

## Creating a Safe Space in your Out of School Setting

A 'Safe Space' is a quiet place for a child to go to when they are feeling overwhelmed by big emotions and need some time away from a situation to calm. Children who regularly feel angry, upset, or anxious can benefit from this private space to be able to have some time out to feel safe and to regulate their emotions.

### A Safe Space should be:

- available for a child to always use independently
- available for as long as they require it
- specific to one child and not a shared space. You may need more than one Safe Space in your setting for different children
- an environment which promotes calm and comfort with resources which support emotional regulation

### How to create a Safe Space for a child

A Safe Space does not need to be expensive or elaborate. It can be:

- A pop-up tent available in assorted sizes and to suit different budgets. These are suitable for children who like to feel enclosed.
- A blanket placed over two chairs or a table
- A comfortable chair, beanbag, or cushion in a quiet corner of your room with the child's name on it.

### Safe Space Examples



## Factors to consider when designing your safe space

- Your budget. Consider looking for second hand resources or ask for donations of items from the local community.
- Listen to the child's voice. Are they able to say or show you what sort of safe space they would like?
- To feel safe, does the child need to still be able to see people or do they prefer to hide away?
- Does the child already show a preference to a particular area of your setting where they feel safe?
- The location needs to be safe and accessible where the child can go independently but where you are still able to supervise them. It also needs to be a space where other children don't need to use.
- What are the child's sensory needs? Are they a sensory seeker and require particular fidget toys or tactile items to support them or a sensory avoider and require reduced sensory stimulation and maybe ear defenders and calm activities such as colouring? They may need a mixture of both. The child's EHCplan can give you this information

## Safer Space Resources.

A Safe Space could contain the following:

- Resources to support children to recognise and describe their feelings such as emotion cards
- Resources which support children to calm and regulate such as fidget toys, stress balls, colouring books, sensory baskets.
- Resources which reduce sensory stimulation such as ear defenders.
- Washable soft furnishings such as cushions and a blanket to support children to feel comfortable, or they can hide under to feel safe
- A resource to support them to express worries and anxieties. You could purchase a Worry Monster, a soft toy which is designed to gobble up the worry. Alternatively, you can make your own Worry Box. The [Young Minds - How to make a worry box](#) tells you how to make one and how to use it.
- Resources which offer the child deep pressure such as weighted blankets, lap pads, neck wraps etc however (Please note that these should be appropriate to the child's height and weight and OT advice should be followed)
- Sand or liquid timers
- Fibre-optic lights

## Examples of Worry Boxes



## How should the Safe Space be used?

- The child needs to be involved with developing the Safe Space, so they feel it belongs to them. Encourage them to design it and to choose the resources.
- When you see the warning signs that they are becoming dysregulated, identify the emotion they are experiencing and guide them on how to manage it. You could say “I can see that losing the game has made you feel upset; would you like to sit and talk this through or would you like to go to your safe space.” By giving them a closed choice of two options, they will feel a sense of being in control. Eventually the child may go straight to the safe space when they recognise they are feeling this emotion.
- Do not use the Safe Space as a reward or a punishment or command a child to use it. Accessing it needs to be unconditional, so it remains a safe space.
- When using the Safe Space, ask the child if they would like an adult to stay near or if they would prefer some time alone. Some children may just wish to hide, others may like you use sensory resources to regulate. Some may want to talk about what has happened. Let the child guide you.
- Once the child has calmed, ask if they are ready to talk or would like more time in their safe place to calm. Listen to them if they would like to share what happened and how they were feeling. Avoid judging or telling the child that they have done something wrong as this could cause the behaviour to escalate again. Reassure that it is ok to feel the emotion and empathise with them. Reflect together on what strategies they can use next time they feel that way. This may need reinforcing quite a few times before the child does this independently.
- Let them use the space for as long as they need to.
- Ensure that any resources which could pose a risk to others if thrown are not stored in the Safe Space so that the child does not have immediate access to these when in crisis. They can be given to the child when they are beginning to calm.
- Record how the Safe Space will be used in your PBS Plan.

### Additional Information:

- [Leicestershire County Council Early Years Inclusion Team - Creating a Safe Space](#)
- [NAIT Safe Space Guidance for Schools and Nurseries](#)
- [Anna Freud Mentally healthy Schools - How to create and use a safe space in schools](#)