

Calming Space

MANUAL



A step-by-step guide for using a Calming Space to help children identify, express, and regulate emotions at school.



Acknowledgements

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Calming Space

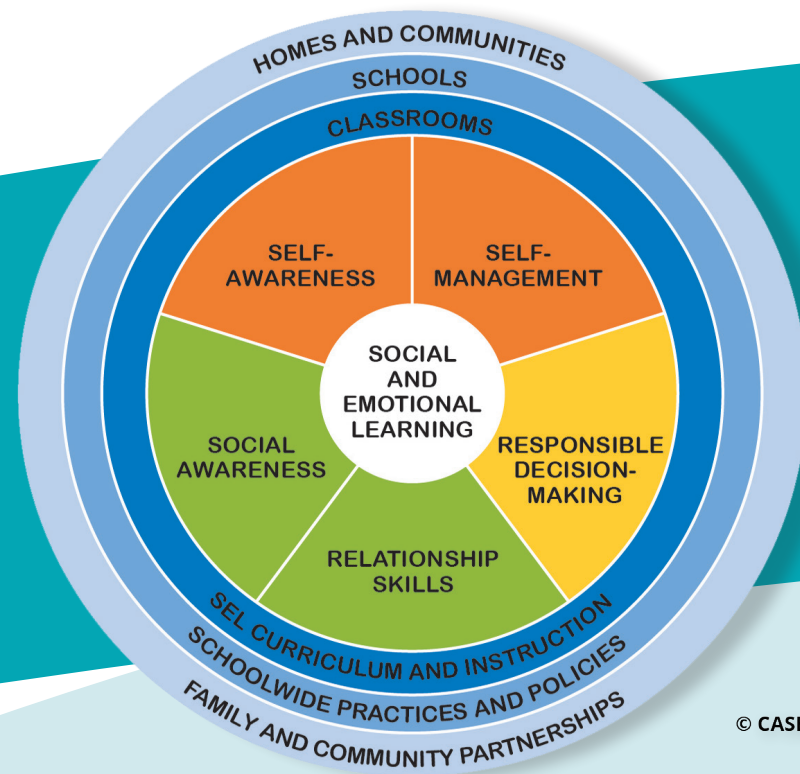


Introduction

For many children, prekindergarten is their first school experience. Experiences in your classroom set the tone for subsequent years of success and connection to the school community (Stormont, Lewis, and Beckner 2005). Creating a classroom culture that is safe, playful, and balanced can help these critical, early experiences be positive and influential (Every Child Ready 2019). Though academic content is important to young children (counting, phonological awareness, writing, etc.), we know that a strong social-emotional foundation is critical to academic success throughout early childhood (Denham 2005; Denham and Brown 2010; Drulak et al.

2011; Jones et al. 2017). In fact, children who go to kindergarten with the social-emotional skills they need are more likely to:

- have access to rigorous content,
- make friends easily,
- be disciplined less frequently,
- and have greater success graduating high school (Raver et al. 2008).



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So, what is social-emotional competence in early childhood? Children who have social-emotional awareness can express, identify, and regulate their emotions (Denham and Brown 2010). According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), five social-emotional competency areas contribute to school readiness (CASEL 2017). CASEL's wheel, illustrated above, spans a lifetime as a framework we can develop, hone, and improve no matter our age. What can we do to support children in growing these skills at three and four years old?

Intentionally creating a safe, connected, and supportive classroom environment can help children develop social-emotional skills to learn and engage at school. Learning prosocial behaviors help children build relationships with both you and their peers (Denham 2005; Denham 2006; Raver et al. 2007). Common prosocial behaviors include listening and talking to others, playing collaboratively, and problem solving.

Strong emotions are normal and acceptable in three- and four-year-old children! Children at this age are rapidly developing self-regulation skills, but they need the guidance and coregulation support of trusted adults for these skills to fully form. Coregulation is the process by which a caregiver (e.g., teacher) helps a child to soothe and develop self-regulation skills through support, connection, responsiveness, and modeling healthy behaviors, regarding the child's needs. Sometimes children get upset when they hear "no," experience upsetting events at home, or are excited about a new Center. No matter the reason, there are steps you can take in your classroom to guide children in identifying and expressing their emotions in a safe way. A common practice is the use of a classroom Calming Space. Combined with coaching and instruction, Calming Spaces can help children regulate strong emotions by trying calming strategies, such as deep breathing and playing with sensory toys.

What is Calming Space?

Calming Space is a strategy you can use to help children recognize their own emotions, calm their bodies, and rejoin classroom activities. It encourages emotional awareness among young children while creating a safe, calm classroom environment. Calming Space provides children with a comfortable, semi-private place in the classroom to:

- identify and talk about emotions with a familiar adult,
- practice managing strong behaviors and emotions through calming strategies (e.g., deep breathing and cuddling a stuffed animal), and
- relax their bodies and de-escalate unpleasant emotions.

CALMING SPACE ≠ TIME OUT

CALMING SPACES ARE NOT TIME-OUT SPOTS! Instead, children might use your Calming Space to address their strong feelings and related behaviors.

Common examples include when a child:

- feels sad because a family member leaves at drop off,
- gets angry if they cannot be the line leader,
- becomes excited about an upcoming classroom activity,
- is disappointed that outdoor play is over,
- feels angry when they cannot have a toy they like, or
- feels frustrated they have to sit down for Morning Meeting.

Setting Up My Calming Space

Creating a Calming Space for your classroom requires some planning and preparation. You'll need to consider space, classroom traffic flow, available materials, and other school systems (e.g., school-wide positive behavior programs). Use the Calming Space planning tool to guide your decision-making.



Size: Your Calming Space should be large enough for a child to comfortably lay down without interfering with instruction, especially Centers. It should also be large enough for you to sit with a child. The minimum recommended size is three feet by three feet.



Safety: The space should be private enough for a child to disengage from classroom activity, but be easily seen by you or another adult. Calming Space should not be in a major classroom walkway, busy area or near the small group instruction table. Consider access to plugs, unsecured furniture, and unsafe materials, such as scissors.



Furniture: The space should include low, large, and soft seating, such as padded mats, a bean bag chair, or large comfortable pillows. Rugs are encouraged but are not enough to create a comfortable space by themselves.



Manipulatives: Calming Space should have at least three of the items from the following list. Objects should be colorful and of varying sizes, prints, and textures (e.g., oversized object, dotted, shiny). These may help with refocusing the emotional state.

- Sensory bottles
- Squishy toys
- Books about feelings and emotions
- Stuffed animals
- Child safe mirror
- Coloring materials (see *Calm Coloring Book*)



Print Materials: A variety of print materials should be made available to facilitate coaching children around emotions and calming strategies. These materials should be placed at eye level for children. Below are Every Child Ready resources from which to choose:

- Calming Cards
- Breathing and Stretching Cards
- Feelings Poster
- *The Calm Body Book*
- *Calm Coloring Book*



Introducing Calming Space

Classroom Familiarity

It is helpful to introduce children to your Calming Space during the first days of school (Every Child Ready users introduce Calming Spaces during Get Ready to Learn). It is best to introduce Calming Space and continue to practice using it while children are calm before it is needed. Begin by teaching where Calming Space is located and how children can use it. Walk with children to Calming Space to explore the space and its materials. Children may need two to three lessons before they are familiar enough with Calming Space to begin to use it and learn additional calming strategies.



Calming Space Lesson

Target:

- Learn about and explore Calming Space. (SEL.2D)

Language:

- Demonstrate understanding of Calming Space. (LL-LS.9B)

Learning Strategy:

Use prior knowledge of emotions to learn about calming down. (AL.6D)

Introduce:

- We are going to talk about a special place in our classroom. It is called Calming Space. Our Calming Space is right by the _____ and has _____. Describe your Calming Space.
- Calming Space is a place you can go when you are feeling upset. You might also feel mad, sad, frustrated, or very excited. Use body language and facial expressions as you state each.
- Let's learn how to use Calming Space. First I'll show you, then you can try it!

Model:

- Model trying to complete the puzzle and feeling frustrated. I have a frown on my face and my heart is beating really fast. I feel like I might cry.
- To help my body feel calm, I will go to Calming Space. Let's walk to our Calming Space.
- In Calming Space use the Feelings Poster to model identifying how you are feeling. I am feeling frustrated. I will take deep breaths to calm down. Model. My body feels relaxed. Model.
- Now that I am calm, I will think about how to solve my problem. I will return to my puzzle and ask for help!

Materials

- Feelings Poster
- Puzzle | 1

Vocabulary

- calm
- Calming Space
- relax

Practice:

- Now it's your turn to try Calming Space! Remember, you can use Calming Space whenever you need to calm your body.
- What should we do when we get to Calming Space to help us feel calm? We can take deep breaths. Model. Now you try.
- We can also relax our bodies. Watch how I relax my body. Model. Now you try.
- Once we feel calm, we can think about what to do next or how to solve our problem.

Differentiate:

- Select a child to model all three steps for the other children.

Conclude:

- We practiced using Calming Space. Remember you can go to Calming Space whenever you need to calm your body.

Apply:

- Encourage families to create a small quiet or calm space so children can continue to practice strategies around emotions at home.



Calming Space Strategies



Teaching Calming Strategies

Practice Makes Perfect

Once children understand when to go to and how to use Calming Space, continue to teach a variety of calming strategies for at least the first eight weeks of school. It is important to have children learn and consistently practice calming strategies when they are in calm and happy moods, so they are better able to remember and apply them when they experience heightened emotions.

Quiet breathing and stretching activities will be particularly helpful in creating a calm classroom even when children have strong feelings, like sadness, anger, or fear. Children can use such strategies anywhere in the classroom. Two helpful tools for teaching breathing and stretching are *The Calm Body Book* and the Breathing and

Stretching Cards, which contain 12 breathing and stretching activities for children. Each should be taught through direct instruction using the book and cards before children are expected to select from them independently or with guided support from a teacher. A list of additional Calming Space books can be found on page 21.

In addition, there are many additional strategies and activities, including others in the Every Child Ready curriculum. Below you can find two sample lessons for introducing new strategies that can be used in Calming Space, as well as other places around your school.



Deep Breathing

Target:

- Learn and explore deep breathing techniques. (SEL.2C)

Language:

- Follow verbal directions. (LL-LS.6A)

Learning Strategy:

- Use directive attention to follow instructions and listen for keywords or phrases. (AL.4B)

Introduce:

- Today we are going to talk about a new way to calm down. When you feel big feelings (strong emotions), you can take deep breaths!

Model:

- “Breathe” means to take in air so your body can use it. Taking deep breaths can help you to control your emotions. To take a deep breath, you slowly fill your belly up with air, and then you slowly let the air out.
- If you lay down and put a block on your belly, taking deep breaths will move the block up and down.

Practice:

- I am going to give you each a block. I want you to lay down on your backs and put the block on your belly.
- With the blocks on their bellies, guide children through a breathing sequence using the Breathing and Stretching Cards.

Materials

- Breathing and Stretching Cards
- Blocks | 1 small block per child

Vocabulary

- breath
- deep

- Did you see how your block moved as you breathed? You can take deep breaths just like the ones that moved your block when you feel upset. Collect the blocks and have everyone sit up.

Differentiate:

- Brainstorm times and places when using deep breaths would help children calm their bodies.
- Use balloons to illustrate the difference between deep and shallow breaths. When you exhale, deep breaths should fill a balloon more than shallow breaths.

Conclude:

- We learned breathing techniques to help us control our big feelings (strong emotions)!

Apply:

- Add the block to your Calming Space and encourage children to use it as you facilitate.

Calming Bottle

Target:

- Practice using a calming bottle to regulate emotions and behaviors. (SEL.2C) (SEL.2D)

Language:

- Demonstrate understanding of how to use sensory bottles (LL-LS.6A)

Learning Strategy:

- Use prior knowledge of feelings to learn about calming down. (AL.6D)

Introduce:

- Today, we we will learn another way to calm down if we have big feelings, like excited, angry, or sad.

Model:

- We can use the calming bottle. Show the bottle(s).
- If I am upset, I can find a calming bottle and roll it slowly! Model rolling and other slow movements like turning side to side or upside down.
- I can watch the color and glitter fall down to the bottom. I am taking slow deep breaths too! Model.

Practice:

- I have bottles that we can use to practice. You will all get a turn to shake the bottle, but you need to wait patiently for your turn. Pass three calming bottles around and support deep breathing.
- Now, let’s practice our calming song! Play “Take a Breath” for children. You can play this while children practice with the calming bottles.

Conclude:

- We learned how to use calming bottles when we are upset. I am going to put one in our Calming Space. I put the other two bottles in the _____. Remember to use them if you are feeling mad, sad, or frustrated.

Materials

- “Take a Breath” | *Dog on the Floor* by Raffi
- Bottle | 3 clean empty water bottles with labels removed
- Glitter glue | 1 bottle glitter glue
- Water | hot water
- Glitter | 1-2 tablespoons in various colors
- Glue | hot glue gun or another type of strong glue
- Chart paper
- Writing tools | marker
- Paper towels

Vocabulary

- bottle
- shake

Prepare

- Squeeze ½ inch of glitter glue in the bottom of each bottle. Add one to two tablespoons of glitter. Fill each bottle with hot water, leaving an inch of space at the top. Place caps on the bottles and shake. Let the glitter settle and the bottles cool. If necessary, add more glitter. Once satisfied with the bottles, remove the cap, wipe the moisture off the neck and secure caps using the glue gun. For extra security, you can wrap the bottle caps with tape.

Calming Space Facilitation Strategies

Child Enters Calming Space:
When you observe a child having strong feelings (e.g., anger toward a peer, sadness at missing a family member), invite the child to use Calming Space. For example, **Jayla, I see that you are really upset. Would you like to walk with me to Calming Space to relax your body and then we can come back to Centers?** If the child refuses, you may even add, **I am going to Calming Space. If you want to come sit with me, you can.** Model going to the space to encourage the child to follow. You can even narrate your movements. **Oh, I found a stuffed animal I want to hug. I am feeling better already. Now, I'm taking some deep, belly breaths. In. Out. In. Out. Jayla, would you like to come try?** If the child still refuses, that's okay. You can provide suggested calming strategies to the child elsewhere in the classroom and revisit using Calming Space when the child is calm again.

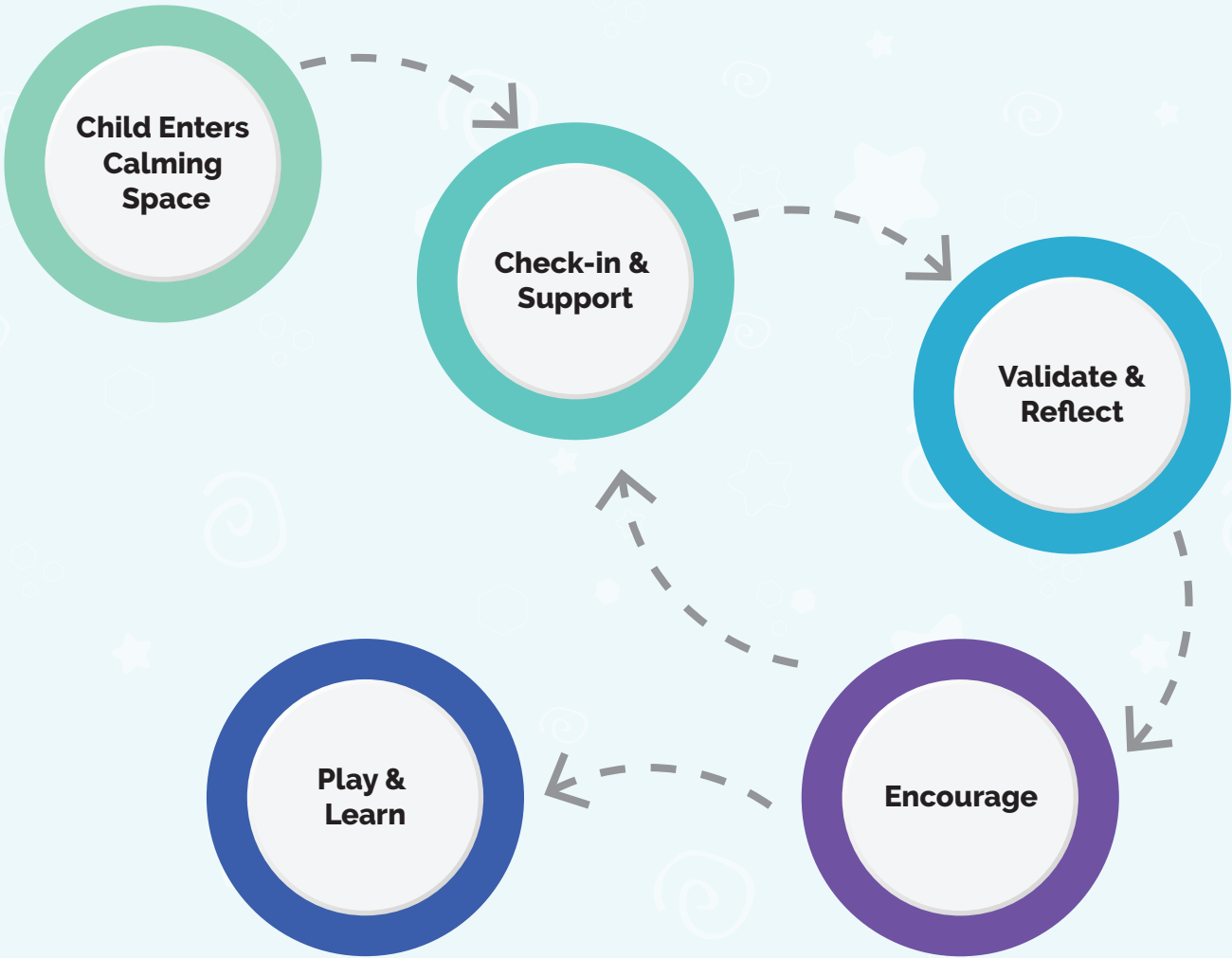
Check-In & Support:
Once the child is in Calming Space, help them identify how they are feeling. Use pictures to support and model as needed (e.g., Feelings Poster or Feelings Rating posters). The child may state or point to the feeling of their choosing. Then, you can help children select a material or strategy. **Would you like to try belly breathing or snuggle the class stuffed animal?** Two options are helpful, but allow the child to select the strategy or object they desire in Calming Space. Model using the calming strategies for the child as needed. You may also set a sand timer, or allow the child to turn it over, and say, **Let's turn over the sand timer. When the sand is all at the bottom, I will come back to see how you're feeling.**

If the child is not yet able to be alone for independent time, that is ok! Support the child with the strategy or material of their choice. You can even ask the child if they would like some space. If they don't seem ready to be coached through a strategy, give the child alone time (or sit near them quietly) before helping them select and use a calming strategy.

Validate & Reflect:
Once the child has calmed down significantly, check on the child's feelings. If the child continues to be highly distressed after three to five minutes, still check on them. Ask questions, validate the child's feelings, and praise their attempt to use Calming Space. **I know that you were feeling sad. You did such a great job relaxing in Calming Space. How do you feel now?** The child may need more time to relax and discuss their feelings. If so, support them in selecting or reusing a strategy. Set a personal timer to check in on them again in three to five minutes. If there was a conflict with a peer, you can either talk with the child in Calming Space to prepare them to discuss solutions with the peer or address each child separately to discuss the events and future behaviors (Isik-Ercan 2018).

Encourage:
When the child appears to be calmer than before, encourage the child to return to instruction or play with their peers. During this time, be positive and enthusiastic. Explain where the child can go, particularly during Centers. Point out the friendly peers and adults in those locations. Say things like, **Welcome back to Centers, we missed you! I know you like Construction Zone best, and it looks like there is space for you to play there now! I'm so glad you feel better!** Provide positive narration for using Calming Space and other praise specific to the child, **Great job taking a deep breath when your tower fell. Let's rebuild it together!**

Note: Though Calming Space is child-led, it should not be an escape from nonpreferred activities. Appropriately selected materials support children in calming down, but refrain from putting favorite toys in Calming Space. Take note if children use Calming Space during the same times of day (e.g., during every Read Aloud). If so, try to find ways to engage them positively during that time of day.



Facilitating Calming Space

Being Mindful of Strong Emotions

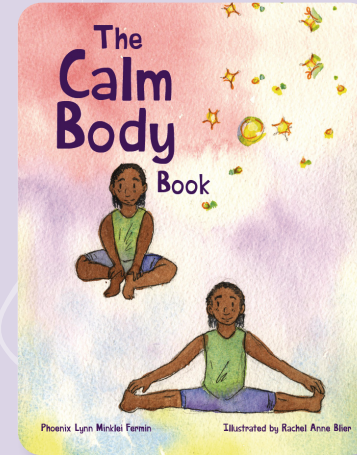
Now that children have learned about Calming Space and strategies they can use around your classroom, it's time to help children use the space throughout the year. The most important thing to remember is that Calming Space is an optional strategy, not a directive or a time-out. Its use should be encouraged and praised, not forced!

Tips and Tricks for Success

A Calming Space is part of a holistic social, emotional, and behavioral approach for classrooms with three- and four-year-old children. There are strategies you can use that both enhance your classroom's safe and connected culture while encouraging children to use and be successful with Calming Space. Each of these strategies should be introduced and practiced when children are calm and open to learning.



Use the Feelings Poster when facilitating Calming Space. Help children indicate how they felt before and after using Calming Space. Use the teachable moment to praise the child and remind them that feelings, even strong ones, are okay and change throughout the day!



Start your morning with slow stretching or breathing practice. You can also end a movement break with a quick stretch or one to two deep breaths.



If you go looking for positive behaviors, you'll likely find them! Make a list of expected classroom behaviors you want to see (Kersey and Masterson 2011). Don't make the list too long; consider targeting a handful of behaviors that often lead to strong emotions or peer conflicts. Whenever you see those target behaviors in your classroom, provide enthusiastic, specific praise to the child.



Strategies used in Calming Space are good for just about any time and place in the classroom. Throughout the year, revisit the strategies you introduced during the first eight weeks of school. You can even create a "Wellness Spa" in one of your Centers to encourage children to practice the strategies when they are already calm!



Use questions and prompts to guide children in discussing their feelings and ways to calm their bodies.

- **Sometimes I have strong feelings. When that happens, I try to** (insert strategy you'd like the child to try). **What do you want to try?**
- **Do you want to talk about your strong feeling?** If the child says no, that's ok! Try another strategy or give the child space.
- **I'm going to look at these pictures to see how I'm feeling.**
- **Do you want to look with me and tell me how you're feeling?**



Use positive statements to validate feelings and confirm safety.

- It sounds like you are having a strong feeling. It's ok to feel _____. I am here to help you.
- Teachers care about you and are here to keep you safe.
- School is a fun place to learn. I am here to help you feel calm.



Show the child visuals (e.g. *The Calm Body Book*) and have them select a type of breathing they would like to try.

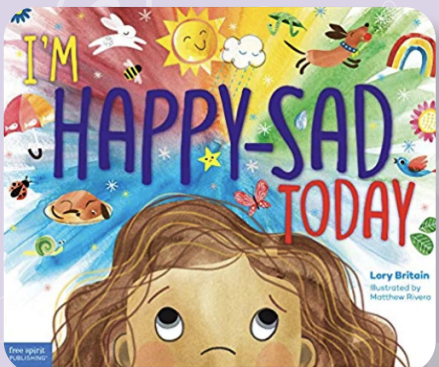
- Give the child space! If the child doesn't respond or is really upset, give them time and space to work out feelings on their own. Monitor safety from a distance and step in to support when the child looks ready to engage with you.
- When providing guidance for children, remember to remain calm and respond slowly and deliberately.
- Consider taking slow deep breaths alongside the child or asking a teaching team member for assistance as needed.



Model and narrate (self-talk) feelings and strategies, especially during the first eight weeks of school.

- Take deep breaths. Place your hand on your stomach, close your eyes, and breathe slowly. Count to ten slowly pausing between each number.
- Model watching a sand timer. **I'm going to turn over the timer and watch the sand fall. When it's done, I will see how I'm feeling. Do you want to try?**
- Pretend to select a strategy from your calming strategies poster or cards. Model the selected strategy and narrate what you are doing and how you feel.

Suggested Calming Space Books



I'm Happy-Sad Today

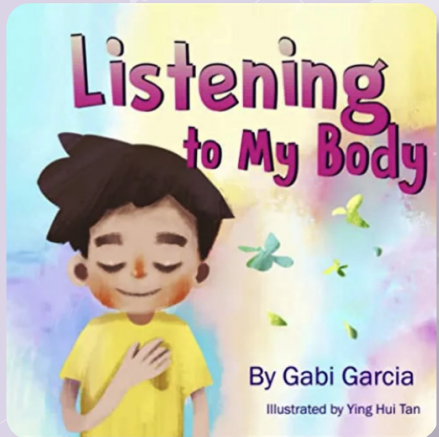
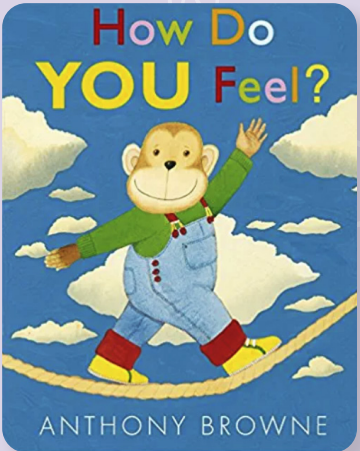
Happy, and also sad. Feeling friendly, with a little shyness mixed in. Excited, but nervous too. Mixed feelings are natural, but they can be confusing. Join a young girl in exploring her many layered emotions as she discovers that all her feelings are okay.

by Lory Britain Ph.D. | Illustrated by Matthew Rivera
ISBN: 978-163198305-4

How Do You Feel?

Do you feel happy? Do you feel confident? Maybe a little sad? Explore and understand feelings in this perfect book for the very young.

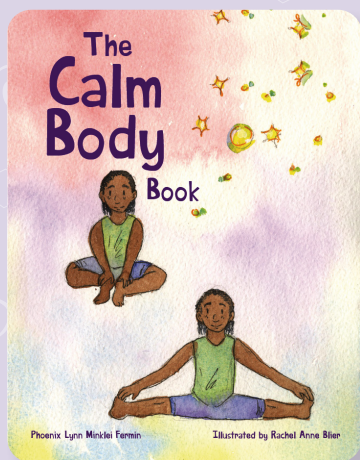
by Anthony Browne
ISBN: 978-140634791-3



Listening to My Body

This counting book uses both everyday objects and simple rhymes to teach children how to count.

by Gabi Garcia | Illustrated by Ying Hui Tan
ISBN: 978-099895800-2

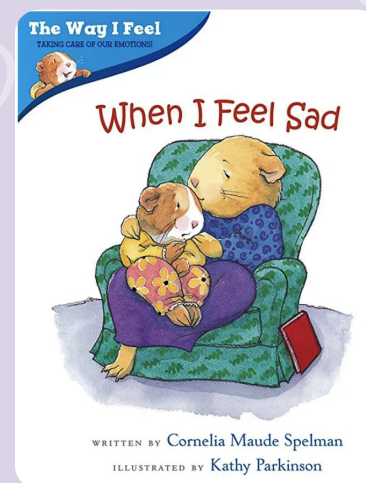


The Calm Body Book

The Calm Body Book provides children with easy to understand stretches and breathing strategies for calming down and preparing to learn.

by Phoenix Lynn Minklei Fermin | Illustrated by Rachel Anne Blier

ISBN: 978-168218070-9



When I Feel Sad

Children will take comfort in this story. Readers will recognize similar experiences in their own lives as this little guinea pig describes feeling sad when someone is cross or when something bad happens. Eventually our heroine realizes that feeling sad doesn't last forever.

by Cornelia Maude Spelman | Illustrated by Kelly Parkinson

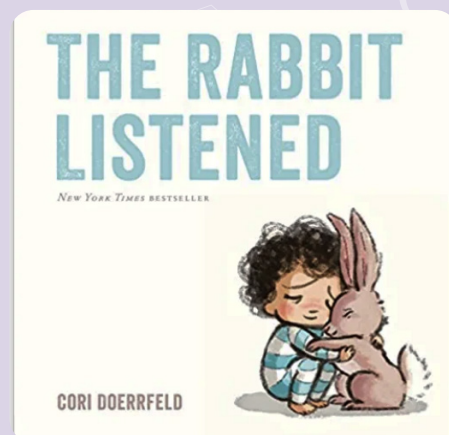
ISBN: 978-080758899-4

The Rabbit Listened

With its spare, poignant text and irresistibly sweet illustrations, *The Rabbit Listened* is about healing heartaches big and small, and taking the time to listen.

by Cori Doerrfeld

ISBN: 978-073522935-8

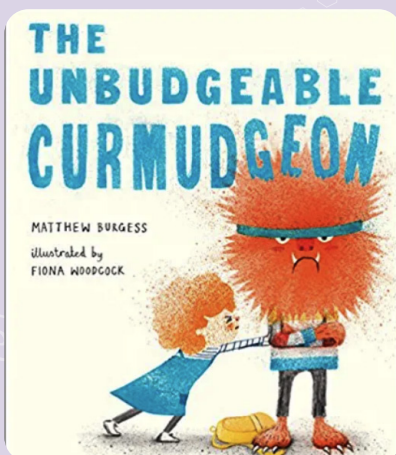
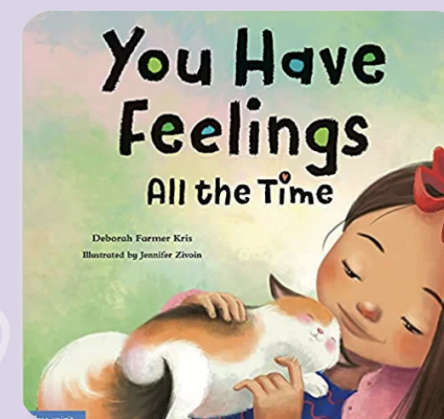


You Have Feelings All the Time

You Have Feelings All the Time serves as a reminder that emotions are a healthy, normal part of life. Some of those feelings are big and some are quiet. Some feel good and others can feel uncomfortable—and that's okay.

by Deborah Farmer Kris | Illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin

ISBN: 978-163198509-6



The Unbudgeable Curmudgeon

Matthew Burgess's playful depiction of bad moods and sibling rivalry is matched perfectly by Fiona Woodcock's unique childlike art style.

by Matthew Burgess | Illustrated by Fiona Woodcock

ISBN: 978-039955662-3

Every Child Ready:
Calming Space Implementation Tool

Observed	Calming Space	Suggested Criteria	Notes
Calming Space Design			
☐	Location: Calming Space is located in a safe location.	- Easily supervised by an adult at all times. - No unsafe items, such as plugs, scissors, etc., are accessible.	
☐	Comfort: Calming Space is comfortable and inviting.	- Includes soft seating. - Has diverse print materials such as Feelings Poster, books, or other items. - Materials are provided, such as stuffed animals and coloring supplies. - Large enough for a child to lie down.	
Calming Space Use			
☐	Purpose: Calming Space is used to identify emotions and support children with selfregulation through coregulation with a trusted adult.	Calming Space is not utilized as a punishment or exclusionary practice.	
☐	Usage: Children are invited to use Calming Space or go independently.	- Teacher invites child to Calming Space. - Teacher models going to Calming Space. - Teacher supports child's needs in other location if child doesn't want to go. - Teacher notices if child has gone to Calming Space independently.	

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Every Child Ready:
Calming Space Implementation Tool

Observed	Calming Space	Suggested Criteria	Notes
Calming Space Cycle			
☐	Check-in: Teacher helps child identify and discuss feelings.	- Teacher names feelings and describes physicality of feeling (I can see you're sad, you're crying. Tears are on your face.) - Teacher identifies if the child is too upset to respond during check-in.	
☐	Monitoring: Teacher helps child select a calming strategy to use.	- Teacher supports calming strategy choice and models when appropriate (coregulation). - Teacher stays in Calming Space to de-escalate or support with caling strategies if the child needs support. - Teacher recognizes if child needs space to calm down independently. - Child is not left alone more than three to five minutes.	
Calming Space Use			
☐	Reflection: Teacher debriefs with child to reflect on feelings, strategies, and causes.	- Teacher refers to print materials - Teacher validates child's feelings (It's okay to feel angry sometimes.) and positively narrates the child's ability to calm down and rejoin the class.	
☐	Invite Out: Teacher encourages child to return to learning with class.	- Teacher uses warm, inviting tone. - Teacher points out peer connections or preferred activities that are available when returning. - Teacher continues to support child if they need additional time in Calming Space.	

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