How to Reduce Disruptive Behaviors Through a Brief Escape Break: Class Pass

Description. When students engage in disruptive behaviors in the classroom, they may be seeking to escape or avoid an academic task (Packenham, Shute, & Reid, 2004). With the Class Pass intervention, the student is able to use a limited number of passes to take brief (8-12 minute) work breaks to engage in preferred activities without disrupting instruction (Collins et al., 2015; Cook et al., 2014). To promote increased work tolerance, however, the student is also given an incentive to retain passes unused to redeem later for rewards.

This article lays out the procedures for using Class Passes (based on the work of Collins et al., 2015; Cook et al., 2014).

Preparation. In advance of the Class Pass intervention, the teacher:

1. **decides how many Class Passes to issue**. The teacher determines the number of Class Passes issued to the student each day. As a guide, research shows that 3 passes per day (elementary) or class period (middle or high school) have generally been sufficient to substantially increase academic engagement. Sample Class Passes can be found later in this document.

2. **determines the length of the work break**. When the student uses a Class Pass, that learner receives a short break from academic work. The teacher chooses the length of these brief breaks. Research supports a 10-minute break period for elementary students and a 5-minute break for secondary-level students.

3. **decides on the minimum wait-time between work breaks**. Once a student has used a Class Pass to take a break, that student is expected to resume work for a minimum period before being allowed to request another break. The teacher chooses the minimum wait-time period between breaks. Research suggests that a minimum wait-time of between 7 and 15 minutes to be effective.

4. **identifies allowed break activities.** The teacher and student develop a list of activities that the student can engage in during work breaks. Acceptable activities should be reinforcing for the student, cause minimal distraction to peers, and be manageable within the time-limits of the break (e.g., 10 minutes). Examples of appropriate activities might include drawing at one's desk or using a computer math-skills program at the back of the classroom. If there are particular rules or exceptions associated with any of the activities, these expectations should be clearly defined. For the activity *using a computer math-skills program*, for example, teacher and student may agree that this activity is available throughout the day *except* when other students are using that program for math instruction. More detailed instructions for identifying break activities can be found in the organizer *Class Pass: Selecting Break Activities* that appears later in this document.

5. **creates a reward menu.** The teacher and student identify several positive reinforcers ('rewards') that the student can access by redeeming unused Class Passes. These rewards are arranged in a menu format, with information about how many unused Class Passes are required to access each reward. Appropriate reward choices are those that are permissible in the classroom or school, viewed as reinforcing by the student, and available at little or no cost. Guidelines for assembling a reward menu can be found in the organizer *Class Pass: Building a Reward Menu* that appears later in this document.

Student Training. When the Class Pass program is ready to start, the teacher trains the student. The training should follow the sequence of coach (the teacher describes the procedures), model (the teacher demonstrates for the student what the procedures look like), and practice (the teacher has the student practice the procedures with instructor feedback). While this training can most likely be completed in a single session, the teacher should be prepared to provide additional training sessions if the student needs them.

Most of the steps that the student is to be trained in are explained in the 'Procedures' section that follows. During this training, the teacher also:

- **helps the student to recognize signs that a work-break is needed.** The teacher tells the student that a work-break might be needed when the learner feels confused, bored, frustrated, or tired during academic work. The student can then be prompted to come up with specific examples of when they might need to take a work-break.
- **identifies the sequence for requesting a work-break.** The student is told that, to initiate a work-break, he or she raises a hand and waits patiently for teacher acknowledgement and approval before starting the break.
- **informs the student when work-breaks are not permitted.** The student is informed that Class Pass breaks are off-limits (1) during exams, (2) if the student has already used up all available Class Passes for the session or day, or (3) if the student requests a work-break too soon after requesting a previous work-break.

Procedures. When the Class Pass is in effect, here are the daily steps that make up this intervention:

1. **The teacher issues the allotted Class Passes.** The instructor starts the day or period by issuing the student the agreed-upon number of Class Passes (e.g., 3).

2. **The student requests Class Pass breaks when needed.** During academic tasks, the student monitors his or her emotional response. If needed, the student signals the request for a Class Pass break by raising a hand and waiting for the teacher to acknowledge and approve the request. The student surrenders a Class Pass and begins the break.

3. **The student takes the timed work-break.** When the student starts the work-break, the teacher or other supervising adult starts a timer set to the break length. At the end of the break, the student returns to the work setting and resumes the academic task.

4. **The student is credited with unused Class Passes and selects rewards.** At the conclusion of the instructional period or day, any Class Passes the student has not used are credited to that learner. Periodically and in a timely manner (e.g., daily, every other day), the student has an opportunity to review the reward menu and 'purchase' rewards for which the student has collected sufficient Class Pass credits.

Troubleshooting/Tips. Here are teacher tips to get the greatest benefit from using the Class Pass intervention:

- **Remind students to use the strategy.** When the teacher observes the student being non-compliant, appearing frustrated, or otherwise displaying potential escape-and-avoid behaviors, the instructor can gently remind the student of the intervention: e.g., *"You can follow instructions or you can take a Class Pass break. It's your choice."*
- **Pair Class Passes with academic supports.** If the student appears to habitually engage in behaviors to escape or avoid academic tasks, it is likely that the learner experiences real difficulty in completing the assigned work. In this common scenario, the Class Pass system can quickly reduce disruptive behaviors—but does not address the academic deficits that are the root cause of those behaviors. Students who fit this profile, therefore, should also be provided with appropriate academic supports to help them to successfully complete schoolwork and eventually eliminate the need for scheduled work-breaks.
- **Periodically update activities and rewards.** To maintain the effectiveness of the Class Pass system, the teacher may want to re-meet with the student every several weeks or so to update the work-break activities and Class Pass reward menus. Refreshing these intervention elements occasionally can sustain student motivation.
- **Fade Class Passes over time.** As the student shows the ability to tolerate longer work-periods and save unused Class Passes for rewards, the teacher should frequently reinforce the student by praising gains in academic engagement as well as increased work production and improved grades. Along with consistent use of

praise, the instructor can gradually reduce the number of Class Passes assigned per day (e.g., dropping from 3 to 2, etc.) until the student is able to complete academic work without supports and the intervention can be discontinued.

References

Collins, T. A., Cook, C. R., Dart, E. H., Socie, D. G., Renshaw, T. L., & Long, A. C. (2015). Improving classroom engagement among high school students with disruptive behavior. Evaluation of the class pass intervention. *Psychology in the Schools, 53*(2), 204-219.

Cook, C. R., Collins, T. A., Dart, E., Vance, M. J., McIntosh, K., Grady, E. A., & Decano, P. (2014). Evaluation of the class pass intervention for typically developing students with hypothesized escape-motivated disruptive classroom behavior. *Psychology in the Schools, 51*(2), 107-125.

Packenham, M., Shute, R., & Reid, R. (2004). A truncated functional behavioral assessment procedure for children with disruptive classroom behaviors. *Education and Treatment of Children, 27*(1), 9-25.

Class Pass: Selecting Break Activities

Directions. Follow these steps to develop a menu of break activities that the student can access with a Class Pass.

Step 1: Meet with the student. Together develop a list of acceptable and engaging activity choices the student can engage in when taking a 'Class Pass' break. List those choices in the 'Break Activity Choice' column. NOTE: Listed activities should be acceptable to the instructor, manageable within the classroom or school setting, and feasible to complete within 8-12 minutes.

Step 2: For each approved activity, use the 'Location/Supervision/Details' column to describe its location (e.g., back of the classroom, neighboring classroom), the adult(s) who will supervise the student, and any additional important details (e.g., accessing materials for the activity).

Activity	Break Activity Choice	Location/Supervision/Details
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

Class Pass: Building a Reward Menu

Directions. Follow these steps to create a menu of rewards for which the student can redeem unused Class Passes.

Step 1: Assemble a list of possible rewards that are affordable, appropriate for your classroom or school, and potentially motivating for students. Here are two good sources for inexpensive or free reward ideas:

- A list of rewards compiled by Dr. Laura A. Riffel:
  http://www.wisconsinpbisnetwork.org/assets/files/resources/Free%20or%20Inexpensive%20Rewards.pdf
- Jackpot! Reward Finder: http://www.interventioncentral.org/teacher-resources/student-rewards-finder

Step 2: Review with the student your set of reward ideas. Ask the student whether he/she likes each reward 'a lot' (thumbs up) 'a little' (thumbs sideways), or 'not at all' (thumbs down). In the 'Reward Choice' column, list any for which the student indicates a strong preference (i.e., *'I like a lot'.*) If a reward can be delivered only under certain conditions (e.g., by a specific person, at a certain time of day), use the 'Details' column to describe those conditions.

Step 3: Record in the "Number/Passes Needed' column the number of Class Passes required for each reward.

Reward	Number/Class Passes Needed	Reward Choice	Details
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

Sample Class Passes

Class Pass	Class Pass
Student: _____	Student: _____
Classroom: _____	Classroom: _____

Class Pass	Class Pass
Student: _____	Student: _____
Classroom: _____	Classroom: _____

Class Pass	Class Pass
Student: _____	Student: _____
Classroom: _____	Classroom: _____

Class Pass	Class Pass
Student: _____	Student: _____
Classroom: _____	Classroom: _____