

## Strategies for Calming Children and Teaching Self-Regulation

### **Breathing and relaxation strategies**

- Decrease stimulation around child by minimizing distractions and people in immediate area.
- Encourage child to take long, slow, deep breaths. As you breathe, you gently disengage your mind from distracting thoughts and sensations. For young children might use blowing bubbles.
- Breathing exercises: <https://childhood101.com/fun-breathing-exercises-for-kids/>  
<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/calming-breathing-techniques-kids/>
- After a few minutes of deep breathing, begin relaxing your body by focusing on one part of the body or group of muscles at a time and mentally releasing any physical tension you feel there.
- Guided imagery of soothing scenes, places, or experiences in your mind to help you relax and focus.
- Yoga and tai chi combine rhythmic breathing with a series of postures or movements. The physical aspects of these practices can help distract from racing thoughts.
- Repetitive prayer or self-talk where the individual silently repeats a short prayer or phrase while practicing breathing focus.
- Guided meditation for children: <https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/guided-meditation-for-kids/>
- Deep pressure tools and activities such as a weighted blanket or stuffed animal, rolling child in a blanket like a burrito, bean bag, rolling a ball or roller over the child's body, hugs, etc.
- Sensory snacks or gum
- Repetitive and rhythmic activities, including rocking, swaying, or gentle swinging
- For calming after a tantrum, use reset activities to help child regain self-regulation. This would be initiated after the child has calmed down somewhat to help stabilize his focus and mood, such as fine motor tasks that are easy to do. For activity ideas, see: <https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/reset-activities-calming-after-a-tantrum/>
- Teach child how to be aware of her own bodily sensations that signal escalating dysregulation and ways to calm down

### **Seeking pleasurable activities and distraction**

- Any enjoyable activity
- Sensory toys and fidgets
- Rough and tumble play and water play
- Music
- Change location
- Eat something
- Watch TV
- Read or write

### **Transition Strategies**

- Tell the child early on when the transition will occur and giving warnings ahead of time, like “We have to leave the playground in 10 minutes so I can go home and cook dinner.”
- Use a transitional object or toy that child can have during the transition.
- Routines and rituals often smooth transitioning from one activity to another, like a bedtime ritual of taking a bath, and reading two story books prior to lights out.

### **Social Support**

- Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice
- Coach child to verbalize emotions in words
- Accept and empathize with negative feelings
- Deescalate child’s negative feelings by responding in calm, nonjudgmental and neutral manner
- Ask child what you can do to help
- Call or be with someone

- Warm, responsive, and accepting attention
- Time-in (sitting quietly in same vicinity as caregiver until ready to talk)
- Establish a positive family emotional climate with expression of positive feelings and adaptive ways of resolving conflicts

### **Analyzing situation & problem-solving**

- Identify early signs of agitation and intervene to avoid escalation
- Modify the environment to minimize stressors
- Process child's feelings and thoughts
- Brainstorm solutions & ways of coping
- Offer concise and respectful choices & limits – "It's OK to feel angry but you cannot push your friend."
- Teach child emotional regulation through work on affect identification, modulation, & expression
- Do-overs (let child practice responding to same situation in constructive way)
- Caregiver modeling self-regulation