



CARPET TIME

Reintegreat School Toolkit


Effective Use of Carpet Time

1. Introduction

Carpet time is a common part of classroom life and can be an effective way to:

- Teach the whole class at once.
- Model social interaction.
- Build a sense of community.

However, it can also be a challenging time, particularly for pupils with **attention, sensory, or regulation difficulties**. The key is for staff to make carpet time purposeful, engaging, and developmentally appropriate.

 *Remember: If we find it hard to sit still and listen during long meetings, children will find it just as hard during carpet sessions.*

2. Developmentally Appropriate Expectations

- A good guide: **age in years + 3 minutes** of attention span.
 - Example: 5-year-olds = around 8 minutes.
- If children are engaged, they may sit for longer, but staff should not rely on this.
- Adjust expectations for **older pupils with SEND, sensory needs, or physical challenges**.

3. Common Challenges During Carpet Time

- Loss of focus or fidgeting.
- Talking over the teacher or peers.
- Sensory discomfort (texture of carpet, close proximity).
- Difficulty sitting cross-legged (core strength or height).
- Low-level disruption that escalates.

4. Key Strategies for Success

A. Organisation & Preparation

- Be ready to start immediately – avoid “dead time.”
- Assign pupils specific carpet spots. Use **visual cues** (dots, mats).
- Consider rows with names – helps with giving instructions or organising games.
- Use a **timer** so children can see how long they’ll be seated.

B. Behaviour Expectations

Use visual props or modelling to make expectations explicit:

- **Mr Potato Head example:**
 - Eyes = good looking
 - Ears = good listening
 - Mouth = quiet
 - Arms = safe hands / hand up
 - Legs = good sitting / safe feet
- Display photos of the class modelling “good carpet sitting.”

C. Engagement & Motivation

- Keep sessions short and purposeful.
- Use participation: asking for volunteers, children to demonstrate.
- Move around – don’t always stand at the front. Sometimes sit with the children or stand in the middle.
- Use **visual props, media clips, and links to children’s interests.**
- Make transitions fun:
 - Music or rhymes.
 - Role play (“Superheroes fly to the carpet”).
 - Competitions (“Which row can sit ready first?”).

5. Supporting Behaviour During Carpet Time

Positive Reinforcement

- **Proximity praise:** praise children near those struggling, e.g. “*This table is sitting beautifully.*”
- **Catch me cards:** for listening, looking, sitting well.
- Games: “Who can sit the quietest?” or “paper on lap” challenge.


Tactical Approaches

- Ignore low-level disruption where possible (if safe).
- Redirect privately rather than publicly to avoid peer attention.
- Use short, positive instructions instead of negatives:
 - “*Let’s have safe feet.*” instead of “*Stop kicking.*”

6. Inclusion & SEN Considerations

- **Sensory needs:** Some pupils may find carpet textures unbearable. Provide cushions, mats, or alternative seating.
- **Physical challenges:** Don’t assume all pupils can sit cross-legged. Tall or older children may find this uncomfortable.
- **Core strength difficulties:** Support with cushions or allow chair seating.

- **Alternative involvement:** Some pupils may sit on a chair next to the teacher as a helper rather than on the carpet.
- **Regulation tools:** Weighted lap pads, fiddle toys, or calming objects may help SEN pupils.

 *Empathy is key – for some children, sitting on the carpet is not achievable. Find ways to include them without forcing conformity.*

7. Managing Length & Structure

- Break carpet time into shorter sessions if focus is lost.
- Use movement breaks between carpet inputs.
- Introduce “brain breaks” (quick stretches, songs, counting games).
- Keep yourself in check: *Are you speaking too long? Too abstract? Is it meaningful to them?*

8. Key Reminders for Staff

- ✓ Carpet time should be purposeful, interactive, and relevant.
- ✓ Short, engaging sessions are more effective than long, passive ones.
- ✓ Visual prompts and modelling help pupils understand expectations.
- ✓ Proximity praise and catch-me cards reinforce positive behaviour.
- ✓ Inclusion matters – adapt for sensory, physical, or emotional needs.
- ✓ Be flexible – if the carpet isn’t working, try chairs or alternative arrangements.

9. Useful Guidance & Resources

- **DfE (2022): Behaviour in Schools** – embedding positive behaviour routines.
- **SEND Code of Practice (2015)** – adjustments for pupils with SEND.
- **Trauma-Informed Approaches** – understanding regulation and engagement.
- **Young Minds:** www.youngminds.org.uk – strategies for attention and behaviour.