

# Supporting Children to Regulate Their Emotions with a Calm Down Kit

Early Childhood  
Education  
Information Brief

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

## Supporting Children to Regulate Their Emotions

Children need adult support to learn to control their emotions. When they become frustrated or angry, or when activities become too much for them, they need help to calm down and go on to other activities. Sometimes our guidance words are not enough; children need time and space to learn to calm themselves. One way to help children control their emotions is to give them materials to use in a quiet safe place to become calmer. This is often called a calm down kit.

### What is a Calm Down Kit?

A calm down kit is a set of materials put together in a box, bag, or corner of a room that children can use to calm down or distract themselves when their emotions might overwhelm them. A kit is put together to meet the needs of one child or a group of children. There are many possible items that can be put in a kit, the particular items are selected to meet the needs and interests of the children who will be using the kit. Materials can easily be rotated in and out of the kit to keep children's interest.

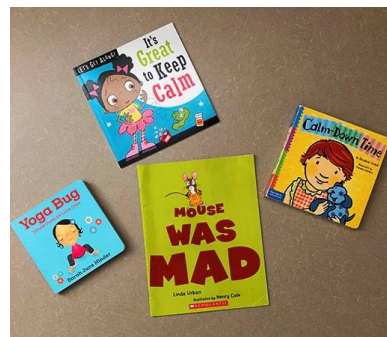
A family may choose to have a kit for all their children or for each child in a family. A classroom teacher may want to designate a special area of the room as a calm down spot (not the same as a time out spot) and keep the kit in that area. The area should be quiet and away from any active play space so children can calm their minds and bodies. The spot can be made comfortable with pillows, a beanbag, or rugs. The kit should be available to children at all times, but should not be considered as toys available for typical play. The kit and calm

down area are set aside just for calming down or taking a break if their emotions become overwhelming. You can also put together a travel kit for outdoor play, when shopping, or doing other activities away from home and school.

### Making a Calm Down Kit

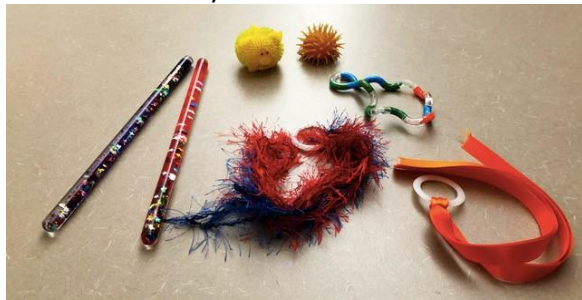
A kit can contain any toys or items that can help a child calm down, but often they include items that provide mental or sensory distraction, or that help the child process their feelings. Items can include:

- **Books.** These can focus on how to calm down, or any picture books for children to read and look at as a distraction.



- **Directions to calm down**
  - Feeling cards or pictures. These cards can have pictures or drawings of faces with various emotions. Children find the card that describes how they feel to help understand their feelings and to communicate to others when they have calmed down.
  - Relaxation prompt cards. Examples of actions to do that can be shown on the cards are: breathe deeply, relax your face (include a mirror to check), draw picture, hum a song, count slowly, ask for a hug, listen to music, or wrap yourself in a blanket.

- Small mirror to check facial expression and practice making a calming face.
- *Sensory materials*
  - Stress balls. These can be purchased or homemade.
  - Rubbing stone (worry stone).
  - Objects to encourage deep breathing, such as a pin wheel to blow, bubbles.
  - Fidget toys (small toys to twist, squeeze, or pull).
  - Clay, play dough or silly putty. Make sure it is the type to not dry out. If making your own, consider making the dough lavender scented (it is a calming scent).
  - Stuffed animal to hug.
  - Ribbons to stroke.
  - Molding sand (can be made or purchased).
  - Glitter wand, sensory bottle, or gel bag. Children shake or squeeze to watch the material flow slowly around the wand, bottle, or bag. These can be purchased or made yourself.



- *Items to Distract from Negative Feelings*
  - Objects to count or sort. These could be counting bears, plastic worms, small blocks in different colors or sizes/shapes.
  - Markers/crayons and paper to draw or write. Children can draw or write about their feelings, or what upset them, or just to distract themselves.
  - Music or recorded story. Some children really respond to music or listening to a recorded story. If using this where other children are playing in a

classroom or home, using headphones is often very helpful.



### Using a Calm Down Kit

Before using a kit with a child or a group of children, make sure they understand what it is for and when they can use it. You will want to teach them where they can find it when they need it, and how to ask for it. You may want to have them help pick out items to put in the initial kit and to check it from time to time to see if it needs to be replenished or some items changed out.

Teaching children to use the kit will involve introducing it and telling them how they can use it or ask to go to the area where it is kept. It may be very helpful to come up with specific phrases for them to use to ask to use it and then to tell you when they are done. After the initial introduction, you will want to have reminder discussions, and possibly practice sessions about how to ask to use the kit. The first few times a child would benefit from using the kit, you may need to walk a child over to the area with the calm down kit and help them pick something to use first. Walk away and see if they can continue on their own. Continue to monitor use of the kit to see if items should be changed to meet the evolving needs of the children.

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