

SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO REGULATE

Children who may have experienced trauma or who have attachment needs can sometimes struggle to move between feelings and emotions and also don't always recognise the need to do so. This makes self-calming very difficult for them. It also means they may not be able to discharge overwhelming feelings in a healthy and appropriate way (Bomber 2007).

This may be due to the fact that they were not soothed and supported consistently by their parents or carers when they were younger.

As professionals we need to support children and young people when they become distressed and teach them how to manage these high levels of stress. Children will usually require an adult to co-regulate with them initially. This includes modelling how to respond to strong feelings.

The key to supporting children to regulate is to notice early when they may be becoming anxious or stressed and intervene before these feelings strengthen and their behaviour becomes stronger. Bomber (2020), explains the need for adults to give regular relational approaches with children, which are regulating to teach children who have experienced toxic stress.

Louise Bomber, in her book "Inside I'm Hurting" recommends a calm box. This is a small box which contains cards made by the adult and child which have different activities which can be used to soothe the child. Louise recommends they have a written but also visual explanation. The activities should take no more than 5 minutes but can be shorter.

Some ideas for calm box activities could include:

- Sorting objects into colours/shapes, etc,
- Colour a pattern in a book
- Listen to a relaxation song
- Play with a fidget toy for 3 minutes

Over time, the adult shouldn't have to prompt the child to use the box as they start to recognise themselves when they need it. Finally, the child should be able to internalise the process of calming down without the need for the box.



Beacon House state that activities need to be:

- Relational (offered by a safe/trusted adult)
- Repetitive (patterned)
- Rewarding (pleasurable)
- Rhythmic
- Respectful (of the child and family)

Below are some suggested activities from Bomber 2020, 2011 & 2007 and Beacon House. We have categorised them to help organise them, but many would fall into more than one category. We would also suggest that many of these could be used with groups and whole classes as well as with individuals. They can also be used regularly and periodically as this will support children with remaining regulated, rather than just used at times of high stress.

It is also important to note that not all strategies will work with all children and it's about an individualised approach.

Type of Activity	Activities and Ideas
Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being asked to do regular jobs. Eg, 'heavy' pushing and pulling tasks/activities such as sweeping, hoovering, cleaning windows/tables, emptying bins, delivering fruit/milk, setting up the lunch tables etc. • Walking breaks • Show visitors where things are in school • Bouncing (trampolining and space hoopers) or other rhythmic activities such as star jumps, marching, rocking chair, dancing etc. • Climbing • Swinging/hanging. Eg. from a tree/monkey bars • Hanging over a gym ball • Gym equipment in school eg. rowing machine, bikes, gorilla gym • Interactive play. Eg. thumb war, twister, passing balloons, popping bubbles with different body parts, building towers with hands, adult chasing and catching child • Movement minutes in between tasks • Songs with actions • Stretching • TRE (Tension and trauma releasing exercises) - videos on YouTube • Go Noodle website



<p>Rhythmic (drumming, tapping etc)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal/informal lessons • Self-tapping on knees whilst thinking of positive things • Self-tapping whilst breathing • Drumming, percussion • Winding masking tape around cardboard tubes • Hammering • Sorting tasks. Eg. ensuring coloured pencils are correctly organised
<p>Breathing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusted adult breathing (child matches adult using non-verbal cues) • 4-7-8 technique (inhale, hold and exhale) • Can place hands on the stomach and watch them move • Breathing exercise cards at childhood101.com • Blowing things as a focused activity (deep breaths) • Meditation • 3 slow deep breaths before new activity • Blow out your fingers as if they are candles on a cake - counting aloud to ten • Wind musical instruments
<p>Music</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using headphones to listen to music privately or rhythmic poetry • Singing together • Music in the background whilst doing a task - with rhythmic beats
<p>Mindfulness/Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colouring and the arts in general. Eg. modelling, painting etc. • Cutting/sticking • Hole punching • Online resources for mindfulness and meditation: do-bemindful.com, BBC (7 techniques for helping keep children calm), copingskillsforkids.com, biglifejournal.com, calmforkids.com. • Being outside in nature, including 'working the land' Eg. gardening. • Baking - kneading is a physical activity and you need to take notice of how the dough changes • Lego • Using animals/pets • Sensory activities • Books to support: <i>Imaging Eating a Lemon</i> (2018) and <i>Quiet the Mind</i> (2012). • Tangles and other fidget toys • Help group the pupil through questions such as 'name 5 things you can see that are... (Eg blue)' 'name 4 things you can feel' 'name 3 things you can smell' to engage the senses



Comforting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm blanket/weighted blanket • Warm drink • Wheatbags heated in the microwave • Aroma cushion • Hot water bottle (if they have stomachache) • Menthol rub • Ice packs • Wet flannel • Ice cube to suck on • Frozen bag of dry rice • Sensory snacks for calming. Eg, toffees, chewy bars, frozen strawberries, hot chocolate, cuppa soup. • Sensory snacks for stimulating. Eg, crunching on ice, apple, oranges, celery, citrus drink, drinking from an orange through a paper/bamboo straw (be mindful of allergies) • Safe Touch. Eg, stroking a back or an arm, massage etc. • Things to chew on. Eg, gel ring, chewy tube or 'chewlry'
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Other strategies include:

- Use PACE in all interactions within school.
- SOS bags (for if they run off) micro towel to sit on, chewy sweets, mindful colouring sheets -set up base with bag nearby (rather than chasing them).
- Action plan for child for what to do if becomes dysregulated – all teachers/staff to follow. Bomber 2020 refers the list of things which help an individual to regulate as their "Safe Anchor".

REFERENCES

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