



## If you need some ideas for calming....

Some of our children have difficulties with processing and integrating sensory information; they may be highly anxious, stressed or have a heightened response to events. They may respond inappropriately or in a way that is difficult to manage, for example by hitting out at family, shouting, engaging in unsafe behaviour or hitting themselves.

Children can become stressed and anxious for a variety of reasons and the changes to routines and everyday activities due to the coronavirus may be adding to their anxiety and affecting their behaviour and their ability to process sensory information. If your child becomes stressed or over-anxious they will have difficulties in participating in everyday activities and will have difficulties controlling their reaction to events. If their reaction is extreme they may go into Flight, Fight or Freeze responses which are out of their control. They will be incapable of logical thought and reasoning until they have calmed down.

We can often prevent children's level of anxiety from increasing to the point where they lose control by using strategies and activities regularly through the day to promote a calm time or calm feelings. Strategies below can be used at regular intervals during the day or at the first signs that their levels of anxiety are increasing. Try to include some of the following things into your daily routine.

- Listening to "calming" music or music that has a regular beat. Listening through headphones can help to "shut out" other distractions – you could take 10 minutes, lie on the floor and close the curtains.
- Drinking through a "sports bottle" or straw (eg yoghurt, thick shakes, smoothies) can have a calming and "organising" effect.
- Pushing against walls with their hands, shoulder, and back – try to 'push the wall down'
- Weight bearing activities eg activities on all fours/laying on their tummy and forearm propping to read a book or draw / scribble.
- Any deep/slow breathing exercises.
- Blowing bubbles.
- "Push-pull" activities that involve deep muscle work – 'Row, Row the Boat', or rocking together on a chair or bed (side to side or back and forth).
- 'Weight lifting' time: do some stretches together while carrying small bags of rice or lentils in each hand. (weight should be no more than five per cent of their body weight)
- Arm exercises such as stretching arms into the air and reaching for the ceiling – stretch as high and as far as possible.
- Lie down and roll up in a blanket (head out), gently squeezing arms and legs
- Give firm hugs or encourage the child to hug themselves
- Using muscles of the hands – squeezing and stretching items such as soft balls, tactile toys, squashies, etc
- Have a box of fidget toys that your child likes, eg playdough, wind-up toys, Lego, fidget spinners, bean bags, etc.

- Fill a cushion with dried beans or rice use it as a weighted cushion.
- While lying down, roll a slightly flat football over arms, legs and back
- Make a den or quiet corner with cushions, blankets, beanbags and weighted cushions. Try to make it into a tent by using a sheet over furniture – use this for some quiet time.

Some children need regular movement activities throughout the day, for these children try activities which use lots of big muscle movements. Some ideas are below:

- Animal walks – walk across the room like a bear, frog, snake, etc.
- Carrying a box of toys from one room to the other or carrying a pile of books
- Obstacle courses – make up a course using furniture, blankets and cushions. Encourage movements to climb under things, stepping over things, rolling across, around things, through a rolled-up mat etc.
- Try to get out in the day for a walk, run in the park or a bike ride.