



HOW TO TEACH: “BREAK CARD”

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“Anyone can be angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not easy.” *Aristotle, the Nichomacbean*

Knowing when and how to be angry is a skill many children struggle to learn. As a result, children benefit from direct teaching on how to manage their emotions. In the beginning, an adult should initially label the emotion, describe the body’s response and teach when a **BREAK** is necessary. This teaching will take time for a child to learn and to develop as a new routine.

Teaching the “BREAK Card”

1. In a natural or created moment **BEFORE** the child reaches his or her frustration level, label the emotion and body responses (physical state) of the child. For example, “*You seem frustrated. Your legs are moving fast and your face is red. This is a good time for a break.*” A child’s physical status should be identified as it relates to an emotional state. Next, without emotion, the adult will show the child the **BREAK** Card and accompany him or her to the indicated break area.
2. Once in the **BREAK** area, the child must be given choices as it relates to their emotional state. Do they need a calming activity? Do they need an alerting activity? Or, do they need a quiet area with no stimuli? This determination is initially adult directed as many children cannot effectively choose the right activity for their emotional state.
3. While teaching how to use a “**BREAK** Card” it’s important to label what the child is doing that demonstrates they are ready to return. Model the language “*I am ready*” paired with a “**READY**” visual before the child returns to the activity he or she was taking a **BREAK** from.

Here are some important points to consider:

- ✓ When teaching how to use the **BREAK** Card, it is important that the child is NOT already frustrated or melting down.
- ✓ All requests for a **BREAK** should be 100% honored –immediately. Even if there are multiple requests. The child may be testing the concept.
- ✓ When praising a child for their success; remember to react in a manner that is reinforcing to that child.
- ✓ Many children cannot read their bodies to know when they are ready to leave a **BREAK** area. Sometimes a nice check-in to see if they are ready is to assess if they can follow a one step instruction. i.e. “Put ready card on table.”
- ✓ The **BREAK** activity should be a regulating activity, NOT a preferred activity. The goal is for the child to regulate his or her emotions and to return to the group activity.