

Possible Calming Tools

Most young children need help in calming themselves. They need adults to coach them by assisting them through the routine. For some children, it can be simply singing a nursery rhyme, chanting the ABCs, or repeating a calming phrase over and over. It may be allowing them to engage in their favourite self-stimulatory behaviour or taking a break with a favourite activity (reading, music, etc.) Some children can be soothed by giving deep pressure touch or other calming sensory stimulation (rocking, bouncing, swinging, etc.).

For children that will “accept” help in calming down, two tools can often be calming. Gentle rocking and deep pressure is one tool that calms and helps organize the nervous system. And repetitive rhythmic patterns (chanting, singing, slow rhythmic movement, etc.) can also be calming. However, do not impose these techniques on the child. Many are sensitive to touch and will find these techniques intrusive. Before ever using these techniques in the heat of the moment, practice them when calm to in still them as safe calming tools, before trying them when upset. If the child finds them comforting, then and only then, use them as part of his calming routine.

For children who want to calm on their own, give them space and time to escape to a safe area and engage in their favourite calming activity (self-stimulation, ie chewing or stimming, curling up in a blanket, reading, etc.). They just need time to recover and regroup themselves. Each child is different, and including them in the planning is essential.

Calming Melt Downs

- Remove demands and lower stimulation.
- Slow down and lower your voice.
- If possible remove child to “safe area”.
- Stay supportive “Its ok, you are safe.”
- If receptive, calm with deep pressure, or rhythmic patterns.
- If not, back off and allow child to rebound. Give child space to rebound.
- Rebounding will be gradual. Immediately following tantrum child is still vulnerable to meltdown.

Safe Area

- An area with reduced stimulation and demands.
- Small space that isolates (large closet, pup tents, small partitioned area in corner of room, etc.).
- Include items that tend to calm and organize (large pillows, bean bags, stuffed animals, favorite toys, soft lighting, etc.)
- Allows the nervous system to rebound. Some children are slow to rebound.
- If child will let you, provide soothing deep pressure and organizing proprioception.
- However, interaction may be overwhelming. Child may need to be left alone. Slowly ease back into daily routine.

Deep Pressure Techniques



- Calms the nervous system
- Increases Dopamine (feel good chemicals) in nervous system.
- Deep pressure massage
- Snuggling under weighted blanket
- Sandwich with bean bags, couch cushions.
- Cocooning with blanket or sleeping bag.
- Pillow press or neutral warm.

Favorite Tricks

- Hand hugs: Pulsating squeezes to palm of hand, with deep pressure stroking of fingers.
- Hand hug, forearm rub, wrist compression: While one hand provides pulsating squeezes to the palm of hand, use other hand to provide deep pressure rubs to forearm. Add wrist compressions while doing this.
- Deep pressure thigh stroking: When child is sitting in a chair, provide rhythmic deep pressure stroking to thighs.
- Shoulder/arms deep pressure stroking: With one hand on each shoulder, provide firm pressure and slowly move hands down each arm in rhythmic fashion.
- Pillow press and neutral warmth (see handouts).

Calming Tools

- Slow and low** • Slow down, lower demands, lower voice.
- Deep Pressure** • Deep pressure to calm: hand massage, pillow press, neutral warmth, etc.
- Proprioception** • Proprioception to organize: Joint compressions, stretching of limbs, body stretch.
- Regulatory Patterns** • Rhythmic regulatory patterns to sooth: Slow rhythmic rocking, swaying, bouncing, paired with soft rhythmic chanting.
- Safe Area** • Safe areas to escape and rebound.
- Relaxation** • Relaxation procedures: deep breathing and muscle tension/relaxation.