

# Calm-Down Corner Setup Guide

How to create and introduce a regulation space at home

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## What Is a Calm-Down Corner?

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A calm-down corner is a designated physical space where a child can go to regulate their emotions. It's NOT a punishment. It's NOT a time-out. It's a co-regulation and self-regulation tool — a place that says: "Big feelings are welcome here, and here are tools to help you move through them." The goal is to teach children that when emotions get big, there are things they can do to feel better.

### IMPORTANT

A calm-down corner should NEVER be used as punishment or forced isolation. If a child associates the space with punishment, it loses all regulatory value. The child should always have the choice to go there or not.

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## Setting Up the Space

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### Location Requirements

- Quiet area away from high-traffic zones — A corner of the living room, bedroom, or playroom. Avoid hallways or areas near the TV.
- Semi-enclosed feeling without being isolated — A canopy, small tent, bookshelf as a wall, or corner with curtains. The child should feel contained but not trapped.
- Visible to parent/caregiver — You need to be able to see the child (especially ages 2-5). This is co-regulation space, not isolation.
- Away from overstimulating areas — Not near a window with lots of activity, not near siblings' play area, not near screens.

### Essential Items

- Comfortable seating — Bean bag, floor cushion, cozy blanket, or stuffed chair. Something soft and body-conforming.
- Feelings chart or poster — Visual display of emotion faces with labels. Children point to how they feel. Post at their eye level.

- Breathing tool** — Pinwheel, hoberman sphere (breathing ball), bubble wand, or laminated breathing card with visual instructions.
- Sensory items (2-3 options)** — Stress ball, putty/playdough, textured fabric, glitter jar (shake and watch settle), weighted lap pad.
- Comfort item** — Stuffed animal, soft blanket, or lovey. Something that provides emotional comfort.

### Optional Enhancements

- Noise-reducing headphones** — For sensory-sensitive children or loud households. Allow them to reduce auditory input.
- Timer or hourglass** — Visual timer helps children see that feelings pass. Sand timers are calming to watch.
- Feelings journal + crayons** — For children age 5+ who can draw or write about their feelings.
- Calming photos or artwork** — Nature scenes, family photos, or art the child made during calm moments.
- Small books about emotions** — "When I Feel Angry," "The Color Monster," "My Many Colored Days."
- Calm-down strategy cards** — Laminated cards with pictures showing strategies: breathe, squeeze, count, hug.

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## Introducing It to Your Child

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### Steps (Do This When Everyone Is Calm)

- 1 Set it up together. Let the child help choose items and arrange the space. Ownership increases buy-in.
- 2 Name it together. "Calm corner," "cozy spot," "peace place" — let them pick. Avoid calling it "the thinking chair" or anything that sounds punitive.
- 3 Explain the purpose. "This is a special place for when your feelings get really big. Everyone has big feelings sometimes — even grown-ups. This is where we go to help our body calm down."
- 4 Practice during a calm moment. Go there together, try the breathing tools, squeeze the stress ball, look at the feelings chart. Make it feel positive and fun.
- 5 Model using it yourself. "Mommy is feeling frustrated. I'm going to sit in the calm corner for a minute and take some breaths." This is the most powerful teaching tool.
- 6 Offer it (don't force it) during real moments. "Would you like to go to your calm corner? I can come with you or you can go by yourself."
- 7 Go WITH them (ages 2-5). Young children need co-regulation. Sit with them, breathe with them, be the calm they can't yet generate alone.
- 8 Debrief after. Once calm: "You did a great job calming your body. What helped the most?" Build their awareness of what works for them.

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## Age-Specific Tips

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AGE	SETUP ADJUSTMENTS	HOW TO USE
2-3 years	Keep it very simple: soft seat, one stuffed animal, one sensory item, feelings chart with 4 faces. Make it cozy and womb-like.	Always go WITH them. You are the regulation tool at this age. Hold them, rock them, narrate: "You're safe. I'm here. Let's breathe together."
3-5 years	Add breathing tools (pinwheel, bubble wand), 2-3 sensory options, simple strategy cards with pictures.	Go with them initially, then gradually give option of going alone. Offer choice: "Do you want to squeeze the ball or use the pinwheel?"
6-8 years	Add journal/drawing supplies, more strategy cards, timer, books. Let them personalize the space.	Begin encouraging independent use. Teach a go-to sequence: "First breathe, then squeeze, then check in." Debrief after.
9-11 years	Make it feel less "babyish" — call it their "chill zone." Include music (headphones), journal, fidgets, weighted blanket.	Mostly self-directed. Check in after: "I noticed you went to your space. Want to talk about what happened?"
12+ years	Their room may become the calm-down space. Provide: journal, headphones, fidgets, stress ball, weighted blanket.	Respect autonomy. "I'm here if you want to talk" is more effective than following them. Model your own regulation.

**Do**

- ✓ Make it inviting and cozy
- ✓ Practice using it when calm
- ✓ Model using it yourself
- ✓ Offer it as a choice
- ✓ Go with young children
- ✓ Celebrate when they use it independently
- ✓ Refresh items when interest wanes

**Don't**

- ✗ Use it as punishment or time-out
- ✗ Force them to go there
- ✗ Send them there when YOU need space (that's different — say so honestly)
- ✗ Expect it to work immediately
- ✗ Shame them for needing it
- ✗ Make it screen-based (tablets, TV)
- ✗ Put it in a closet or isolated room