

BEHAVIOR · ALL GRADES

Take 5 Calm-Down Toolkit

Five tools for hard moments

Why teach these

When a child is upset or overwhelmed, the most useful thing is a tool they already know how to use. Teaching tools in calm moments — practising them when nothing is wrong — means they're available later, when they ARE wrong. These five categories cover the main evidence-informed approaches to self-regulation in children. Different children prefer different ones. Teach all five so each child can find what works for them.

Tool 1 — Breathing

4-4-8 Breathing Breathe in for 4. Hold for 4. Out for 8. The longer out-breath activates the calming part of the nervous system. Repeat 3 times.	Finger Breathing Trace one hand with the other. Breathe in as you go up a finger. Out as you go down. 5 fingers = 5 long breaths. Younger children love this.
Square Breathing Imagine a square. Breathe in along one side (4 counts). Hold along the next (4). Out along the next (4). Hold (4). Repeat.	Why breathing works It's the only autonomic function we can consciously control. Slowing breath sends a 'safety' signal to the nervous system. Within 30 seconds, heart rate slows.

Tool 2 — Grounding (5-4-3-2-1)

What it is A sensory anchoring technique. Notice 5 things you can see, 4 you can hear, 3 you can touch, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste.	Why it works Anxiety pulls attention into thoughts about the future. Sensory grounding pulls attention back to the present moment, where the body actually is.
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When to use Especially good for anxiety, panic, racing thoughts. Less useful for anger or frustration.	Adapt for younger Just '5 things you can see.' That alone often works for K-Y2 children.
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Tool 3 — Movement

Wall pushes Stand facing a wall. Push as hard as you can for 10 seconds. Rest. Repeat. Provides 'heavy work' that calms the nervous system.	Star jumps / running on the spot Get the heart rate up briefly, then it comes back down lower. Especially good for ADHD children.
Shake it out Stand. Shake your hands hard for 10 seconds. Then your arms. Then your whole body. Releases tension.	Why movement works Strong emotion creates physiological arousal. Movement metabolises some of that arousal, making it easier to come back to calm.

Tool 4 — Sensory

Cold water Cold water on the wrists or face. Activates the dive response, which slows heart rate.	Stretchy/textured object A piece of putty, a tangle, a stress ball. Tactile focus pulls attention out of distress.
Warm drink A hot drink or warm food, held in hands, sipped slowly. The combination of warmth, taste, and slow movement is regulating.	Calm corner A specific physical space (see calm corner setup guide). Lower light, soft, quiet.

Tool 5 — Cognitive

Name what you feel 'I am feeling angry. My chest is tight. I want to shout.' Naming an emotion reduces its intensity (research term: 'affect labelling').	Think of three things you can do When upset, the brain narrows. Forcing yourself to generate three options widens it. 'I could walk away. I could ask for help. I could come back to it.'
Talk to yourself like a friend What would you say to a friend in this situation? Often kinder than what we say to ourselves.	The 'next 5 minutes' question When overwhelmed, ask: 'What can I do for the next 5 minutes?' Not the whole problem. Just the next 5 minutes.



How to teach this

1. PRACTISE IN CALM TIMES. Devote a full lesson early in the year. Try every tool together. Discuss which one each child liked. 2. RECAP REGULARLY. Once a fortnight, do a 5-minute review. 'Remember 4-4-8? Let's practise.' The tools have to stay fresh. 3. MODEL YOUR OWN. 'I'm feeling frustrated about the printer. I'm going to do some 4-4-8.' Children learn most from what they see. 4. NAME WHAT YOU SEE. When you notice a child using a tool, name it warmly. 'I saw you take 5 deep breaths just then. Well done — that was a smart choice.' 5. PRINT THE TAKE-HOME CARD. A wallet-sized version with the 5 tools. Children keep it. Refer to it. It becomes self-reminder.

