

This resource has quick tips on how to use calming tools to help children and youth manage stress during your program time. Program Leaders and Program Staff can use this resource as a guide for building a “calming box” and for helpful hints to effectively offer calming tools.

## What is a calming tool?



Physical objects, spaces, or activities that...

- Help children/youth manage stress
- Appeal to the senses
- Focus attention
- Encourage deep breathing

## When to offer a calming tool



More important than the “what” is the “when” you offer!

- As soon as you notice signs of stress (*heavy breathing, clenched fists, stomping around the room, etc.*)
- Before the behavior escalates (*if you wait too long, the calming tools become a reward for negative behavior*)
- Before difficult or overwhelming times/situations
- If you know a transition, competitive game, or teacher-directed activity may trigger stress, let the child know in advance they will be able to use a calming tool

## How to offer calming tools



Be mindful of your tone and remember, anyone can benefit from calming tools.

- Describe what you see  
“Your voice is getting higher and higher.”
- Acknowledge youth perspective  
“It’s upsetting when someone takes your seat.”
- Highlight what works for you/what you have seen work for the youth  
“When I am upset, I like to sit by myself, close my eyes and hold something soft.”/“I’ve noticed listening to music helps you feel better.”
- Help them find the right activity/item  
“Let’s look at the calming box to see what might help.”

## Build your own “Calming Box” that can be independently accessed by children/youth



### ITEMS TO INCLUDE:

- Bubbles
- Resistance Bands
- Stuffed Animal
- Noise-Canceling Headphones
- Bubble Wrap
- Rubik's Cube
- Books
- Activity Books (*iSpy*, *Word Jumbles*, *Sudoku*, etc.)
- Fidget Spinner
- Stress Ball
- Clay or Play-doh
- Yoga Pose Sheet
- Stretching Instructions
- Deep Breathing Activity Instructions
- Kaleidoscope
- Meditation Guide
- Koosh Balls
- Exercise Muscle Roller

## Keys for Success

### Explanations and modeling

Explain which items and spaces are available and model their use. What is it? How do you use it? When do you use it?

### Novelty

Variety is crucial! Switch up the items in your calming box as often as you can.

### Child/Youth Input

Get the children/youth's opinions on the available items and suggestions on additional items they find calming.