



# Tons of Tools to Help ME be ME!

## Tips & tools for building your own calm down kit

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## How do sensory tools help people feel calm?

We are all different; therefore, it is important to be aware of what best helps your child. Remember that preferences can change from time-to-time.

**Breath work** is an effective tool for calming the mind and body. Breathing exercises can improve cognitive function, encourage positive thought processes, and reduce symptoms of anxiety.

**Keeping your hands busy** can be great for kids who struggle with calming, attention, focus, and sensory processing.

**Deep pressure** is the simplest tool to help with calming. Deep pressure touch can be very relaxing to children. Deep pressure has been found to impact the autonomic nervous system (ANS), the part of the nervous system that regulates breathing, heart rate, and many other functions of the body. This is why children calm down with a hug from a loved one.

**Auditory** Loud noises or extremely loud environments can cause discomfort to some children.

**Oral motor** Chewing, crunching, and sucking are all actions that provide deep pressure to the jaw and mouth area. The deep pressure provides another opportunity to experience a calming effect.

**Visual tool preference is different for everyone; therefore, the caregiver may need to put on their detective hat to help the child determine what best fits their need. Lasers and strobe lights need to be used with caution as they have been linked to causing seizures. If your child has a history of seizure activity, check with a physician before using any type of visual tools.**

**Olfactory** When we smell something good, we have an instant emotional reaction to the memories that the scent evokes, and that can make us feel calmer and more content. Discontinue use if your child has an adverse reaction to a certain smell. If your child has respiratory issues, please check with a physician before introducing something new.

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## Breath



- **Blow on a pinwheel:** It is a great way for adults to monitor if your child is deep breathing. You can talk about the quality of breath by demonstrating how fast the pinwheel moves. Deep breathing to make the pinwheel move fast versus shallow breathing to make the pinwheel move slow.
- **Blow bubbles:** Bubbles are highly motivating to children, which makes it a great tool to practice deep breathing. It is also a great way to get them to stretch their arms to reach for bubbles to pop.
- **Blow on a feather:** The child can hold onto the feather and blow watching it move with their breath, or they can try to blow the feather in the air for a deeper breath.

## Hands



- **Stress ball for lemon squeezes:** Pretend to make lemonade. The stress ball is the lemon that the child places in their hands. Next, the child will count 1,2,3 squeeze. Repeat this as many times as needed.
- **Fidgets:** Use stretchy band, tangle, spinners, spiral stretchy bands, pop tubes. Don't get a fidget that has a cute face or one that looks like a toy. Your child needs to remember that fidgets are tools to help them focus and calm down.
- **Play dough or kinetic sand:** They are great tools to keep hands busy by squeezing, rolling, pulling, and pinching.
- **Coloring book or a doodle notepad:** Have a variety of media for the child to use (crayons, markers, stickers, etc).

## Ears



- **Noise canceling headphones or ear plugs (kids that avoid sound):** These tools can help a child calm down if they have a sensitivity to loud noises or noisy environments. If you don't have either available, you can teach your child to have a headphone moment. This is where you have your child close their eyes, cover their ears, and do some deep breathing. This is a great way to quiet the mind and body.
- **Toy instruments or jingle bells (kids who seek sound):** It is fun to provide a variety of noise makers to explore with your child. Let them pick out some favorites to place in their toolbox.
- **Some children seek auditory input:** Noises such as white noise, nature sounds, or soft music can be calming to them.

## Mouth



- **Take a snack break:** Eat a crunchy snack (Goldfish, pretzels), gummy snack, chewing gum, or suckers.
- **Using a straw to suck thicker purees:** Thick purees like Jell-o, yogurt, or smoothie require more deep pressure through the mouth. Check with your child's physician if your child is on an alternative diet before trying this sensory strategy.
- **Use a crazy straw to drink liquids versus a regular straw:** Crazy straws require more energy as the liquid goes through a lot of loops and curves before entering the child's mouth.

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## Nose



- **Scented lotion (vanilla is calming and citrus is alerting):** Using scented lotion is a portable tool that can be used anywhere. Scented lotion can be used to massage hands, arms, and feet.
- **Make scent jars by adding different scents to plastic containers with a lid:** You can put a cotton ball in each jar and then add essential oil or different herbs from the spice rack (citrus, coffee grounds, garlic, vanilla extract). Let your child explore different scents to determine what is calming or alerting to them. \*It's best to use natural scents versus synthetic scents.

## Eyes



- **Sunglasses or eye mask (kids that avoid light):** Have these available in your child's toolbox on days that it is too bright or they just need a break. Using sunglasses or an eye mask is a great way to rest their eyes. Dimming the light can also be helpful to some children, especially if the light is overstimulating to them.
- **Oil bottles that remind you of a lava lamp (Kids that seek visual):** Watching movement from a lava lamp or sensory bottle can be soothing to children. Rhythmic movement can slow the mind and body.
- **Light up toys:** For example you can use tops and texture balls.

## Touch



- **Headband & wristband:** Many children enjoy wearing headbands or wristbands because they provide deep pressure. A stretchy athletic headband and/or wristband will do the trick!
- **Bear hugs:** A good bear hug is calming and can be given by a parent, or the child can give themselves a bear hug by crossing their arms in front of their chest and grasping arms to administer a squeeze to facilitate deep pressure.
- **Finger squeezes:** This can be done by a parent or by the child. Starting with the thumb and moving through each finger applying deep pressure (similar to the motion you would do to remove a ring from the finger).

## Miss Farrah's Pro Tips



- I like to keep all my sensory tools in some sort of container like a basket, tray, toolbox, or a box that your child can personalize by decorating it. This is a great way to get the buy-in for your child to use the tools because they take ownership of the calm down kit.
- Have the child practice using the sensory tools from their toolbox a few times during the week when they are not upset. This allows the child to be familiar and build comfort with the tools during times they are not upset or feeling anxious.
- Never force a child to use a sensory tool. Instead, continue to expose the child to the sensory tool. I like to present sensory tools to the whole class, by modeling different ways to use it. I take volunteers to try the sensory tool. Peer modeling is very successful with students who may be unsure of new tools.
- The main thing to remember is to have fun with trying out the calming tools!