, "are more effective when preceded by a functional assessment" (Campbell, 2003) in order to determine the causes and maintaining factors related to the behaviour. The function of the behaviour provides insight into what consequences are reinforcing the behaviour. This is essential information if planning to use time out from reinforcement.

Where Does Time-out Fit in an Intervention Plan?

Individual provinces or regions may use specific terms to refer to plans developed to address challenging and/or disruptive behaviours in schools. In some cases, provinces combine goals, objectives, and outcomes related to behaviour and educational program planning into a single document, while other provinces use separate documents for each purpose. Provincial and board/district policies and guidelines should be consulted for additional information on specific documentation practices. Throughout this information paper, the term "intervention plan" is used to refer to plans that are developed for the purpose of reducing difficult behaviours and increasing more desirable behaviours in order to support student success.

The use of any type of time-out procedure should be considered in the context of school-wide positive behaviour supports. Positive approaches to addressing student behaviour should be in place to promote positive behaviour among all students in the school community, and staff should receive training in implementing the strategies and approaches that teach and encourage positive behaviour. Research supports the use of approaches such as School-wide Positive Behaviour Supports (SWPBS) and Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to teach and reinforce appropriate and desired behaviours for all learners in a school, supporting the "achievement of social and academic gains while minimizing problem behaviour for all students" (Horner and Sugai, 2009). If this is not the case, additional training and support should be provided to ensure that positive behavioural supports are implemented before more intrusive procedures are used.

Some of the less restrictive, inclusionary time-out procedures such as planned ignoring and contingent observation are used in schools on a regular basis to address problem behaviours. However, when more intrusive exclusionary procedures are being considered, it is critical that provincial and board/district policies and guidelines regarding the use of time-out are in place. It is also important that staff have knowledge and understanding of the policies so they can determine when it may be appropriate to consider time-out, who should be involved in decisions regarding the use of time-out for a particular situation and a specific student, and what data collection, monitoring, and reporting procedures should be followed.

If all positive approaches to address the behaviour have been unsuccessful, ***research indicates that there are key factors to keep in mind if a time-out procedure is being considered***:

- **Engage Student Support/Educational Support Services Team and Families.** In the case of a student with diverse learning needs, including ASD, the parents/guardians and appropriate Student Support Services/Educational Support Services personnel should be involved from the beginning in discussions and decision-making concerning the use of behaviour reduction procedures such as time-out (Colorado, 2000).

- **Define the behaviour(s) leading to time-out to be certain that all staff involved know exactly what behaviour is being targeted and to ensure consistency.** It is important to identify only the one or two most important behaviours to target for intervention at any one time. Trying to address several behaviours at once increases the likelihood that an intervention will be implemented inconsistently or will be applied for any occurrence of

an undesirable behaviour. This can lead to over-use of the intervention and confusion on the part of the student and staff. It will not be effective in decreasing the behaviour.

- **Determine the function and maintaining consequences of the behaviour.** In general, behaviour functions to either obtain something the individual wants (attention, items, pleasurable sensations, etc.) or to escape or avoid something that the individual doesn't want (difficult or unpleasant tasks, non-preferred people, unpleasant situations, etc.). If the learner's behaviour is motivated by escaping the task demands or avoiding the learning environment for any reason, a time-out intervention will likely reinforce that behaviour and will result in an ***increase*** in that behaviour in the future. Let's think about Jack, a middle school student with ASD. Writing tasks are particularly difficult for Jack, and each time he has been given a writing task in the past few days, he has thrown his materials on the floor. When this happens, the teacher sends Jack to sit in a chair in the reading corner for a few minutes. By the time Jack returns to his desk, the class has moved on to a new activity, and Jack does not usually end up completing the writing assignment. In this case, it is likely that Jack will continue to throw his materials on the floor when given a writing task because he can escape the task by being assigned a time-out in the reading corner. Similarly, if the student is able to access reinforcement in the time-out situation (i.e. attention from adults or peers, access to preferred items or activities, etc.) the use of time-out will be ineffective and will cause the problem behaviour to happen more frequently. For example, Molly is a grade 1 student who pulls the hair of her classmates and gets sent to the principal's office. In the office, she talks to the principal about her behaviour, but she also talks about her new puppy and about going swimming with her friends. Each time Molly is sent to the office she gets fifteen or twenty minutes of one-to-one attention from the principal and gets to talk about some of her favorite topics. It is very likely that this intended time-out will actually increase Molly's hair-pulling behaviour. For Molly and Jack, time-out was not the appropriate intervention because it did not take into consideration the function of the behaviour. Prior to implementing a time-out procedure, a functional behaviour assessment should be conducted with the support of a professional experienced in this method.

- **Weigh the risks of implementing the time-out procedure vs. risks of not implementing time-out.** The school team and family should consider the desired outcomes and potential benefits of implementing a time-out procedure and weigh those considerations against the potential disadvantages and risks. It is important to think about the anticipated loss of instructional time and learning opportunities, the potential for negative emotional effects on the student, the impact on the perception of other student in the learning environment, and the potential for negative impact on peer interaction.

- **Decide on the type of time-out (non-exclusion vs. exclusion).** If it is determined that a time-out procedure is the appropriate intervention for a particular student, decisions regarding the type of time-out should be guided by the individual learning needs of the student and by a consideration for using the least intrusive approaches first (Gast, 2001). Discussions should also address who should be involved in planning and carrying out the procedure. Is this a decision that should be made by the classroom teacher, or is a team approach required? Who has the appropriate level of expertise, training, and experience

to plan, carry out, and/or oversee the intervention? If a seclusion time-out procedure is being considered, the appropriate Student Services personnel and/or program planning team should be involved.

- **Identify what behaviour the student should do instead of the challenging behaviour and whether or not he/she already has this skill.** Some students have skill deficits that prevent them from demonstrating the behaviours that are being expected of them. Unless a student has been taught how to do the desired behaviour and has proven that he or she can consistently demonstrate that behaviour in a variety of settings and under a variety of circumstances, it should not be assumed that the learner has the skills necessary to do what is being asked. Think about a student who repeatedly speaks out in class instead of raising his hand. The teacher should be sure that the student understands what the expected behaviour is (i.e. raising his hand) and that he has the skills to raise his hand at the appropriate times. If he doesn't have the required skills, a plan will need to be put into place to teach these skills. Depending on the situation, it may also be appropriate to implement an intervention to reduce speaking out at the same time as hand-raising is being taught. The teacher and school team should consider the options and decide on the best approach for each learner and each situation.

- **Combine time-out with positive approaches to teach and reinforce appropriate replacement behaviours.** Since time-out is a behaviour-reduction procedure, it does not directly increase desired behaviours. Any intervention intended to reduce or stop a problem behaviour should be combined with an equally or even more effective intervention to increase appropriate behaviour through the use of targeted teaching strategies, practice opportunities, and high levels of reinforcement. For example, if you work with a student who hits peers and adults when she wants to get their attention, it is important to decrease that behaviour. However, it is equally important that she learns an appropriate way to get people's attention. You may decide to use a brief time-out, by having the child sit in a spot in the classroom away from classmates if she hits, but this should be combined with a plan to teach her how to get attention appropriately. If she has verbal skills, she might need to have support to practice approaching peers and adults and saying "Hi" or "Excuse me." If she does not have strong verbal skills, she may need to be taught to exchange a picture symbol with somebody or to tap them lightly on the shoulder in order to get their attention. No matter what replacement skill she is learning, she should receive lots of attention and praise every time she uses the new skill to get somebody's attention instead of hitting.

> Time-out alone can never increase desired behaviours.

- **Obtain informed consent.** There may be school board practices or policies as to which strategies require formal informed consent and which do not. In general, the less intrusive time-out procedures like planned ignoring or contingent observation are commonly used and typically do not require informed consent prior to use, although it would be expected that parents would be kept informed. If a more restrictive time-out procedure, such as exclusion, is being considered as a behaviour-reduction strategy, it

should be a documented component of the student's Behaviour Support Plan (BSP/IBSP) and parental consent should be obtained. The purpose and use of the procedure should be explained to parents clearly enough that they have a complete understanding of why and how the procedure will be carried out.

- **Enrich the "time-in" environment.** "The distinction between the time-in and time-out environments is extremely important. The greater the difference between the reinforcing value of time-in and absence of that reinforcing value in the time-out setting, the more effective time-out will be" (Cooper, 2007). If the learning environment is not reinforcing for the student who is engaging in problem behaviours, a time-out intervention cannot possibly be effective. The reinforcement strategies you choose will depend on your individual learners, but strategies such as providing lots of positive praise throughout the day, allowing students to be "classroom helpers," building in times when students can sit beside a peer buddy, giving students a 3-minute "brain break," and offering choices between work tasks may be helpful in making the classroom environment more reinforcing for some learners. It is also essential to ensure that tasks are at correct instructional level. Tasks that are very difficult for the learner are more likely to evoke challenging behaviour.

- **Define procedures for the duration of time-out.** Regardless of the behaviour being addressed and the type of time-out, there should be a pre-determined time for the duration of the time-out. Research indicates that a brief time-out, as little as 1 to 5 minutes, may be as effective as a longer time-out in reducing the occurrences of problem behaviour (Gast, 2001; Donaldson and Vollmer, 2011), and most experts recommend a time-out duration of no longer than 15 minutes (Nelson, 1997). The use of a timer may be helpful to make sure the time-out does not last longer than planned.

Seclusion is not synonymous with time-out.

- **Select the location for the time-out.** If an exclusion time-out procedure will be used, the space should be free of distractions, such as books, toys, posters, etc. and should not contain items or activities that could provide sources of reinforcement. There should be no opportunity for the student to interact with adults or peers in the time-out location. The space should have adequate lighting and ventilation, and the student should be visible at all times. Provincial guidelines on time-out rooms should be followed, where such guidelines are available (***see Appendix A for additional information***).

- **Explain the time-out rules.** To the extent possible, the student should understand which behaviour or behaviours will result in time-out and how the time-out procedure will take place. Prior to implementing a time-out procedure, the team should consider such questions as: Does the student understand the reason for the time-out? Does the student have the ability and the opportunity to stop the misbehaviour and to demonstrate appropriate behaviour? Does the student understand the expectations during the time-out procedure and the expectations for a successful return to the common learning

environment? The time-out rules and expectations should be explained to the student in a way he or she will understand prior to implementing the procedure. This may involve a verbal explanation, the use of visual or auditory supports, or other strategies or cues that may help the individual understand the time-out.

Staff should not interact with the student while the time-out is happening, as talking to the student may provide a source of reinforcement.

- **Apply time-out consistently and appropriately.** Once the time-out considerations (behaviour, type of time-out, duration, etc.) have been determined, it is important that staff be consistent in applying the time-out procedure. Inconsistent application of time-out will result in confusion and will not have the desired effect on student behaviour. Appropriate application of time-out also means that staff should not be interacting with the student at all while the time-out is happening, as talking to the student may provide a source of reinforcement.

- **Determine measurement type for ongoing data collection.** When using a time-out procedure, it is important to collect data and to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention on an ongoing basis. The team should decide on a measurement system that will provide accurate and reliable data and that can be reasonably and consistently carried out by those responsible for collecting the data.

- **Monitor and review regularly.** Staff may be measuring changes in the frequency or intensity of the behaviour, and the data should be reviewed on a regular basis (weekly, bi-weekly) to see if it reflects the desired behaviour change. If the data does not indicate a reduction in the behaviour, the time-out procedure, or some aspect of the behaviour intervention plan, is not effective. In these situations the plan may need to be adjusted or an alternative procedure may be necessary. Appropriate Student Support Services / Education Support Services personnel should be consulted for ongoing data analysis and support.

A structured tool, such as the ***"Time-Out Planning Sheet,"*** may be helpful in guiding staff through the process of considering the important factors in the development of an effective time-out intervention plan for an individual student (***see Appendix B***).

Seclusion and Physical Restraint: Guidelines from Professional Organizations

Although the terms "time-out" and "seclusion" are sometimes used interchangeably, this is not accurate. The two terms are not synonymous. Seclusion involves placing a "child or youth alone in a room or area from which the child or youth is physically prevented from leaving" (Council for Exceptional Children, 2010), regardless of the reason for doing so or the impact on the individual's behaviour. Seclusion is sometimes used in situations where a student's behaviour becomes so challenging or aggressive that it becomes a risk to the safety of other students, to staff, or even to the student himself or herself. Depending on the level of risk, a

seclusion procedure may be necessary and appropriate, but that does not mean that it is a time-out. A seclusion intervention that prevents harm and maintains safety by interrupting a challenging or aggressive behaviour in the moment may be an effective intervention in that instance, either to allow the individual to de-escalate or to prevent harm to others. However, if it does not have any effect on the frequency of that behaviour in the future, it is not a time-out.

The use of seclusion, like the use of physical restraint techniques, has caused a great deal of controversy and has prompted many professional organizations to develop position statements and policies on the use of these procedures. Seclusion and physical restraints are two of the most intrusive interventions schools rely on to respond to severe aggressive episodes. "Recently, however, public awareness has been raised regarding the inherent dangers associated with the use of these aversive procedures" (Ryan et. al, 2007). In its ***Policy on Physical Restraint and Seclusion Procedures in School Settings***, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) defines physical restraint as, "any method of one or more persons restricting another person's freedom of movement, physical activity, or normal access to his or her body. It is a means for controlling that person's movement, reconstituting behavioural control, and establishing and maintaining safety for the out-of-control individual, other individuals, and school staff" (CEC, 2010). The CEC also notes that physical restraint and seclusion are often closely associated, as physical restraint techniques are typically used when transporting an individual to a seclusion environment. The CEC policy emphasizes the right of all children and youth to be treated with dignity, the right of individuals to receive the necessary educational and mental health supports, the use of behavioural interventions that emphasize prevention and positive behavioural supports, and mandatory staff training in conflict de-escalation and crisis intervention strategies. The CEC policy also promotes "appropriate educational assessment, including Functional Behavioural Assessments" in situations where a student's behaviour regularly interferes with his/her own learning or the learning of others. The CEC recognizes restraint and seclusion as an emergency response, not a treatment. It indicates that physical restraint or seclusion should be used in a school environment only when there is an immediate risk to the safety of the child or youth himself/herself or to or others. (http://www.cec.sped.org/~/media/Files/Policy/CEC%20Professional%20Policies%20and%20Positions/restraint%20and%20seclusion.pdf)

The *Council for Exceptional Children* recognizes restraint and seclusion as an emergency response, not a treatment.

The Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA), the Association for Behaviour Analysis International (ABAI), and the Association of Professional Behaviour Analysts (APBA) have also developed position statements on the use of restraint and seclusion. The Ontario Association for Behavior Analysis supports the use of restraint and seclusion only "during an emergency situation as a last resort when the risk of the continuation of the behaviour (e.g., severe self-injury) outweighs the risk involved with the procedure itself" (ONTABA, 2013). The Association for Behaviour Analysis International and its members "strongly oppose the inappropriate and/or unnecessary use of seclusion, restraint, or other intrusive interventions" and assert that, "restraint may be necessary on some rare occasions with meticulous clinical oversight and controls" and that "seclusion is sometimes necessary or needed, but behaviour analysts

would support only the most highly monitored and ethical practices associated with such use" (ABAI, 2010). The ABAI differentiates between the use of restraint and seclusion procedures and the use of time-out, stating that, "a carefully planned and monitored use of timeout from reinforcement can be acceptable under restricted circumstances." (http://www.ontaba.org/pdf/ontaba_position_statement_on_restraint_and_seclusion_2013.pdf) (https://www.abainternational.org/about-us/policies-and-positions/restraint-and-seclusion,-2010.aspx)

Similarly, it is the position of the Association of Professional Behaviour Analysts (APBA) that "the misuse and abuse of restraint and seclusion procedures with vulnerable people is intolerable, and represents a clear violation of ethical principles and accepted professional practice" (APBA, 2009). In keeping with the professional judgment of members of similar organizations, the APBA supports a distinction between the inappropriate use of such procedures and circumstances under which the use of physical restraint or seclusion procedures may be necessary or acceptable. They assert that, "the ethical, humane, and competent application of restraint and seclusion procedures requires that their use meet all applicable legal, clinical, and ethical standards. Those standards include oversight by properly qualified professionals, competency-based staff training, full due process, transparency, accountability, and rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of intervention." They caution against the complete prohibition of the use of restraint and seclusion techniques, as they judge that such procedures may be necessary in the treatment of severe problem behaviours, but only under clearly-defined circumstances and only with intensive oversight and monitoring by adequately trained and qualified staff. (http://www.apbahome.net/Restraint_Seclusion%20.pdf)

When working with students who present difficult or challenging behaviours in a school setting, including learners with ASD, it is essential for school teams to have knowledge and skills in a variety of evidence-based behaviour intervention strategies (***refer to Autism in Education "Evidence-Based Practices" paper***). Understanding the purpose and the appropriate application of each of those strategies, including time-out, is important in order to use the strategy effectively.

Emergency Procedures and Safety Measures

In rare situations, the behaviour of a student poses an immediate and significant danger for himself/herself, other students or adults, or to the environment (i.e significant property damage). In such cases, it may be necessary to use emergency procedures, which may include removing the student to a secluded area (supervision must be maintained at all times) or using provincial and district/board approved physical intervention and/or restraint techniques as a last resort, in order to maintain safety. In such emergency situations, it is important to be aware of a number of considerations and guidelines regarding the use of seclusion. The following conditions for the use of seclusion as an emergency procedure in schools have been suggested by researchers and practitioners in the field of special education and school psychology (Nelson, 2007; Ryan, 2007; US Department of Education, 2012):

- Seclusion is appropriate only when a student is engaging in intense violent behaviour that presents substantial risk to the student or others; when the threat could be diminished if the student was in a safe environment away from other students and staff; and when other less restrictive interventions are not possible or have been ineffective.

- Seclusion should only be employed as a last resort after other less restrictive methods of de-escalating a dangerous situation have been attempted.

- Seclusion should only be used as long as necessary and should be discontinued when the student no longer poses an immediate threat to himself/herself or to others.

- All involved staff should have knowledge and training related to all provincial and board/district policies and guidelines on the use of emergency procedures

- Seclusion should only be employed by staff members who have received specific Department and Board/District approved crisis intervention training and who have demonstrated competency, through the successful completion of the appropriate assessment of knowledge and skills.

- Consider seclusion only when the student can be safely transported to the seclusion environment by trained staff members using appropriate techniques based on crisis intervention training.

- In the event that frequent violent behaviour is anticipated, safety response measures within a documented intervention plan should be clearly defined. This may include seclusion to ensure the safety of the student and others. The plan should be closely monitored to determine its effectiveness and altered if the data does not indicate progress.

Seclusion should not be used to force compliance with staff commands, nor should seclusion be employed when:

- The substantial safety risk no longer exists.

- A known medical, physical or psychological condition of the student would make the seclusion procedures dangerous for that student (e.g. students expressing suicidal thoughts, students with heart or circulatory conditions, history of trauma, or other conditions). In these situations, alternative strategies should be planned in collaboration with the parent and in consultation with a medical or mental health specialist

- A student is engaging in severe self-injurious behaviours without adequate protection (i.e. helmet, sleeves, gloves, etc.)

Summary and Implications for Practice

Time-out involves a continuum of behavioural strategies intended to reduce or stop a target behaviour through the removal of a reinforcing item, activity, event, or situation. Based on the research, there is little doubt that time-out may be an effective behaviour-reduction strategy in

some situations and for some individuals; however, it is also important to keep in mind that time-out is a behaviour-reduction procedure, and as such, even if it is effective, it can only decrease undesirable behaviours; ***time-out on its own does not increase desirable behaviours or teach new, more appropriate replacement behaviours.*** "Exclusive use of time-out over other interventions strategies reduces its effectiveness and increases potential for abuse" (Gast, 2001) and lack of knowledge, training, and experience, even with the best intentions, can lead to the inappropriate use of time-out procedures.

When considering a time-out procedure, staff should have an understanding of behaviour-change principles, have sufficient training and experience, give careful consideration to the range of potential interventions, and be aware of the potential risks. Given the potential for misunderstanding and misuse of the more intrusive types of time-out, it is important that clear and comprehensive policies and guidelines regarding their use are in place and that staff receive adequate training. Most importantly, the highest level of consideration for the safety and dignity of students must be promoted and maintained.

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This paper is produced by the Interprovincial Autism Advisory Committee. It will be amended as new information comes to light through relevant research and literature. If you would like to make a comment or provide additional information related to this topic area, please forward to:
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Appendix A: Provincial Policies and Guidelines

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador - Education
Non-violent Crisis Intervention Guidelines
http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/safeandcaring/procedure_4.pdf

Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Guidelines for Using Designated Time-out Rooms in Nova Scotia Schools
https://studentservices.ednet.ns.ca/sites/default/files/Time_Out_Guidelines_and_Sample_Form.pdf

Appendix B: Time-Out Planning Sheet

Behavior Management Planning Sheet: Time Out

This Planning Sheet can help instructional staff to put together a well-constructed time-out program to meet a student's behavior needs. The Planning Sheet is built upon Kazdin's (1989) analysis of the effective components of time-out and incorporates guidelines from Yell (1994) for responsible implementation of time-out in a school setting.

1. Is there evidence to suggest that the student finds the present instructional/classroom setting sufficiently rewarding so that timing the student out for short periods will be an effective behavior management strategy? ___YES ___NO

2. Is the use of student time-out procedures permitted under the educational regulations of your province and the operating policies of your school district or agency? ___YES ___NO

3. State in specific, observable terms the behavior(s) that will cause the student to be sent to time-out:

   A. _____

   B. _____

   C. _____

4. Define appropriate *replacement behavior(s)* that will help the student to avoid time-out. NOTE: Be sure to provide positive reinforcement whenever the student displays these replacement behaviors.

   A. _____

   B. _____

   C. _____

5. What type of time-out are you planning to use? (NOTE: the choices below are ranked in ascending order of restrictiveness. Select the *least restrictive* option that you believe will be effective in reducing problem behaviors):

   ☐ Non-Exclusionary Time-Out: The child remains in the instructional setting but is temporarily prevented from engaging in reinforcing activities. Examples: planned ignoring, removal of reinforcing objects or activities.

   ☐ Exclusionary Time-Out: Contingent Observation. The student is removed from the instructional setting to another part of the classroom. The student is instructed to continue to watch the instructional activities but cannot otherwise participate in them.

Where will the student be sent in the classroom for contingent observation time-out?

_____

☐ Exclusionary Time-Out: Exclusion. The student is removed from the instructional setting to another part of the classroom. The student is prevented from watching or otherwise participating in instructional activities. (NOTE: An adult must supervise the student at all times during exclusion time-out).

Where will the student be sent in the classroom for exclusion time-out?

_____

Who will supervise the child during exclusion time-out?

_____

☐ Exclusionary Time-Out: Isolation/Seclusion. The student is removed from the instructional setting to a separate time-out room. (NOTE: An adult must supervise the student at all times during isolation/seclusion time-out).

Where is the time-out room located?

_____

Who will supervise the child during isolation/seclusion time-out?

_____

6. How long will each time-out period last? (Research indicates that brief time-out durations, as little as 1-5 minutes, may be as effective as longer time-outs in reducing problem behavior. As a rule of thumb, do not permit time-out periods to exceed 20 minutes.)

   Length of Time-Out Interval: _____ minutes

7. Will a warning be issued to the student prior to sending that student to time-out (recommended)?

   ____YES ____NO
   If *YES*, who will be responsible for delivering that warning and under what conditions will the warning be given?

   _____

   _____

8. Does the student understand what the expectations are for successful return to the classroom or classroom activities?

   ____YES ____NO

9. How will the student be notified that he or she can return to the classroom at the conclusion of time-out?

_____

_____

10. Is there a specific routine that the student must follow when re-entering the classroom or instructional setting from time-out? ____YES ____NO

    If Yes, describe the re-entry routine: _____

_____

11. Who will be responsible for informing the student of the time-out procedures and for training him or her in all steps of the time-out sequence?

_____

12. Which classroom or school staff will be responsible for keeping a written record of student time-outs (i.e. student behaviors that led to each time-out; frequency, duration, and outcome of time-out episodes)?

_____

13. Describe any *positive* behavior management strategies (e.g. use of rewards for appropriate student behaviors) that you plan to use in addition to the time-out procedure (Strongly recommended):

_____

_____

14. What is the estimated *start date* for the time-out procedure? _____/_____/_____
    On what date will classroom staff review the student's response to time-out and evaluate this intervention's effectiveness? _____/_____/_____

15. Who will be responsible for reviewing this time-out plan with the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) and getting their signed permission to implement the plan? (NOTE: Signed parent permission is strongly recommended – particularly if either the *exclusion* or *isolation/seclusion* form of time-out is used.)

_____

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