Limited Space Guidelines

by

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Teaching in an area with limited space such as a classroom, hallway, or secluded outside area is a unique opportunity to engage children in creative movement. It also provides an opportunity to teach students how to stay active despite a limited environment and potential lack of resources. Below are some parameters for teaching in limited space in order to allow students the same positive benefits they would get from a physical education experience in a non-limited space as discussed in “Effect of Limited Space on Children's Development.”

Safety First

Your students’ safety is the number one priority. Without a safe environment, students will not be able to learn effectively, and you will not be able to teach effectively. Safety means the physical and emotional well-being of the students. In a limited space situation, there are certain safety concerns to be aware of when considering developing a safe learning environment.

Perceived and real bullying that limited space exasperates is a large barrier to teaching effectively in limited space. When students are confined to small spaces for extended period of times, they may tend to become frustrated. Some of the frustration may come from perceived bumping or touching students think is happening on purpose when it is really a symptom of being in a tight space. In a tight space, such as a classroom students learn in, accidents will occur. However, some students do not recognize these accidents as such. Such frustration can lead to arguments and bullying in the form of name-calling or pushing and shoving.

In addition to perceived bullying, students who do not get along outside of physical education class and are confined to a small space in physical education class together may act aggressively toward each other physically or verbally. When this occurs, it can stop your instruction completely.

The combination of perceived or real bullying can create a class environment where children may not want to learn, or you cannot teach effectively in, which, as you learned in assignment one, can be detrimental to their holistic well-being.
Yet another safety concern in a limited space is real physical danger. Depending on your situation, a danger could be a chipped tile in the floor, actual desks and chairs, protruding windows, heating units, and wires; if outside, tree limbs, trash, uneven ground, tree roots, and much more. Being aware of these physical safety concerns is important so students are safe and able to learn because they are not worried about getting hurt. When students are more worried about getting hurt than learning the subject matter, quality physical education cannot occur.

When considering establishing a safe environment in limited space to allow for high quality and meaningful instruction, you will want to consider some actions to address these issues. As each situation is unique, what you choose to do to address these concerns is going to be up to you. However, below are some general suggestions for how to create a safe learning environment to avoid perceived bullying, real bullying, and physical safety hazards.

- Explain to the students that you are in a small space and accidents will happen, and that you will know when it is an accident and will address the issue.
- Remove any dangers within your ability.
- Cover up any sharp edges or objects that are not removable but dangerous.
- Establish “no enter” zones where students cannot go in to avoid dangers such as wooded areas if you are outside, heaters, teachers' desks, and the like.
- Know your students so you can plan groups and activities that keep students separated who might otherwise engage in bullying purposefully.
- Establish clear behavioral guidelines, including rules and consequences, and enforce them consistently.

Many of the other limited space guidelines discussed in this document will help you with safety as well. However, when the emotional and physical safety of your students is a primer to instruction that matters, the safety concerns and suggested solutions mentioned in this section are important to consider as a limited space guideline.

**Get Outside/Prepare for Being Outside**

At every opportunity that the weather or your school or school system’s weather policy allows, go outside to teach. Even if this means that you have to push a little and go out when it is 50-some degrees and windy, being outside is usually
the closest to optimum space for some activities that are more complex and allow students to move the most.

When choosing to go outside, prepare yourself and your students. Preparation means clearly communicating your weather policy to parents through a letter home, email, your school webpage, or some other means. In this communication include when classes have physical education. Share this policy with your colleagues as well so they ensure students wear what they need on their physical education day.

Sharing your policy allows students to come prepared on physical education days in the right clothing for the weather. In addition, prepare by having certain items on hand for you and the students. Consider that you may be outside all day in temperatures that you would not be out in if you had the proper space. Thus, you want to be prepared for the effects certain conditions can cause you and your students. Some items include the following:

- Tissues for those runny noses.
- Hand lotion to protect skin and keep soft in cool weather.
- Lip balm to protect lips in the sun and cool weather. This is for chapped lips where bad cracking or minor bleeding occurs. Never let students share lip balm. Use a tongue depressor or Q-tip for the student to apply the lip balm.
- Sunscreen to protect your skin in the sun no matter what the air temperature.
- Gloves, hats, jackets and scarves (Ask for donations.) for outside cold days.
- Hand sanitizer for sending students back inside with clean hands.
- Wet wipes to help remove dirt and grime from skin and clothing.
- A first aid kit to handle minor health issues you are legally allowed to manage, such as cleaning a tiny cut and bandaging that cut.
- Sunglasses to protect your eyes.
- Bathroom sign-out sheet to keep track of student movement for safety.
- Hand warmers for cooler days.
- Paper towels for warmer days when students may need to wipe sweat from their faces.

Being prepared for teaching outside will allow you to teach effectively because you are keeping comfort and safety in mind. Preparedness also shows the students you care, and it helps to avoid sending students in and out of the building, which can cause disruption to instruction and leave the opportunity open
for students to be unsupervised. If you must send a student inside, use the buddy system.

**Design Active Lessons**

A general guideline, according to The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, suggests students be in a moderate to vigorous physical activity zone, or MVPA, for more than 50 percent of the lesson. You will know if this is occurring based on how heavily a student is breathing, as well as having students take their heart rate. You can even have them place a hand on their heart and use the other one to show you how fast their heart is beating by moving the fingers on that hand open and close like a puppet’s mouth.

You can achieve this goal in many creative ways. This can include integrating calisthenics throughout the lesson, making students move during the skill they are learning such as ski jumping side to side while they practice catching, or have them practice a skill in a lunge position. Get creative to keep students moving.

Suggestions to increase moderate to vigorous physical activity time from The Alliance for a Healthier Generation include the following:

- Utilize best-practice teaching strategies in each physical education class that are known to increase MVPA.
- Adopt and implement a curriculum that is designed and proven to increase MVPA.
- Classes start with an instant activity.
- Students warm up during roll call.
- Instructions are brief and concise.
- Existing activities are altered to increase physical activity (relays, team sports, elimination games).
- High interest, high-activity games/sports/skill practice are added
- Individual or small group practice is utilized.
- Student/equipment ratio doesn’t exceed 3 to 1 during skill practice, or 6 to 1 during game/activity play.
- Challenges to motivate students during skill practice/game play are provided. Equipment is appropriately managed to minimize students waiting to obtain equipment.
- There is a focus on lifetime activities.
- Teaching is based on research-based curriculum.
Get Creative

Being in a limited space means that you will need to get creative in the activities you choose. There are many resources for limited space activities, and there are many great activities you can adapt to a limited space. You will have to think outside of the box to find activities or units to do in limited space. For example, gymnastics may not be feasible in your limited space, but yoga is a great replacement. Moreover, dance is a wonderful and simple limited space activity. There are resources in the resource section of this class to help you. But get creative.

Also do not be afraid to look for ready-made activities that are fitness-based. For example, **Skillastics** has a great fitness game that keeps students active in small spaces and is not too expensive. **Skillastics** is a board-type game that has students do certain skill or fitness activities when they land on a space. There is one large board you can do with the whole class, or smaller boards for groups. You could make your own game, if it came to it. You can always seek donations through websites like [Donors Choose](https://www.donorschoose.org) or through your PTO to purchase what you need.

Skillastics offers board games that encourage physical activity.
Keep Students Engaged

Students who are not engaged or bored can cause behavior issues. Keep students engaged so they do not have time to blink, walk over to that other student’s desk and take something, whisper something unkind in a student's ear, or start trouble otherwise. In addition, keeping students engaged keeps their minds off the fact they may not be outside when they want to be, or anything else that can become a distraction to the lesson. What happens when students are not engaged and how to engage them, as well as why it is important to do, so can be found in this Washington Post article.

Keep Timing In Mind

When planning your limited space lessons, you will want to keep timing in mind. You will want to be aware of how long you have a class. For example, if you have a first-grade class for forty-five minutes to an hour, you are going to have to break your activities in smaller time blocks to keep children engaged. The average attention span of a child by age is below according to studydog.com. Middle and high schoolers can hold their attention for roughly 15 to 20 minutes at a time. Following are the times your child, by age, should be able to focus.
Establish Clear Procedures

Be crystal clear with students about expectations for working in your activity area during the first couple of lessons you start teaching in your space and at the start of each new unit, especially pertaining to safety. Being in a limited space, especially if it is shared space such as a teacher's classroom, brings a different set of rules and considerations. Be sure to post your rules and consequences. PE Central has one example on in its climate section. You can also learn more about classroom management from this PE Central article. Below are many, but not all, considerations to discuss and practice with your students in your limited space and think about adding to your protocols.

- Entering and exiting the room
- Warm up and cool down

A normal child can concentrate for 2-5 minutes per year old they are.

So the time your child should be able to focus on the same task is:

If your child is: They should be able to focus:

- 2 years 4-10 minutes
- 3 years 6-15 minutes
- 4 years 8-20 minutes
- 5 years 10-25 minutes
- 6 years 12-30 minutes
- 7 years 14-35 minutes
- 8 years 16-40 minutes
- 9 years 18-45 minutes
- 10 years 20-50 minutes
PE Central's Professional Development – Online Courses
Teaching In Limited Space: Making High Quality Physical Education Possible In Tight Spaces

- Posting objectives
- Handing out and collecting equipment (including any papers and writing utensils)
- Establish movement boundaries (off-limit areas, and how students move during activity)
- Discuss peer interaction
- Discuss behavioral expectations
- Nurse, bathroom (sign-out sheet), injury, water
- Organization in the classroom
- Attendance
- Stop and start cues
- Transitions
- Fire drill/emergency situations
- Moving furniture
- Appropriate noise level
- Respecting other students' desks and belongings or properties
- Discussing how in such a small space, students will make contact, and if it is not an accident, you will know and handle the situation

Be Verbal

Voice consistent positive, verbal reminders to students regarding your procedures and expectations. In addition, praise students who are doing the skill correctly or showing the proper effort to maintain movement. Doing this will not only make the students feel appreciated, but it will keep them on task and out of harm’s way. To learn to praise well, read behavioral intervention ideas from Intervention Central.

Correct Behavior Right Away

Correct misbehavior with specific examples of behavior broken and the correct procedure to be followed. Do not assume your students will remember your guidelines! However, try to praise publicly and make corrections privately. This means you can give a look, use a signal that lets the student know to fix their choices, or pull them aside. Never chastise a student in front of their peers, especially in a limited space where the student cannot go to a location away from the class to cool off or sit and think. Minimize any possible friction in the space, as things can escalate fast in a limited space. Be firm, consistent, and aware. Stay vigilant to be proactive. To learn more about correcting behavior the right way in different situations, visit suggested behavioral interventions at Intervention
Central. Learn more about classroom management at PE Central's climate section.

When in Rome

Some limited space situations will mean being in a teacher’s classroom or a space with already clearly established guidelines. Use what is already in place to keep things simple for the students. If they have a certain desk they sit at, keep them grouped by desks. If they are given numbers for identification such as one through 30, use those numbers to group or pick helpers. Moreover, if there is an already established way for leaving the room for the bathroom, follow that. Going with the flow in this sense will allow you to focus on teaching and give the students less to have to think about to distract them from learning.

This also means using the structure of the space to your advantage. For example, if the space has an area such as a large rug that is good for certain activities, use it. If the area has a projection system already setup to use, do so. If the space has lines that will help when organizing activities, incorporate them. Know the space and think of ways you can use its setup to make your planning and teaching simpler to keep it effective and high quality.

Use Small Groups

Small groups are a great way to keep students active and safe in limited space. This is essentially like giving each group of students their own portion of the area. It allows them to interact as well as encourage each other during the activity. This can be a benefit because a student may respond differently to their peers than the teacher in certain situations. Small groups also make it simple for you to evaluate learning and monitor behavior. You can do a lesson on grouping using PE Central's lesson ideas.

Technology is Your Best Friend

In a limited space, technology can be an amazing tool. This could be as simple as a projector for game rules, a computer hooked into a projector to have a whole-class activity, or using pedometers as an incentive for more movement. Any technology that lets you do an activity that can be done by the whole group where everyone is active is a plus in a small space. Likewise, if students have access to laptops or mobile devices where they can do self-paced activities, you can achieve more. For a more comprehensive list of uses of technology in
physical education, check [Support Real Teacher's technology in physical education information](#) and the resource section of the course.

**Stay Flexible**

Things are always changing from day to day. Therefore, you will want to stay flexible. If the space you normally use gets taken for an assembly or other reason, it is not an excuse to not teach. Simply go to Plan B, which is discussed below. The awareness of the possibility of things changing that can affect your teaching lets you stay prepared to make changes on the fly.

**Plan B**

Keep a file somewhere that is easily accessible called Plan B. In this folder place go-to activities for when all else fails. This could be for situations when you have to come inside due to unexpected conditions out of your control, when your space gets taken, or you are left no option but to teach in a classroom with desks and chairs. Having this file ready to go will let you still teach with integrity and at the high quality needed to benefit the students. Plus, it takes the panic out of the situation and allows you to act calm, which is important for maintaining a well-managed class.

**Organize Well**

Your organization is going to greatly influence your teaching and students' learning. Consider how you will move equipment around the building if that is the case. Think about where you will store equipment if you need it in a hurry. Think about how you will carry your lesson plans, whistle, and other teaching tools around as not to lose them. Moreover, how will you organize your physical space for maximum teaching, learning, and MVPA? How you organize yourself can be the difference between a day of chaos and a day of effective teaching and learning.

**Communicate**

Depending on your situation, you will need to clearly communicate with students and colleagues so there are no surprises. This also shows respect for others, is professional, and keeps any potential tension because of miscommunication at bay. Talk with classroom teachers if you are to use their space. How will the
Communication can also mean letting the teachers know if you are inside for the day. This can be done with an announcement each day or communication at the start of the year. Let the administration know your plans and protocols for when you will consider it an inside day. This shows respect and lets the teacher have the students ready in the right clothing and mindset. It also lets the teacher prepare what they will do if you need their space or a space that is public domain.

Equipment Plays a Role

The equipment you use in a limited space can make all the difference between that high quality situation that mimics regular space teaching and utter frustration. Certain equipment lends itself to limited space because you can use it in a multitude of ways. Other equipment is best because it can create immediate structure and maintain movement. One example of equipment that allows for flexibility is yarn balls. These can be used for many activities, are safe, and are easy to carry around and manage. Beanbags are another great resource. From using them for a multitude of appropriate limited space games to their small size, they are a great tool. Samples of activities that create structure and maintain activity include speed cup stacking and using balloons to teach striking or catching and throwing. These lend themselves to immediate structure because they require having students in a certain setup that keeps them active without being physically out of control. Yet, other predesigned games sold by sports companies such as S&S Worldwide can be entire lessons themselves. Skillastics is one example of this. Below are two examples of achieving the goal of high quality teaching and learning with MVPA in limited space. Note how little equipment is needed.

**Balloon Pop:** Two equal circles of students are joined together by holding hands or interlocking elbows. The object is for the group to keep a balloon in the air and not let go of the person next to them. You may add more than one balloon.

**Group Juggle:** A name-learning game that establishes a pattern by always throwing a soft gator skin or yarn ball to the same person, calling their name and receiving from the same person thanking them by name, in a circle formation with
the only rule being you cannot throw to the persons on either side of you. The teacher gradually adds more objects and the class juggles together.

Activities Source:
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08924562.2012.10592177

When You Have Little Equipment

There may be situations when you have a required unit of study or lesson, but you have limited equipment. Limited equipment in limited space can be problematic. For example, you may be required to teach basketball passing, but only have six basketballs. This will mean partner passing will not work. However, you can make six separate lines with equal students, space the students out evenly, and have them pass up and down the line in a quick manner. This keeps students engaged, safe, and active.

If you choose to purchase equipment so you have enough, consider that you do not have to buy expensive equipment, however, to keep your activities in line with your curricular goals. Items such as pool noodles, a deck of cards, plastic cups and ping-pong balls, and paper plates can all be used for many activities that align with curriculum and maintain MVPA.

Dealing With Distractions

Distractions are a natural part of teaching in limited space. When you teach in situations where other students, staff, and elements out of your control cross your path, you will have distracted students. Distractions could be as simple as noise from a classroom next to the one you are in, or more severe such as multiple classes at recess when you are trying to teach in a limited outside space. Combine those distractions with normal distractions such as fire drills, birds, passing cars, passing planes, and leaves falling from trees, and so many more, you may run into situations where you feel like throwing your hands up and saying, “No more!”

Don’t get discouraged. In some situations, your classroom management plan may quickly redirect the students back on task. In others, a quick reminder for the students to focus in their class will get them on back on task. In yet other situations, especially when multiple distractions occur, you may find yourself putting out fires the whole time. When a major distraction occurs that makes you want to throw in the towel - try going with the distraction instead.
This may sound counterintuitive, but when go with the distraction, you may find children get back on task faster, and you might find a valuable teaching opportunity. For example, if you are teaching in a space where students or staff enter through your space without regard, it becomes a chance to discuss boundaries and respect and how to work with people who are not respectful or cross boundaries. Another distraction you may encounter is falling leaves or a small set of trees around your outside limited space. Children may want to catch the leaves or they may lose equipment in the trees. That is a good time to discuss the seasons and let them practice catching by trying to catch leaves. You can also discuss ways to avoid losing equipment, which teaches self-control.

Whatever distraction occurs, you will want to handle it accordingly. Let your response be dictated by the severity of the distraction. Oftentimes, these become teachable and meaningful moments that provide life lessons for students.

**Respect**

Your teaching space may be in a location that other staff share, such as a classroom, hallway, or multipurpose room. Therefore, it is important to be respectful of their space. For example, if you are in the classroom where students also learn, you should return the desk and chairs to the way you found them. If, however, you are teaching on a stage in the cafeteria, consider that students eating may have silent lunchtime. You will want to consider how your students behave and how loud they are during a silent lunchtime as to not distract the students at lunch or upset the lunch monitors. There are many situations when your paths cross with other staff because of your teaching space being shared or limited. Consider how your actions and those of your students will impact your professional relationships with your colleagues. That is part of being professional and working as a team in what may be a tough situation for everyone involved.

These guidelines are meant to act as a framework to turn limited space into a space where high quality and effective teaching occurs. Every limited space situation is different, therefore, it is not possible to provide specifics for every combination of circumstances that create limited space. These guidelines, however, should provide parameters within to work when teaching in limited space for most situations and get you thinking of other practices for making limited space work in your students' best interest.