

# Creating a Mindful Space to Support Self-Regulation

*“Self-regulation is the ability to monitor and manage your energy states, emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in ways that are acceptable and produce positive results such as well-being, loving relationships, and learning.”*

## Understanding the Importance of Self-Regulation

Humans learn more quickly during the first few years than at any other time in their lives. Promoting self-regulation in children early in their lives, helps children to develop critical skills like attentional control, problem-solving, and coping strategies for managing distressing environmental or emotional experiences. Creating an inviting and supportive environment can proactively foster self-regulation skills and help children establish that strong foundation.

## How a Calming Space Can Help

Calming spaces give a child a quiet area to retreat to for a break when they're feeling overwhelmed, anxious and stressed, or just a place to get away from all the commotion around them. This designated space has the sole intent of being a safe space for a child to go to when they feel their emotions are dysregulated and they need to regain emotional and physical control. This in turn will empower the child in becoming independent in recognizing when they feel they need to separate themselves. Having such a place equipped with appropriate comforting objects and soothing materials, will promote mindfulness, breathing and reflection.

## Some Items to Include in a Calming Space

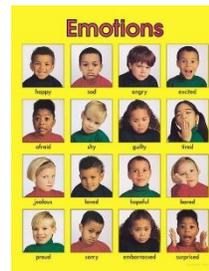
A variety of items can be placed in a calming space to support a child while feeling dysregulated. Here are some ideas:

- **Comfortable Seating-** a bean bag chair filled with shredded memory foam conforms to the body and can help alleviate neck and shoulder tension; or the addition of a rocking chair has proven that the simple act of rocking releases endorphins which can improve mood and reduce stress.
- **Pillows and Blankets-** the warmth and a cozy comfortable atmosphere allows children the option to rest their head or wrap themselves up in a 'burrito' style to support deep pressure providing a calming effect. Just ensure the blanket is not too tight to constrict breathing.
- **Pictures-** adding pictures of the child(ren)'s family, friends or pets provides a visual cue of 'who they are and where they fit' in the world. This encourages a feeling of love and belonging beyond their loved ones physical presence.



*“A calming space helps children develop emotional regulation, provides structure, and supports them in feeling safe and secure.”*

- **Emotions Chart**- An emotions chart is a tool that supports a child in reflecting on their feelings and helps expand their emotional vocabulary when communicating their thoughts.
- **Sunglasses or a Hat**- A dark space is not always possible and for some people, light can cause great sensitivity. Providing a pair of sunglasses or a hat, will allow a child to combat the bright light and/or provide a sense of escape.



- **Breathing techniques**- Deep breathing helps get more oxygen into the bloodstream, and opens up capillaries. It physically supports the body in bring it to a calmer state helping to support a child to self-regulate.
- **Noise canceling headphones or earmuffs**- Noise canceling headphones reduce the actual noise level (decibels) that the ears process but does not completely eliminate noise altogether. For children with auditory sensitivities, it enables them to participate in louder environments without being overstimulated by the sounds around them.



- **Paper and Colouring Materials**- Dr. Joel Pearson, a brain scientist from the University of New South Wales in Australia, explains that colouring “occupies the same parts of the brain that stops any anxiety-related mental imagery. The act of colouring is similar to meditation or mindfulness in that it gives people something else to focus their attention on.”
- **Sensory Bottles**- These are a great alternative to messier sensory experiences that children may crave as they try to self-regulate their emotions or seek sensory stimulation. Sensory bottles can include: oil, water, food coloring, glitter or small toys etc.



*\*\*Remember, creating a calming area is not intended to be a ‘timeout’ spot but is meant to be a positive safe space for children to retreat to to support self-regulation independently\*\**

If you require assistance in better supporting your child or children in your program, please contact your Resource Consultant at Childinü Oxford or by visiting:  
<https://childinuoxford.com/about/meet-our-team/>

## References

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