

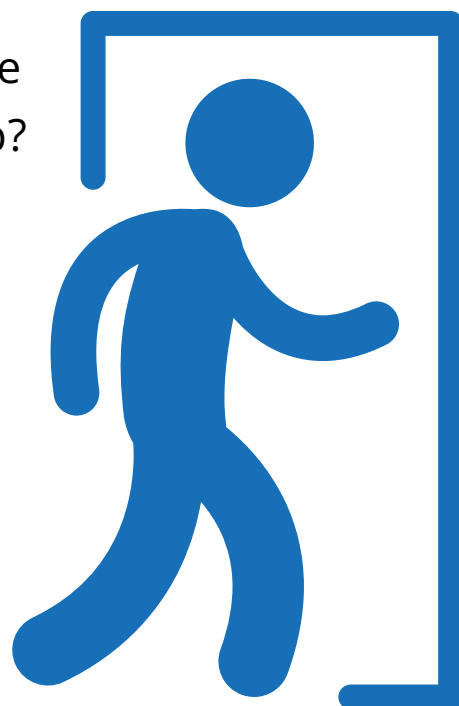
The Stay-Put Toolbox:

40 Ways to Regulate Without Leaving the Room

WHY STUDENTS WANT TO LEAVE THE CLASSROOM

For many students—especially students labeled with autism—the classroom can feel overwhelming. Noise, unpredictability, peer demands, lighting, pressure to perform, and sensory input can trigger a flight response. This isn't misbehavior. It's survival. Their nervous system is shouting: "Get me out of here!"

Leaving may bring immediate relief—but it often becomes a learned pattern. When discomfort = exit, students miss the chance to build skills in the space where they'll need them most. Our job? Help students stay, feel safe, and learn to regulate without leaving.



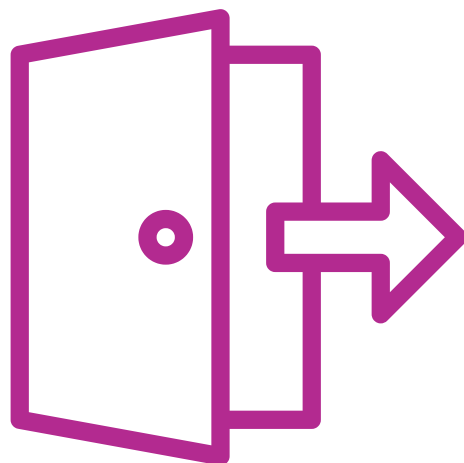
WHY LEAVING THE ROOM ISN'T THE ANSWER

Offering out-of-classroom breaks may seem supportive—but over time, it can erode access, inclusion, and learning.

Here's what's lost every time a student walks out:

- Instructional access: They miss content, tasks, and class discussions.
- Peer connection: They're separated from friendships, collaboration, and community.
- Opportunity to grow: They don't get to practice coping in the environment where the challenge occurs.
- Inclusion itself: Special education is not a place—it's the support that helps students access general education. Leaving means the opposite of that.

Instead of removing students, let's surround them with tools that allow them to stay, self-regulate, and stay connected. That's inclusion. That's special education.



THE TOOLBOX: 40 STAY-PUT STRATEGIES

MOVEMENT & SENSORY INPUT

1. Classroom Job

- a. Give tasks like delivering notes, wiping boards, or organizing.

2. Chair Push-Ups

- a. Let students lift themselves using the arms of their chair.

3. Wall Pushes

- a. Quiet and regulating: push against the wall using palms.

4. Under-Desk Pedals

- a. Quiet movement while seated.

5. Foot Bands

- a. Stretchy bands around desk legs for pushing with feet.

6. Balance Board

- a. Stand and wobble while solving problems.

7. Heavy Work

- a. Carry books, move supplies—give muscles something to do.

8. Sit/Stand Choice

- a. Offer flexible seating with stools, wobble chairs, floor cushions.

9. Stretch Posters

- a. Hang visual guides and allow quick physical resets.

10. Fidget Bin

- a. Putty, poppers, stress balls—tools for quiet sensory input.

THE TOOLBOX: 40 STAY-PUT STRATEGIES

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL ANCHORS

1. **Peer Buddy**

- a. Sit near a trusted friend or classroom “anchor.”

2. **Silent Signal**

- a. Teach hand signals for “I need space” or “I’m stuck.”

3. **Emotion Check-Ins**

- a. Use emojis, cards, or charts for mood sharing.

4. **Teacher Time Token**

- a. Quietly request a moment to sit near the teacher.

5. **Kind Words Jar**

- a. Pull positive notes from classmates or teacher.

6. **Comfort Object**

- a. Small item from home (with permission) for grounding.

7. **Class Pet or Stuffed Animal**

- a. Hold during work or transition time.

8. **Gratitude Grab**

- a. Write down something they’re thankful for.

9. **“With a Friend” Jobs**

- a. Partner tasks build connection and purpose.

10. **Social Scripts Booklet**

- a. Quietly read through calming or affirming scripts.

THE TOOLBOX: 40 STAY-PUT STRATEGIES

FOCUS & REFOCUS TOOLS

1. Mindful Coloring

- a. Use mandalas or calming images during reset.

2. Doodle Journal

- a. Self-expression through drawing or scribbling.

3. Breathing Visuals

- a. Posters for rainbow, box, or balloon breathing.

4. Strategy Flip Cards

- a. "I can breathe," "I can count 10 dots," etc.

5. Read-to-Regulate Bin

- a. Books with calming plots or imagery.

6. Noise-Canceling Headphones

- a. For quiet time without leaving.

7. Mini Puzzles or Brain Breaks

- a. Simple, self-contained games.

8. Sand Timers

- a. Visualize "2 minutes of calm" before re-entry.

9. Music via Headphones

- a. Calming or familiar songs for 2–5 mins.

10. Mystery Sensory Box

- a. Reach into a box of mystery textures/tools.

THE TOOLBOX: 40 STAY-PUT STRATEGIES

ROUTINES & ENVIRONMENT

1. Self-Regulation Station

- a. A shelf or area with all the tools.

2. Cozy Corner (In-Class)

- a. Beanbag, rug, soft lighting, and posters.

3. Lighting Options

- a. Light filters or lamps instead of overhead fluorescents.

4. Flexible Seating Zones

- a. Areas for group, solo, quiet, and movement work.

5. Timer Challenge

- a. "Just five more minutes, then check-in."

6. Cool Down Cue Cards

- a. "Need space? Try: move, draw, read, fidget."

7. Visual Schedules

- a. Decrease anxiety by showing what's next.

8. Checklists

- a. Track tools used and what helped the most.

9. Breathing Buddies

- a. Lie down with a stuffed animal on the belly and breathe.

10. Whole-Class Reset Rituals

- a. Everyone breathes, everyone stretches, everyone stays.

MAKING IT NOT SPECIAL: OFFERING STAY-PUT SUPPORTS TO ALL STUDENTS

To make these strategies inclusive and effective, they need to be:

Available to All

- No gatekeeping. Make the fidget bin and cozy corner open to everyone.
- Avoid language like “special tools”—use “learning tools” or “focus tools.”

Taught Like Curriculum

- Introduce each support with a demonstration and guided practice.
- Build them into your community-building at the start of the year.

Embedded in the Day

- Offer whole-class stretch or breathing routines after transitions.
- Use classroom jobs as regular regulation tools.

Framed as Self-Awareness

- Encourage students to reflect: “What helps me stay focused, calm, and connected?”
- Create a class anchor chart with all the strategies so they’re visible and shared.

FINAL WORD: STAYING IS THE GOAL

Every time we help a student stay in the classroom—even when overwhelmed—we affirm their belonging. We uphold the promise of inclusion. We ensure access to instruction, peers, and the full classroom experience.

Let's stop building systems that escort students out. Let's build rooms that say: You can stay, and we will support you right here.

**Stop struggling
with old behavior
systems.**

GET TOOLS THAT WORK

Download the
FREE
Bundle!