

## **TEACH SELF-CALMING**

### **Steps for creating self-calming strategies**

1. When the student is focused and calm, talk with them about how they know when they are getting upset. Help them identify internal cues for these feelings. Write them down or draw them. If they are going to self-calm and improve self control, they will need to know when they are getting angry before they reach a full-blown meltdown. Also remember, emotions can feel more manageable when kids know how to describe their feelings.
2. Talk with them about things that soothe and calm them. (It might be activities they are already doing or new ones.) Make an agreement to practice these calming strategies so they can use them when they are upset. See below some ideas for calming strategies.

Some students may only need one short strategy to help them gain control over their emotions e.g. taking deep breaths or counting back from 20. Other students might find that they need to do a sequence of activities or a longer activity to help them regulate.

Examples might be:

“When I’m angry at my brother, I can jump on the trampoline.”

“If I’m stuck on a math problem, I’ll listen to two songs and then try it again.”

“When I’m feeling anxious about college applications, I’ll go for a run.”

3. Create a plan for home and school indicating which calming strategies they will use. The questions to consider in your calming plan form:  
How do I know when I am upset?  
Home Plan: What calms me down at home? Whom can I talk to at home to help solve the problem?  
School Plan: What calms me down at school? Whom can I talk to at school to help solve the problem?
4. Decide whom they will talk with to discuss how to solve the problem once they are calm. Be “present” and understanding. Focus on the student. After they are done speaking, restate what they said in their own words, not yours. You might say: “It sounds like you felt Mr. Knight was being disrespectful.” This helps them feel heard and understood. Ask related questions and help them to work through positive next steps. “Is there anything you think you could tell him tomorrow?”
5. Each day for several months, have the student imagine the sensations of anger/upset and rehearse the calming strategy. The student will have to be able to do the calming strategy without too much conscious effort, because he may have difficulty thinking as he is beginning to get angry or upset. Parents can rehearse their

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home strategy each morning or after school. Teachers can have their students rehearse their calm plan every morning five minutes before class starts, where appropriate.

**Self-calm strategies to consider:** Some strategies would be more appropriate for home or school, thus guiding the student towards which strategies are most appropriate for the setting they are in. You might want to choose specific strategies at school, to eliminate the chances of reinforcing the behaviours, to avoid work.

- Taking deep breaths or breathing techniques (see attached)
- Getting a drink of water or sucking on ice cubes
- Chewing on a straw or gum
- Chewing on something crunchy such as carrot sticks, celery sticks, apple pieces
- Find a positive distraction, this can be something you do or think about. The 5 senses grounding technique works well:



**LOOK**

Name 5 things you can see



**FEEL**

Name 4 things you can feel



**LISTEN**

Name 3 things you can hear



**SMELL**

Name 2 things you can smell



**TASTE**

Name 1 thing you can taste

- Taking a walk: At school, you might want to incorporate a task to this; as you do not want this strategy to become a work avoidance strategy.
- Listening to music: headphones on an IPad works well, when others are around. Discuss which effect various different music can have on your mood. In a recent study

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(Sound of the new generation [www.youthmusic.org.uk/sound-of-the-next-generation](http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/sound-of-the-next-generation)) it was found that “wider qualitative research has shown that young people choose different genres of music for different moods, but that they often like to be “mood-congruent” – that is, to listen to music that reflects how they’re feeling. This is because exploring the feelings and sensations created by music can help give “form to different feelings”, making them more comprehensible.” Keeping this in mind, it would be good to reflect on how the music makes them feel; and be aware that if they listen to aggressive or rebellious types of music, this can increase their feelings of aggression and anger. Our aim here is to find music that has a calming effect on them internally and their behaviour.

- Reading or listening to an audiobook
- Drawing or doodling: This article gives some lovely ideas for doodling for the older student: <http://mindfulartstudio.com/art-journaling-for-healing-doodle-and-de-stress/>
- Physical ‘muscle work’ activities, such as with Theraband. There are quite a few exercises online available for using theraband in an exercise program. It is worth exploring these and choosing one or two exercises with the student. Theraband can be bought from: <https://www.thera-bands.co.uk/>
- Rocking in a rocking chair, swinging in a swing or even trampolining
- Towelling: Put lots of cream on the hand and forearms. Firmly massage the forearm and hand; then rub it with a dry face cloth in the direction from the elbow to the fingertips. If this is done firmly, it gives a deep pressure feeling, which can be quite calming. Older students can do this for themselves.
- Use a stress ball to squeeze in hands, when feeling the anxiety creeping up. Count backward from 20 or even 10, with each squeeze. The squeezing provides calming deep pressure, while the counting provides the emotional distraction short term.

Similarly, they can count backwards, while doing a physical activity such as chair press ups.

- Isometric stretches: Isometric exercises do not require any obvious changes in movement or posture, so it can be done discreetly while going about your everyday situations. These exercises are meant to be gentle and done slowly. The goal is to relax so trying to rush through them will not work as well. It is advised to hold your tension at minimum 5 to 7 seconds. Always begin these exercises with a small breath and hold it for 5 seconds while you tighten/tense your muscles at the same time, then breathe out 5 seconds while you relax your muscles and breathe out gently saying to yourself... “relax”.

Some easy ways to use isometric exercises:

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- Crossing your legs (at the ankles), press them together and tense up and hold
  - Hold onto your chair by placing your hands under the sides of the chair and pull up
  - Place hands behind your head, lock your fingers together and then push your head back and hold
  - Tightly grip onto an immobile object and tense up to 5 seconds, allowing the tension to go up the arm
  - Cup hands together and try to pull them apart (this can work in front of you or behind you)
  - Tighten thigh/buttock muscles while sitting in a chair and hold
  - Holding hands palm to palm, press together and hold
  - When standing: You tighten your legs and press your knees as far back as they will go and hold
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- Progressive relaxation: This can be done in parts or the whole routine. It also helps to do this with relaxing music.  
<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/how-to-do-progressive-muscle-relaxation/>
  - Weighted blanket: When feeling overwhelmed, to go to a quiet space and sit or lay for 10 to 15 minutes under a weighted blanket, listening to calming music over headphones. Please discuss with the occupational Therapist when you plan to buy or use a weighted blanket. <https://www.sensorydirect.com/classic-weighted-blanket-fleece.html>

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further advice or have questions.

Kind regards,

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