**Emotional Regulation activities**

**Calming Environment**

A quiet space can be as simple as a corner with a bean bag chair and some pillows, a small tent or canopy made from a sheet, or even a desk with a partition for some privacy.  A quiet space is a great way to limit auditory, visual, and other input so a child can regroup and calm herself down.

Don’t forget to provide kids with a clear way of indicating when they need to use the quiet space

**Calming Tactile Input**

There are many great ways to provide calming input through the [**tactile system**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/sensory-processing-tactile-system/).  One simple tool that is easily used as a calming sensory break during the day is a [**tactile bin**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/hands-way-explore-farm/).  Fill a shoebox-sized plastic container with sand, dry rice, or dry beans and let kids run their hands through it.

Applying deep pressure to the body with hugs, a [**weighted blanket**](https://harkla.co/?rfsn=1015805.797b1) or [**weighted stuffed animal**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/creative-core-exercises-kids/), or squishes with a pillow or beanbag chair provides full-body calming sensory input for kids who might be overwhelmed or anxious

**Calming Oral Sensory Input**

The [**oral sensory system**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/sensory-processing-what-does-oral-sensory-mean/) can be another great avenue for calming and [**self-regulation**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/self-regulation/).  For many children, chewing can provide calming oral sensory and proprioceptive input.  Try [**oral sensory snacks**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/oral-sensory-snack-ideas-kids/) like bagels and fruit leather or even gum.

Many kids benefit from using chewy pendants, bracelets, or other items to provide this calming input.

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Other great calming oral sensory activities include sucking against resistance (e.g. sucking a thick smoothie through a straw) and blowing (e.g. blowing a feather or pompom across a table).

**Calming**[**Auditory**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/sensory-processing-auditory-system/)**Input**

One of the quickest way to help kids who are overstimulated and overwhelmed is to quiet things down.  Using a quiet voice to address kids and get their attention rather than raising your voice over the noise is a great start.

Other auditory strategies include playing white noise. Quiet, calming music is another great option.  [**Noise reducing headphones**](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00CBDJ84S/ref%3Das_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=theinsptree0f-20&camp=1789&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=B00CBDJ84S&linkId=cc3a0bb634e3866f79d7533713553905) are also great for kids who become overstimulated by sound in loud situations

**Calming Visual Input**

Some children become overwhelmed and overstimulated by [**visual input**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/sensory-processing-visual-system/).  The movement, light, and other distractions in a school setting can simply be too much.

There is usually enough natural light coming through the windows during the day for kids to see and simply turning off or dimming the lights is a quick and easy way to decrease visual stimulation.

Other calming visual activities include repetitive visual input like watching fish in a fish tank or looking at [**sensory bottles**](http://lemonlimeadventures.com/sensory-bottles/) and [**calm down jars**](http://www.preschoolinspirations.com/2014/11/13/6-ways-to-make-a-calm-down-jar/) filled with liquid and other objects (water, oil, water beads, glitter).  Many children also respond positively to a [**visual picture schedule**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/visual-schedule/)**,**which lets them know what’s coming next throughout the day.

**Calming Proprioceptive Input**

A lot of kids benefit from [**proprioceptive input**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/sensory-processing-proprioception/) in the form of heavy work.  Heavy work means moving the body against heavy resistance.  This provides stimulation to the muscles and joints that can be calming and organizing.

Heavy work activities include: squishing/squeezing play dough or a stress ball, pulling against resistance bands, pushing/moving chairs or desks, climbing, holding a heavy door open, and carrying books.

Chewing also comes into play here.  Chewing against resistance as described above is another great way to provide calming input to the proprioceptive system.

**Calming movement**

Many children find repetitive and rhythmic [**vestibular input**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/vestibular/), including rocking, swaying, or gentle swingingto be extremely calming.  This kind of sensory input can be a great and easy way to help a child reset when they are overstimulated, overwhelmed, or [**dealing with tantrums**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/reset-activities-calming-after-a-tantrum/).  Adding a rocking chair or two around the room and having an exercise ball handy are simple ways to provide calming movement when kids need it.

Try one of these [**Row, Row, Row Your Boat activities**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/row-row-row-boat-3-fun-ways-t0-ride-waves/) or some gentle back and forth movement on a [**scooter**](https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/10-awesome-scooter-activities-kids/) or on a therapy ball.

 **Calming Combinations**

When it comes to finding calming solutions for kids, it’s best to allow some time for experimentation and trial and error.  And sometimes, the best solutions involve combining two or more strategies and using them together.

Here are some examples:
-Dig/play in tactile bin while listening to white noise or quiet music on headphones
-Sitting or lying with a weighted blanket while looking at sensory bottles
-Chewing gum or a chewy snack while working on a calming, independent fine motor task
-Rhythmic rocking or swaying with calming breathing technique

 Calming Sensory Activities to reduce meltdowns.

**1.  Invert the Head or Move the body.**  If the child likes going upside down and is still small enough to pick up, by all means, literally turn that frown upside down!  Bigger kids can learn to lean back over the couch, do a down dog or hang upside down off the edge of the bed as a coping strategy.

Head inversion can be very calming to kids.  By changing the perspective of the body, you can also change the mental and emotional viewpoint of the individual.  Change the body position, and you can change subtle neurochemical responses in the brain and body, which help soothe the nervous system!
Also, if you anticipate an emotional struggle or speed bump, front load it with playful movement the child enjoys!  Before you get in the car, run up and down the sidewalk a few times.  Before you sit your kiddo down to do homework that usually creates a power struggle, have him ride his bike for 15 minutes.  Offer your child options to do the kind of movement you most see them wanting to do!

Big movement helps develop and stimulate the vestibular (balance) and proprioceptive (posture and movement) systems of the body, which equals better self-regulation and better overall brain and body function!

Time and time again, research shows us that the more often we move, the more we can regulate big emotions and the better our self-regulation, decision making and learning!

Research also shows that getting outdoors can help with poor attention, and moving the body as minimally as walking on a treadmill indoors can help with executive functioning.  You don't have to sign your child up for movement bootcamp to receive the positive effects movement offers.  A recent study\* shows that movement as easy as going for a short walk for as little as a few minutes can boost creativity by up to 60 percent and can offer a boon to the skill of generating ideas.

 The CDC recommends just 1 hour of physical activity per day, but if you truly want your child to have good self-regulation, attention and cognitive skills in the modern world, kids need several HOURS of physical movement EVERY day for optimal brain and body development!  Get your kids moving both indoors and outdoors (really, get outside!) as frequent and intermittent movement as often as possible is better than one hour just one time a day!

**2. Get below eye level and whisper if you must talk to your child.**

I love  the advice child psychologist and best selling author, [Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D,](http://tinabryson.com/) gives to parents:  get below eye level to soothe a child's nervous system when they are getting emotionally upset.

Moving down BELOW a child's eye level sends a visual message (beyond the child's awareness)  to the brain that because the other person is lower, they are not a threat.  This tells a child's nervous system to simmer down already because we are all on the same team.

If you absolutely*have*to say something whispering it with as few words as possible when you are below eye level will be better received by your child as it takes away vocal tone that may further aggravate the child and decreases possible over stimulation to the auditory system.  Oh, and whispering prevents yelling.  Bonus!

**3. Firm Hugs from Behind or Deep Pressure to the Body.** Occupational therapists like myself will often recommend deep pressure to the body as a calming or focusing technique for kids. That's because deep pressure,which means firm & even pressure to the body as tolerated by the child (not so hard your kiddo's eyeballs bulge) is soothing to the nervous system.  It releases calming neurotransmitters and soothing hormones that are like a tonic to stress and big emotions.

I'll give you some real life examples so you can see what I mean: for instance, if your baby slept better when swaddled, you can thank the calming effects of deep pressure.   Likewise, the biochemical changes in your body are responsible for the feeling of relaxation or decreased pain after a massage.  Still not convinced of how innate the need for deep pressure is?  Think of a time you cut your skin, stubbed your toe or bumped your head.  You probably immediately grabbed or covered the injured area with your hand and pressed on it, which is an intuitive self-application of deep pressure to decrease the pain response.   It works!

In contrast, light touch (think of a spider crawling on your skin) can be quite irritating to the nervous system, and we usually have automatic stress-like or aggressive responses to such input (like swatting at it).

Often, when we hug a child from the front, we are leaning forward and there are more opportunities for that light, irritating touch (like a necklace that swings forward and lightly grazes the child's skin or the parent's hair that falls down to lightly tickle the child's face) to create irritation to the nervous system.

This may seem like a small thing not worth minding. "My child isn't bothered by light touch," you say, but to a nervous system that's about to erupt into melt mode, light touch of any kind, even from a loved one toward a child that usually isn't bothered by it, could be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Fortunately, Deep pressure could be the rudder that starts the ship turning around.  So if your child is generally receptive to a hug, offer a strong, loving hug from behind (which gives less light touch and more deep pressure), or deep, sustained pressure on the shoulders or firm back rubs.

You can also use deep pressure when the sun is shining, so to speak,  which better develops a child's propriocpetive (posture & movement) and tactile (touch) systems!

Deep pressure also helps develops body mapping, which is our brain's internal GPS for where a part of our body is in relation to another! Close your eyes and touch your nose with your fingertip.  If you can do it, that's your internal GPS knowing where to move your finger without looking!
I love teaching meditation in the aerial yoga hammock because the full body hug helps kids feel settled and comfortable in their own bodies, and I know the deep pressure is doing some good work for their brains and bodies unbeknownst to them!

**4.  Go Outside or Change Lighting and Noise Level.** Often, environmental factors get overlooked, and parents may not understand how sensitive a developing brain can be to auditory or visual information in the environment, especially since many kids may not even know that visual or auditory overwhelm is what is driving them bonkers.

Many times, parents will be surprised to discover that visual and auditory overstimulation is a hidden cause of disruptive or explosive behaviors.

A child's brain is constantly taking in and analyzing the visual information and sound in the environment, and at an early age, the brain has less ability to filter out extraneous noise and visual information.   The more overstimulating the environment, the more disorganizing that can be to an underdeveloped brain.

Our modern times are busy, loud, filled with visual choices and stimulation galore and pretty darn full to the brim schedule-wise.  This can wreak much more havoc on the neural wiring and nervous system of a child than it can on an adult.  Lucky for us, there are some simple solutions to the modern day hustle and bustle.

We can make small changes in the environment to reduce overstimulation of our children's sensory systems.

Usually, the simplest solution is just to go outside.  There are many studies that demonstrate the positive effects of the outdoors on the nervous system.  Just simply being outside can lower blood pressure and heart rates, which will soothe a revved up nervous system, and I hope all kiddos are able to get outdoors and play *every day*to build healthy brains and bodies.

**Emotional Regulation Games & Activities**

Ping Pong ball breathing games

* Put a ping pong ball in a short glass. Blow hard into the glass. The ball will fly out of it. Model for the child and encourage them to copy.
* Use playdough to make a track. Put the PP ball in between the track. Use a straw to blow the ball to the end of the track.
* Tilt head back & balance a PP ball on your lips. Blow the ball upwards, trying to keep it in the air for as long as possible.

Balloon Games

* Line up some paper cups on the edge of a table. Blow up a balloon. Let the air out of the balloon to blow the cups off the table.
* Put a penny in a balloon. Blow the balloon up & tie it. Hold the balloon in 2 hands and move it so the penny moves around the circumference of the balloon. When you stop moving the balloon, the penny will continue to move.
* Balloon Volleyball / tennis. Encourages cooperation, waiting, anticipation, hand - eye coordination, concentration.

Bubbles

* Scented bubbles – smell the bubbles, blow the bubbles, catch the bubbles / pop the bubbles.
* Blow the bubbles, then crouch underneath them to try & blow them to hit the ceiling.

Fine Motor Skill Activities

* Threading (buttons / pasta / beads onto a string)
* Lacing / sewing
* Pushing pipe cleaners into a colander
* Sorting games (coloured lego into coloured bottles, posting diff size buttons through different sized holes on a cardboard box lid)
* Finger painting
* Playdough - cutting, rolling, shaping.
* Tearing paper / card / fabric.
* Cutting paper / card / fabric.
* Pouring sand / water into different sized containers.
* Using tweezers / chopsticks / tongs to transfer objects from one container to another.