

Setting up a calming area in your home

Your child may need to go to a quiet calming area to calm themselves down if they are feeling anxious, frightened, overwhelmed, sad, angry.

Many pre-schools have calming areas but this is something you can easily set up in your own home.

Have a look at some of the suggestions below.

What does it look like?

Successful calming areas come in all shapes and sizes. How your calming area looks will depend on your home and the needs of your child. For example it may be a small tent, a cushion in a corner, a comfy chair or an area of a room. Here are some ideas to get you started.



Where is it?

The calming area should ideally be in a quieter area of the home. This is not always possible, but it is important that the child feels safe and secure there.

What's in it?

This will depend on the needs of your child. It may include cushions, blankets, soft toys, books or sensory items. The aim of any item in the calming area is to help your child calm down and self-regulate. If any item isn't doing this, then it should be removed. It's important to remember that what may be calming to one child may be stimulating to another.

When and how to go there?

Your child may need the calming area if they are feeling anxious, frightened, overwhelmed, sad, angry etc... The calming area should be there for them whenever it is needed. Your child can choose to go there at any time. You may suggest that your child goes to the calming area but it should never be forced. Your child also chooses how long to stay there. Your child should be given the opportunity to practice (when calm) going to the calming area and trying different calm down activities.

What if the calming area isn't available?

A range of calming strategies should be taught and practiced in different places. This means that if your child needs to calm themselves when out and about, they will be able to do this using the exercises you have practised at home.

Some important points to remember:

- You should show your child how to use the calming area.

- You should talk about your child's feelings and name them.... for example.... I can see you are angry because we didn't go to the park.
- You should to teach your child ways to calm themselves down (See our other handouts on emotional regulation, breathing exercises, Calm down story)
- Your child should be praised immediately anytime they use the calming area or try to calm themselves down
- If you use 'Time Out/Naughty Step' at home for challenging behaviour, it is important not to confuse this with the calming area.
- A calming area may be used when you notice your child becoming angry or upset.
- Your child decides when to go to the calming area, not the parent. You may suggest that they go to the calming area but it should always be their choice.
- Your child decides when to leave the calming area, usually when they feel calmer.