



Pathways to Success

Helpful Strategies for Parents and Caregivers of Young Children

How to Use a Calming Space

See also: *How to Create a Calming Space*

Once you have created a calming space, practice using it.

Make sure the children understand how and when the space can be used. Practice walking calmly to the space with the child and spend a couple of minutes exploring the different calming tools there. Talk to the child about coming to the area and how it will help their body and brain feel better.

Practice using the calming tools.

Introduce the different tools and allow the child to explore them. Show how to use them, and practice using them together. Exploring these tools when a child is calm will increase their ability to use them when they are upset.

- Practice deep breaths
- Play with soothing toys
- Listen to music
- Take sips of water

When a child shows signs of emotional distress:

Your first job as the caregiver is to be calm. Say to the child:

“You look _____ .” (Label the emotion: sad, mad, frustrated, angry, excited, etc.)

“I see you are _____ .” (Label what they are doing with their body: kicking, poking, screaming, crying, running, wiggling, etc.)

“I want to help you feel better. Let’s go take a break together in the calming space.”

(see over)



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Move to the calming space with the child. Gently assist them or have them walk with you.

Help the child use the different calming tools. Give the child a chance to find what works best for them because the strategies will be different for each child.

Remain in the space with the child or just outside of the space. This is an opportunity for you to help the child better understand their emotions, so you need to be accessible to the child. (Remember: This is an opportunity for the child to calm themselves and is not a punishment.)

Keep language simple and brief. Let them know you are there and their feelings and experience matter to you.

- Label their emotions again: “you look sad,” “you look mad,” etc.
- Label their experience: “you miss mom,” “craft was hard,” “your friend took your toy,” etc.
- Avoid saying: “don’t cry,” “you’re okay,” “do you want _____ ?” “why did you _____ ?”
- Do not try to problem solve right now.

As they start to calm, you can begin to provide more comfort such as rubbing their back, offering a hug, etc.

Once the child is calm, describe it for the child. **“Your body is looking calm. Your face looks happy. We are going to stay in the calming space for one more minute, then we will go back and try _____ again.”** This gives the child an opportunity to rejoin the group or activity they left when they became upset.

Set a timer (if necessary) and help the child leave the space calmly.