

Self-Calming

Activities to help young children learn and grow

Calm is a superpower.
–Unknown



For success in school, at home, and in social settings, children must possess the ability to calm themselves. They need to be able to regulate and manage incoming information and stimulation. In our busy, over-scheduled world, self-calming activities are a necessary gift to share with your child.

The best time to teach your child to self-calm isn't when they are in full blown meltdown mode. Teach your child calming strategies when they are already calm. Name and practice the strategies so that you can suggest one or several to your child when they need your support most. Practicing the strategies in a fun and playful way will help your child access those strategies later.

Here are a few that may help your child self-calm:

- *Count.* Have your child count slowly to five or ten . . . or continue counting for as long as they feel stressed. That number can become a measurement for your child's stress. "You only had to count to twelve and look how calm you are now!"
- *Breathe.* Take a long breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Breathing in through your mouth can be alerting, so try "smelling a flower" then "blowing out a candle" with your child.
- *Hug.* Some children benefit from a hug from you when offered as a choice. The compression and human touch are comforting and calming to their sensory systems – and their souls. They might also like hugging a pillow or stuffed animal.

Here are more activity ideas for helping your child find their way back to calm.

MOVE YOUR BODY

Show Me Your Muscles. Many large motor activities can be calming to the body. Dim the lights and try a different combination of these activities each day: lie on the floor, rock on a large ball, try a yoga pose, walk on a balance beam, jump on a trampoline, sit or rock in a rocking chair, swing, or push against a wall.

Peaceful and Productive. Think through daily activities that require resistance and heavy lifting. Have your child help with these tasks. Examples include taking out the trash, carrying a load of laundry, watering the flowers outside, carrying books, taking items from one room to another, or wearing a backpack filled with several items. All these activities give input to the joints and muscles and the body interprets these activities as calming and fatiguing.

LET'S PLAY AND PRETEND

Quiet Time. Sensory activities often have a calming effect, as they require quiet concentration. The focus and sensory input are calming and organizing to the body. Help your child experiment with these activities:

- Blow bubbles
- Read a book
- File folder games (simple paper games that are kept neatly in a file folder)
- Explore a container filled with rice, water, or beans and add some small toys
- Play with stress balls
- Roll, shape and squeeze Play-Doh
- Work a familiar puzzle

Play List. Make a special music play list on your listening device dedicated to your child. Allow them to select the songs they love. Find a comfortable listening spot and let them “drive” the song selections as they focus on their favorites. Perhaps they will dance or simply quietly listen. Listen with them to enhance your connection and closeness.

LOVING OTHERS...AND MYSELF!

Make a Gift. Help your child find calming activities that have a purpose and can even benefit others. String beads or pasta to make a necklace or bracelet to share with a friend. Draw a picture and make a card to give to a family member.

Make a Rain Stick. A rain stick is a tube with small items inside that make a calming sound when they move from one end of the tube to another. Your child can make their own by wrapping a long strip of foil around a pencil or dowel and then placing the coiled foil into a paper towel roll. Cover one end with duct tape or plastic tape, then add a teaspoon each of rice, corn kernels or dried beans into the tube. Finish by covering the end with duct or plastic tape. Slowly tip the tube one way and then the other and listen to the soothing sound of the small items inside sliding from one end to the other.



GET READY TO READ

Yoga Position Poster. Create a simple yoga routine to do with your child. An easy way for children to understand yoga positions is to associate the movements and poses with animals. Check out the yoga books listed below. After reviewing the books, have your child pick their favorite poses. Make a poster with pictures of the animals that represent their preferred poses and number them. You can complete this routine each day when you need a calming activity to do together. Place the poster in an easy to view area so that your child has access to it at any time of the day.

Emotion Chart. Have your child help you make an emotion chart. They can decide what emotions should be on the chart. You may need to provide descriptions of situations, so they can determine the emotion that matches it (How would you feel if you lost your favorite toy?). You can take pictures of your child demonstrating the emotions and paste them on paper, cut out pictures from a magazine, or draw simple pictures of the emotion (happy face, sad face). Draw attention to the poster when your child is feeling emotional and help them put words to their feelings.

MORE BOOKS TO READ

Check out these books about self-calming:

Barbar's Yoga for Elephants by Laurent de Brunhoff

Calm Down Time by Elizabeth Verdick

Little Monkey Calms Down by Michael Dahl

Sometimes I Feel Like a Mouse by Jeanne Modesitt

When Sophie Gets Angry-Really Really Angry by Molly Bang

You Are a Lion (and Other Fun Yoga Poses) by Taeenn Yoo

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY GUIDE

The goal of the activity guide is to share activities that you can enjoy with the children you love while connecting with them in a more meaningful way. Music combined with play, rich picture book literature and YOU as a child's play partner create the engagement a young child needs to learn and grow. My **SING.PLAY.LOVE.**® songs, books, movies and activities can be powerful tools for supporting the development—and delight—of your youngster.

When Jennifer Ferguson was a little girl, she found that being outside and snuggling with her dachshund were her favorite ways to calm down. Today, she finds that being outside and snuggling with her dachshund are still key to relaxing and finding calm. She loves creating fun lesson plans using books, music and games for students of all ages and abilities.