Calm Adult, Calm Child

A co-regulation card set for the calm corner and staff room

When a child is overwhelmed, the calm starts with us. A young child borrows a grown-up's steadiness - so the most useful first move is to settle our own body, then connect, then help. Print these cards for your calm corner, a lanyard, or the fridge.

The idea in one line

Calm yourself first. Then be the calm. Then - only then - help sort it out.

✧ 1. Regulate

settle your own body

✧ 2. Relate

connect, warm and close

✧ 3. Then help

talk it through, when calm

How to print, use and make it last

- Print at A4 or US Letter on normal colour settings - that's all you need.
- To reuse it for years, laminate it: cut-outs become wipe-clean cards, and fill-in pages take a whiteboard marker and wipe clean.
- Prefer to fill it in on screen? Open the PDF in a free PDF editor (or your web browser) and use the text tool.

Some big feelings take time. A calm grown-up helps even when it doesn't fix things straight away - you're not failing if a child stays upset for a while.

Lantern Path Books

From Lantern Path Books - a gentle support tool for calm moments, not medical or clinical advice.

Two Cards for the Grown-Up

What to do with your own body first - cut out and keep close

These two are for YOU, not the child. Managing your own calm is the part that works. Print on card, cut out, pop on a lanyard or by the calm corner.

Calm Yourself First

Before you help a child, take ten seconds for you. They borrow your steadiness.

- Drop your shoulders
- Slow your out-breath
- Soften your face
- Quieten and slow your voice
- Use fewer words

Be the Calm

Lend your steadiness - this is the active part, not a soft add-on.

- Get down to their level
- Stand side-on, not face-on
- Warm, gentle presence
- Offer rhythm - walk, rock, slow counting
- Wait. Don't try to reason yet

Name the Feeling

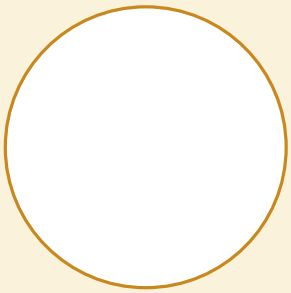
Putting the feeling into words - gently, no need to insist

When a child can't find the words, lend them yours. Use the sentence below, and let them point to a feeling. Offer the word; you don't have to be right first time.

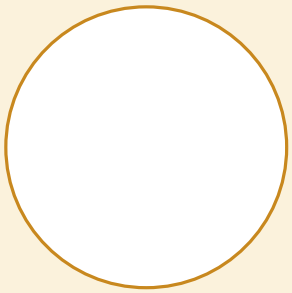
"You feel _____ because _____.
That makes sense."

Point to how you feel:

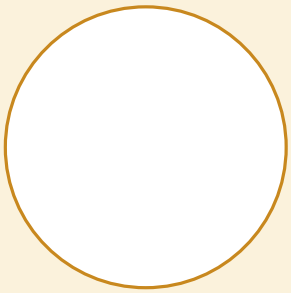
Happy



Sad



Angry



Scared

Worried

Frustrated

Tired

Calm

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The Big-Feelings Helper

Five calm steps - accept the feeling, hold the limit

A gentle order of moves for a big-feelings moment. The secret is step 4: every feeling is okay, but not every action is. That is the difference between calm support and 'anything goes'.

1 Notice

"I can see something is wrong." Tune in early, before it grows.

2 Connect

Get close and calm first. Warmth before words.

3 Name & accept the feeling

"It's okay to feel angry." Every feeling is allowed.

4 Hold the kind limit

"It's okay to be angry. It's not okay to hurt. I won't let anyone get hurt."

5 Sort it out together

Only once calm: "When you're ready, let's work out what to do."

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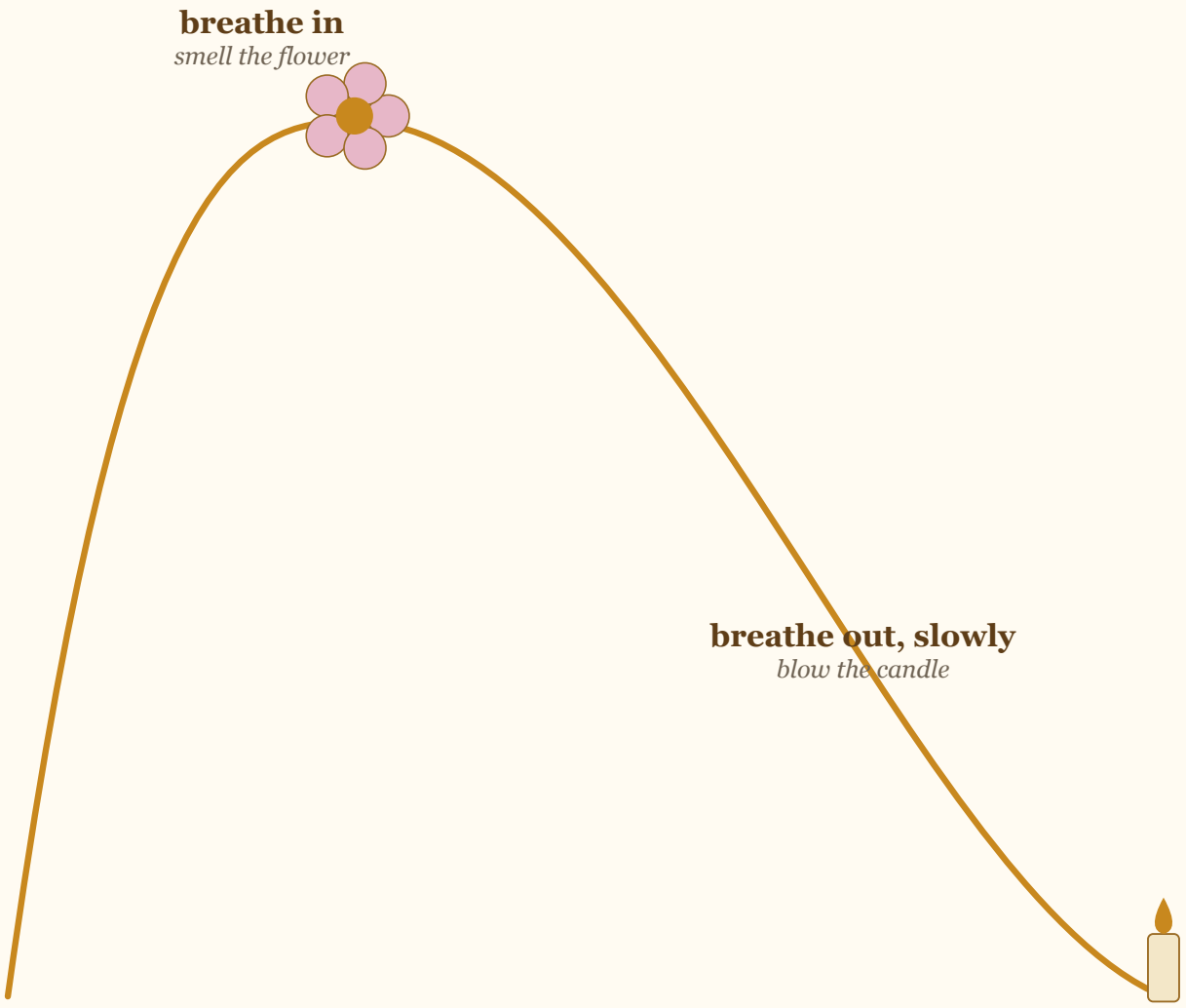
Candle and Flower Breathing

Smell the flower... blow the candle, slowly

A calming activity for the calm corner. Trace the path together with a finger: smell the flower as you breathe in, then blow the candle slowly as you breathe out. Do it three or four times.



Always trace the picture together - it sets the slow pace. Keep the out-breath longer than the in-breath, and no holding your breath. Young children need the picture to pace it.

Why These Cards Work

The research behind the pack, in plain words

Everything here is built on published research about how young children settle. We make supportive tools, not clinical advice - the notes below are accurate statements about the research, not promises about any one child.

What the research says

- This pack is built on the OPRE/UNC co-regulation practice framework: young children settle by borrowing a calm adult's steadiness.
- Putting feelings into words ("affect labelling") helps many children feel understood and settle.
- Naming and accepting the feeling while gently holding the limit (emotion coaching) supports calmer, kinder responses.
- Slowing the breath, with a longer out-breath than in-breath, is a simple, well-studied way to help a body feel calmer.

If you have concerns

A general support tool, not medical or clinical advice. For frequent, intense or lasting distress, talk with the family and a GP or child-health professional.

The research behind it

Murray, D. & Rosanbalm, K. (2015). Co-Regulation From Birth Through Young Adulthood: A Practice Brief. OPRE / UNC Frank Porter Graham.

Torre, J. & Lieberman, M. (2018). Putting Feelings Into Words: Affect Labeling as Implicit Emotion Regulation. Emotion Review.

Havighurst, S., Kehoe, C., et al. (2024). Randomised trial of an online emotion-coaching program. Scientific Reports (Nature).

Tsznitman, G., Gross, J. & Tarullo, A. (2024). A few deep breaths and children's physiological arousal. Dev. Psychobiology.

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