

# Tools and Supplies

Students often do not have a toolbox full of calming strategies they know to use. This may even be a new concept for them. Calming strategies get us back to calm and ready to learn. When explaining about the tools in the box, remind students that these may look like toys, but here in the classroom, they are tools to help you when you are having a tough time. (Give students time to practice using and exploring the tools.)

## Stress Items

Sensory Bottles Squishy Balls  
Relaxation CD Headphones  
Bubbles Pinwheels

## Build a Squishy Ball

4+ balloons (Latex), empty water bottle, flour

1 CUP flour (sugar or another **dry** ingredient will work as well.)

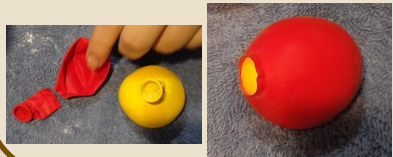
Take funnel and pour the dry ingredient into the water bottle.

Blow up the first balloon and place the neck of the balloon over the opening of the water bottle. Turn over and empty the flour into the balloon.

Once the bottle is empty, remove the balloon and slowly let the air out. (Caution: flour may fly out.)

Tie off the balloon when the all that is left inside is the flour.

Cut off the "rolled" top of the second balloon. (This allows for more stretching.) Place the first balloon into the second balloon. Repeat until you have 4 layers of balloons. (Or whatever makes the strength you would like.



## Items to help guide students

### Emotions sheet with icons to help identify and record emotions

*These should align with the classroom rules for the calming center. They should be visual and simple to "SEE" and "USE".*

### Mirror to help identify emotions

*Small handheld or mounted mirror is best. Include pictures of age appropriate kids with emotions labeled to help students self-identify their emotions.*

### Visual calming strategies

*Create cards or small posters that include the calming strategies to use in the center. These should be simple, picture instructions on how the tools are used to calm emotions. Depending on the age of the students no fewer than 4 and no more than 15 choices should be in the center at a time.*

### Breathing Visual

*Create a card or small poster showing the different breathing techniques that can be used to calm. IF there is device in the center, have quick links to the videos showing the techniques.*

## Toys

Slinky  
Fidgets  
Coloring Books (pages)  
Coloring pencils  
Markers  
Blank Paper  
Playdoh  
Stuffed Animals  
Comic books  
Puzzles  
Pictures (animals and kids work great!)  
Books

## Sensory Bottle Recipe

**Choose a container**— Water bottles, plastic candy tubes.

**Slow moving**— 1 part clear glue/3 parts water. (Increase the glue to make slower.)

**Wavy**— 1 part baby oil/2 parts water.

**Inside**— Glitter, beads, shape glitter and other small objects.

## Technology Resources for the Calming Center

(All resources have a FREE educators account)



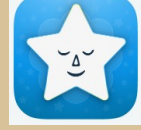
Calm



GoNoodle



Stop, Breathe, Think



Stop, Breathe, Think KIDS



Smiling Mind

# CLASSROOM CALMING CENTER

Classroom calming centers are created for students to briefly get away from the frustrating task or over-stimulating activity to de-escalate. When students are in the calming center space, the goal is to give the student "time away" (not time out) so that the behavior does not escalate any further. The overall classroom space is designed for learning and can be a stable environment. Students that face risk, such as poverty, homelessness, trauma and related stressors can benefit from adding a space that focuses them on self-regulation. These "tier 1" strategies benefit all students in the classroom. A well created calming space allows the student to self-regulate from a "survival brain" mindset that can produce the fight or flight response to one with more cognitive functioning that is ready to learn. When students experience stress or trauma at home or are overwhelmed in school, their nervous systems respond. Some students become extremely activated while others shutdown. Activation comes in reactions such as inattention, difficulty sitting still and hyperactivity. Shut down looks like daydreaming, falling asleep in class or not responding to others bids to connect. With both activation and shut-down, cognition is impaired and learning is difficult. Calming centers can help with both. When activated, a calming center provides an opportunity for students to reset or re-regulate and when shut down, a calming center provides opportunity for engagement.

### Calming Center Definition:

*A classroom calming center is a quiet area of the room equipped with soft furnishings and soothing materials to help a student de-escalate when upset.*

## Location, Location, Location



Choose a good spot. The spot shouldn't be too isolated or too close to things. Students need space to calm and refocus, but also kept track of and be interested in returning to class. Make sure you have good visibility of the space. Make the spot comfortable.

### Privacy

Enough to allow the student to maintain dignity yet remain within eyesight of the educator to maintain safety.

### Space

A small nook or space set apart from the rest of the room. Size should accommodate one child or two, no more. The space should allow for the educator to talk with the student, but not space for the educator to "sit" with the student.

### Location

The location should be away from the teacher's desk or the main location where the teacher is in the classroom. The student experiencing a crisis needs to be able to "remove" themselves from the trigger without asking permission and going "past" the teacher.

### Place to sit

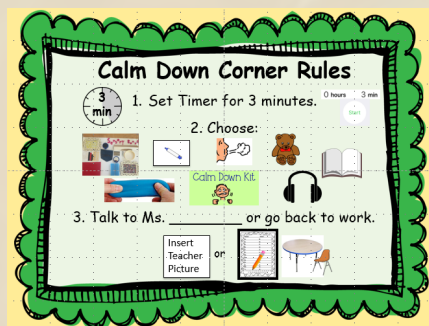
The space should have a defined place for the student to sit and relax. This allows the student to quickly know and understand what is expected in the area. "Sit and relax" instead of pace, spin, or wander back out of the space.

# How to Implement

Successful implementation of a calming center is based on the introduction and the conversations about why and how to use the center. There will be the “novelty” of the items in the center but this will wear off as students get to explore and use the center. Beginning with the why in a circle conversation can help students understand their emotions and the need to regulate them for success in the classroom and life.

## Teach when and how to use the calming center:

- Incorporate rules and routines around the calming center in your classroom management plan.
- Discuss with the class about some specific reasons why someone might use the calming center, and how these reasons could be different for different students.
- Talk with the class about how to go to the calming center (walk, hands to self, quiet voice), how to be in it (show materials that are in your calming center and how to use them) and how to come back without disturbing others in the class.
- Depending on students’ age, decide whether or not to require permission for calming center use and whether students will start the timer independently or not.
- Role play and model with students.
- Be specific on what you will and won’t allow in the calming center space.
- Let students know that they are responsible for completing work they may miss while being in the calming center. Provide the structure for how the student will complete missed work.
- Create a visual with calm down strategies discussed as a group to help students choose which strategy to use and to process within the center.



## Going to the Space

When introducing the space, it is important to spend time practicing going to the calm center. The key concept is calmly and quickly. Calmly and quickly shows we are working hard and doing our best to get back to calm. We are also being respectful of others who are working.

In the calming center, students should go through 4+ steps. These steps make the calm down process interactive. It also pushes students to reflect on how they are feeling and to focus on using strategies to get back to calm. Here is a sample of the steps that could be used. (This can be a checklist or visual guide.)

- Do a feelings check.
- Use a calming strategy.
- Do a feelings check.
- If calm, return to activity or debrief with teacher.
- If not calm, use the same strategy or another strategy.
- Do a feelings check.
- Return when calm or with adult support.

Consider putting in a stop point where the student checks in with an adult. Timers are perfect for this.

## Leaving the Calming Center

Part of an effective calming center is students being able to tell when they are ready to return. The student should know that they are close to calm or at least ready to talk or work on a simple activity.

## Rejoining Class/Activity

Spending a short amount of time in a calming center may help most students return to classroom activities. Some students may need a re-entry activity, something that is simple and frustration-free.

## Outside the Calming Center

One missing element that can sabotage a calming center is if there is an audience (a.k.a. gawking classmates) that does not know what to do when someone is using the space. If the student using the space is driven by attention, classmates laughing or staring while they are in the space can reinforce negative behaviors.

- Teach students what to do when another student is using the calming center.
- Keep working.
- Give the person space.
- Make sure the student has privacy (no staring or talking).
- The center is a calm, quiet place.

# Breathing Techniques

Students don’t always want to breathe when they are experiencing emotions. However, increasing the oxygen and blood flow to the brain is the best way to calm.

All calming kits should include bubbles or a pinwheel...especially with very young students. The act of blowing bubbles or moving the pinwheel automatically gets the brain on the right track.

All of the following breathing techniques start with the same instructions:

- **Close your eyes or look down** (This removes many distractions from the student’s focus.)
- **Sit or stand up straight** (This allows the student to be aware of their physical self.)

**4/8-** As you inhale slowly through your nose, silently count to 4. As you exhale slowly through your mouth like you’re blowing through a straw, silently count to 8.

**Bunny-** Take in 3 quick sniffs using your nose, like a bunny. Then do one long exhale through your mouth.

**Circle-** Put your fingertips together to form a sphere. As you breathe in move your fingers apart so it’s like you are holding a basketball. As you breathe out, bring your fingers back together to make the original sphere.

**Elephant-** Let your arms dangle at your sides. As you breathe in slowly, raise your arms over you head like elephant trunks. As you breathe our slowly, lower your arms to your sides again.

**Fingertip-** Bring your pinky and thumb together on one or both hands. As you breathe in through your nose, touch your thumb to each finger from your pinky to your index finger. As you breathe out through your nose, do the reverse (index to pinky).

**Fireworks-** Place your palms together, in front of your heart. As you slowly inhale through your nose, lift your hands in the air. At the end of your inhale, clap once. Slowly exhale through your nose and twinkle your fingers like fireworks as you lower your hands to your heart.

**Leaky Tire-** Breathe in slowly through your nose. Pause for 1...2...3...Now exhale slowly through your teeth, making the hissing sound of a leaky tire.

**Mountain Valley-** Place one hand on top of your opposite wrist. Breathe in and slowly move your hand up your arm to your shoulder (the mountain). Breath out, slowly move your hand back down to your wrist (the valley).

**Rainbow-** As you breathe in slowly through your nose, raise your arms up over your head. Let your hands meet so your arms make a rainbow shape. Breathe out and slowly through your nose and bring your arms down to your sides, spreading the rainbow around the room.

**Rainfall-** Inhale slowly through your nose. As you exhale through your mouth, make a “shhhhh” sound, like the gentle fall of rain.

**Rectangle-** Inhale while counting to 4, hold for 2 counts, exhale while counting to 4, and hold again for 2 counts. As you count draw the four sides of a rectangle with your finger in the air (up one side for 4, over for 2, down the other side for 4, and over for 2). Drawing this on paper would work as well.

**Rocket-** Place your palms together with your hands in front of your heart. As you slowly breathe in through your nose, lift the rocket into the air. As you slowly exhale through your nose, bring the rocket back toward your heart.

**Shoulder Roll-** As you take a slow breath in through your nose, lift your shoulders up toward your ears. As you exhale a slow breath out your nose, roll your shoulders back down again.

**Starfish-** Hold up one hand like a starfish. (Fingers spread-out) With your other hand, use your pointer finger to slowly trace the outside of each finger. Breathe in through your nose as you go up your finger, breathe out through your mouth as you go down.

YouTube playlist with examples of all the breathing techniques

can be found here: <http://bit.ly/37jsDjf>