

Taking a Break: Using a Calm Down Area at Home



A calm down area provides a child a place to calm down and take a break. It is one strategy that might be used when children are feeling anxious, stressed, or overwhelmed. Families can help children learn how to take a break from activities or interactions that are challenging to them. Just like adults, young children might react to stress, frustration, and disappointment by becoming angry, shouting, refusing help from adults, or engaging in other challenging behaviors. Adults might use helpful strategies such as self-talk, deep breathing, or taking a break when they are feeling the need to take a break and calm down. The calm down area provides children with a place to let go of strong emotions and begin to feel calm and ready to engage with others again.

Getting Started

The calm down area or calm down spot does not need to require a lot of space. It might be a chair that your child prefers, a group of toys that you child likes that are in a bedroom, or an area where you place a basket of calming toys. The only requirement is that it is an area that is quiet, away from interactions with others, and soothing for the child.

When you create your calm down area, think of things that your child already uses to calm down. They might be stuffed animals, a favorite pillow, a puzzle, squishy toys, or books. Put those in the calm down spot.

Show your child that you have created a calm down area and let your child know that they can use the area when they need to “feel better”. You might explain to your child that sometimes you go to a calm down spot that helps you feel better (e.g., “When I am feeling frustrated with my work, sometimes I lay down on the couch.”).

Encourage your child to play with what you have put in the spot. You might add a visual that helps the child take deep breaths ([link](#)) or a social story like “Tucker the Turtle ...” ([link](#)) that might help your child calm down. Encourage your child to get familiar with the calm down area when they are calm. This will give them a chance to explore the items in the calm down area and figure out what is most soothing and calming.

When you think your child might benefit from the calm down area, remind your child that they can go to the calm down area to feel better or guide your child to it (e.g., “I am going to help you go to your calm down spot so you can feel better.”).



Tips for Using

▶ **The calm down area is not used for punishment.**

Do not “send” your child there or use the calm down area as a punishing consequence (e.g., “If you don’t calm down, you will need to go to the calm down spot.”). Your instructions to your child about the use of the calm down area should be supportive (e.g., “It sounds like you are feeling really frustrated right now. I can help you go the calm down spot so that you can feel better.”).



- ▶ **Help children use the calm down area BEFORE they experience a meltdown or tantrum.** Try to notice when your child is nearing frustration or starting to get overwhelmed and redirect them to the calm down area. Look for signs like whining, crying, or other behaviors that happen before your child experiences very strong emotions to help you know when the calm down area might help them feel better.



- ▶ **While your child is in the calm down area, try to limit interactions and distractions.** Help siblings and other family members understand that they should not interact with your child when they are using the calm down area.



- ▶ **Check-in with your child once they are calm.** Provide feedback and positive attention to your child for using the calm down area (e.g., “I noticed you read a book in the calm down corner. It looks like reading a book helped you feel better.”).



- ▶ **Once your child is calm, discuss their emotions.** Help them compare how they might have felt before and after using the calm down area (e.g., “Before you went to the calm down area you were crying and very sad. How do you feel now?”).