

Teaching and practicing calming strategies

As adults, we use many different ways to calm down when upset, such as getting exercise, taking deep breaths, meditation, yoga, or therapy. These are skills that we have learned and practiced over time.

Children need help learning skills. They need help:

- figuring out what helps them calm down (for example, some children find taking a deep breath really helpful, while others need to express energy in other ways).
- practicing these skills many times when calm, so their bodies remember them and can use them when they're upset.

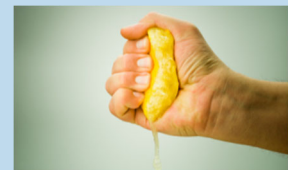
Calming ideas

- **Deep breathing** (please see CDC handout on Breathing Exercises with Children)
- Some children need to **move their bodies** when they have big feelings (adults do too; we might take a run or punch a punching bag when mad).
 - Examples of physically releasing energy are: hitting a pillow, squeezing a stuffy or ball tightly, going outside and running, jumping on a trampoline, doing jumping jacks, etc.
- **Tense and Release**
 - Helps children understand the difference in how *tense* and *relaxed* feels in their body.
 - Practicing what relaxed feels like helps children understand this idea and how it feels.

Ways to practice Tense and Release

- "Making Lemonade" with visualization and/or props (see sidebar).
- Squeezing squishy ball, playdough, etc. and relaxing.
- Tense and release with different body parts: scrunching nose, squeezing shoulders, making "fists" with hands or feet.

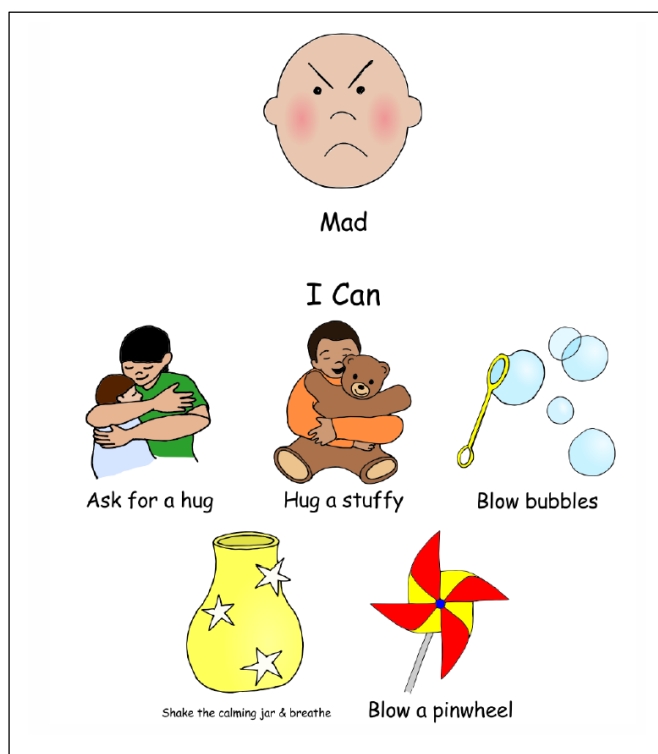
Steps for Making Lemonade



1. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose, holding it for a few seconds before exhaling.
2. Take a slow, deep breath while squeezing the muscles in your hands and arms for 5 seconds – imagine you're squeezing lemons to make lemonade.
3. Exhale and release all the tension from your hand and arm muscles.
4. Take a slow, deep breath while squeezing the muscles in your shoulders for 5 seconds – trying to touch your ears with your shoulders.
5. Exhale and release all the tension from your shoulder muscles.

How to integrate calming strategies into your home

- Use visuals. Put pictures on your fridge or wall that visually show calming strategies. (Example: a picture of a child stomping their feet, or squeezing a ball, or jumping on a trampoline). See the sample below.
- Have hands-on materials available. (Example: have a squishy ball or stuffed animal to squeeze readily available.)
- Create a calming area or basket, where different calming materials are kept together.



Sample sheet with visuals for posting at home.



Calming area.



Calming basket.