

Calm down ideas for Children

RECEPTION/YEAR 1

- **Sing out loud** - Everyone knows the sweet relief associated with rocking out to your favourite tune. But the physical act of singing out loud, even if it is off key, has been shown to release endorphins, the “feel good” chemical in the brain.
- **Paint it out.** Not only does painting give the brain something to focus on other than the stressor, but participating in [visual arts has been linked to resilience to stress in general](#). Have your child try “painting” with shaving cream on a plastic shower curtain in the yard. Not only is clean up a breeze, but your child will smell great when they are finished.
- **Blow bubbles.** Just like blowing on a pinwheel, blowing bubbles can help your child gain control of their breathing and thus, their mental state. Bonus: Running around popping bubbles is just as fun as blowing them.
- **Count to 5.** Just when it seems as though they “can’t take it anymore”, have your child close their eyes and count to five. This form of 5-second meditation offers the brain a chance to reset itself and be able to look at a situation from a different perspective. It also gives your child a chance to think before they act in a volatile situation.
- **Decorate a wall.** We are not talking about paint and decor, but poster tack and pictures from magazines or printed from the internet can give your child a chance to create large-scale temporary art in any space. The creative process is what is important, not the result.

- **Walk in nature.** According to [Stanford scientists](#), walking in nature has been proven to improve cognition and reduce stress. Even if you do not have time to spend the 50 minutes researchers did, taking a 15-minute walk in nature works can be just what your child needs.
- **Blow on a pinwheel.** Similar to the candle exercise, blowing on a pinwheel focuses more on controlled exhalation rather than deep inhalation. Tell your child to make the pinwheel go slow, then fast, then slow to show them how they can vary the rate at which they blow out the air in their lungs.
- **Go to your calm down space.** Having a designated “Calm Down Space” in your home gives children an opportunity to retreat when they feel out of control and re-join the group when they need to. It is important to make this space comfortable, so your child wants to visit it when they are in need of a self-imposed “time out”.
- **Take a colouring break.** It’s not without good reason that restaurants give children colouring; it gives them something to focus on and can be a great mindfulness activity that reduces anxiety. Make a trip with your child to pick up some crayons and markers and get them excited about filling in the pages of a colouring book.

YEAR 2/YEAR 3

- **Visualise a quiet place.** Research has shown that visualisation is beneficial for a range of populations to [reduce stress levels](#). Ask your child to close their eyes and picture a calm, peaceful place. Then, gently guide them to slowly start to build up a picture of how it looks, smells, and feels to be there.
- **Drink water.** Dehydration has been [linked to a reduction in mental performance](#). Pour your child a tall glass of cold water and have them sip it slowly. You can try this with them and observe the calming effect this has on your own nervous system.
- **Jump rope.** Set a timer for 2 minutes, put on some music, and challenge your child to jump to the beat of the song. If your child isn't able to jump rope, playing hopscotch is a great alternative.
- **Blow out a candle.** Light a candle for your child to blow out. Then re-light it and move it further and further away from them, so they have to take deeper and deeper breaths to blow it out. This is a great way to practice deep breathing, while making a game out of it.
- **Shake a glitter jar.** "[Calm Down Jars](#)" have been making their way around Pinterest for a while now, but the concept behind them is sound. Giving your child a focal point for 3-5 minutes that is not the stressor will allow their brain and body to reset itself. These jars can be made simply from sealed canning jars filled with coloured water and glitter or with baby food jars filled with warm water and glitter glue.

- **Go for a run.** [Running has been shown to reduce stress](#), and can sometimes be more effective than a trip to the therapist's office. Going for a 10-minute jog can not only affect your child's mood immediately, its effects on their ability to cope with stress can last for several hours afterward.
- **Give or get a bear hug.** Hugging allows your body to produce oxytocin, a naturally occurring hormone in your body necessary for immune system function. Not only does a 20 second hug [reduce blood pressure, increase feelings of well-being, and reduce the harmful physical effects of stress](#), both you and your child will reap the benefits!
- **Name your emotion.** Often when children become overwhelmed, it is because they have difficulty identifying the negative thoughts they are having. Whether your child is quick to anger, panic, or obsess to ensure things are perfect, ask them to give this feeling a name, and help them talk back to it. For instance, by asking your child, "is Mr. Perfect bothering you again?" you can work together to help them challenge their perfectionism, rather than fight them over it.
- **Push against a wall.** This trick is perfect for allowing the body to get rid of stress hormones without having to go outside or even leave the room. Have your child try to push the wall over for 10 seconds, 3 times. This process allows the muscles to contract in a futile attempt to bring the wall down, then relax, releasing feel-good hormones into the body.

- **Pop bubble wrap.** Anyone who has received a package in the mail knows the joy of popping row after row of bubble wrap. The same material can be found at most retailers and dollar stores and be cut into manageable pieces for stress-relief anywhere, anytime.
- **Do a primal yell.** Sometimes all your child's emotions are simply too much to contain in their body. Have them stand with their feet shoulder width apart and imagine their feelings boiling up from their toes through their legs and body, and out of their mouths. They do not have to yell words, or even maintain a certain pitch, just whatever comes out that feels good to them.
- **Plan a fun activity.** When you are in an anxious moment, it can seem as though the walls are closing in and the world will come to an end. Some children need to focus on what is ahead of them to reset their internal dialog. Plan something fun to do as a family, and let your child have a say in it. Any topic that will get them focused on a future something to look forward to can be helpful.
- **Make a bracelet.** Crafting in general can facilitate a state of "flow" or a state characterized by complete absorption in an activity. The same concept can be extended to knitting, crochet, folding laundry, or any activity where your child forgets their external surroundings.

YEAR 4/YEAR 5

- **Jump high.** Challenge your child to a jumping contest to see who can jump highest, longest, fastest, or slowest. This is another great way to get in some exercise to help your child blow off some steam.
- **Count backwards from 100.** Not only does counting give your child a chance to focus on something other than what is bothering them, counting backwards offers an added concentration challenge without overwhelming their brain.
- **Breathe into your belly.** Most of us breathe incorrectly, especially when we are in a stressful situation. Have your child think about their belly like it is a balloon. Tell them to breathe in deep to fill the balloon, and breathe out to deflate it. Repeat this simple process 5 times and notice the effects.
- **Talk it out.** For children who are able to verbalize their feelings, talking about what is bothering them gives them a chance to let you know what is going on while processing it for themselves. The trick is to resist the urge to “fix” the problem. Your child needs you to listen and ask appropriate questions, not offer unsolicited advice.
- **Envision your best self.** This is a great way to motivate your child to work toward a goal. Have them write down where they would like to see themselves in a week, a month, or a year, with this specific goal in mind.
- **Write it out.** For older children, journaling, or writing their feelings down can have a profound effect on their mood, especially if they can do so without the fear of having it read. Give your child a notebook to keep in a safe place, and allow them to write about how they feel, assuring them you will not read it unless they ask you to.

- **Roll a tennis ball on your back.** An old physical therapy trick, rolling a tennis ball on your child's back will give them a gentle massage when they are most in need of a calming touch. Focus on the shoulders, neck, and lower back as these are typical places where the body holds tension.
- **Have a dance party.** Adding a physical component to your musical enjoyment gets your kids moving and is a fun way to be active. Crank up the tunes and have a dance party in your living room when your child is in a bad mood and watch their mood transform.
- **Change the scenery.** How many times have we thought to ourselves, "Just walk away," when confronted by a big emotion? Your child may simply need a change of scenery in order to calm down. If you are inside, head out. If you are outside, find a quiet space indoors. Either way, change the scenery and you will likely change the mood.

YEAR 6

- **Do the “Downward Facing Dog” pose.** Just like inversions help reset the autonomic nervous system, the yoga pose known as Downward Facing Dog in particular has the added benefit of activating several muscles in the arms, legs, and core. This stretch helps muscles begin to burn additional blood glucose that is made available by the body’s fight or flight response.
- **Repeat a mantra.** Create a mantra that you and your child can use to help them calm down. “I am calm” or “I am relaxed” work well, but feel free to get creative and make it something personal to you and your child.
- **Write a letter in the voice of your BFF.** We would never talk to our best friend in the same critical way we talk to ourselves. The same is true for our children. Tell them to be kind to themselves, and ask them what they would tell a best friend to do in their situation.
- **Create a vision board.** Have your child cut out words and pictures from magazines that speak to their interests, desires, and dreams. Then have them glue these pictures and words onto a poster board to display in their room. Not only does the process of creation allow them to think about what they want from life, displaying things they love gives them an opportunity to focus on what is really important when they are upset.
- **Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude.** A cousin to “write it out”, gratitude journaling has been linked to [better performance in the classroom](#) as well as a reduction of stress outside of learning environments. Having a separate notebook only for things your child is grateful for will give them the freedom to keep their journaling activities separate.

- **Roll a golf ball under your feet.** Rolling a golf ball under your child's feet can not only improve circulation, but there are pressure points on the bottom of the feet that relieve stress and relax the muscles of the feet and legs. Roll over the entire sole of your child's foot using various pressures for maximum benefit.
- **Go for a walk.** There's a real reason people go for walks to clear their heads. Not only is the fresh air and exercise restorative, but the natural rhythm walking creates has a self-soothing quality. Take your child on a walk, and they may even open up to you about what is on their mind.
- **Knead the bread.** Grandmothers around the world will tell you that the process of bread making is a tremendous stress relief. Simple recipes are abundant online that allow your child to get their hands dirty turning and pushing dough. The best part is that at the end, you have homemade bread to show for it!