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Calming

Some children, for a number of reasons, can become highly anxious, stressed or have a heightened arousal or alertness. They may respond inappropriately or out of context to a particular event, stimulus or the environment, for example by hitting out at another pupil because they brushed past them or by running out of the classroom or shouting at an adult when asked to complete a task.

This can indicate that they have difficulties with processing and integrating sensory information. This inability to correctly process sensory information can result in a child going into Flight, Fight or Freeze responses to a stimulus. These reactions are beyond the child's control. They will be incapable of logical thought and reasoning until they have calmed down.



Children can become stressed and anxious for a variety of other reasons such as illness, difficulties at school, difficulties at home and poor peer relationships. No matter what the reason, once a child becomes stressed, over anxious or over alert they will not be able to concentrate on the task at hand and this will therefore hamper their learning.

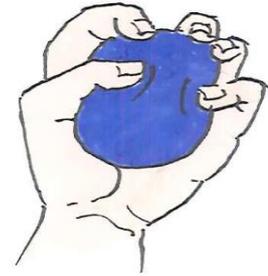
We can often prevent children's level of anxiety from increasing to the point where they lose control by using the strategies below at regular intervals during the day or at the first signs that their levels of anxiety are increasing. See 'Sensory processing' for more information and advice about this.

Strategies

- Any deep/slow breathing exercises.
- Talking in a calm even tone.
- Listening to "calming" music or music that has a regular beat. Listening through headphones can help to "shut out" other distractions.
- 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
- Weight bearing activities eg activities on all fours/laying on their tummy and forearm propping. Board games can often be played this way.
- Gentle rocking in a rocking chair.
- Gentle linear swinging.
- Blowing bubbles.



- “Push-pull” activities that involve deep muscle work, for example moving a wheelbarrow full of dirt, moving furniture or tug of war game.
- Running an “errand” so you have removed the child from a situation but given them the structure of a task.
- Carry a weighted back pack, (weight should be no more than five per cent of their body weight) or consider other weighted products such as weighted lap pads or ‘snakes’
- Roll tightly in a blanket and firmly squeeze arms and legs
- Give firm, tight hugs either by an adult or encourage the child to hug themselves
- Arm exercises such as stretching arms into the air and reaching for the ceiling
- Hand squeezing and stretching such as squeezing stress balls or stretching elastic bands wrapped around the fingers
- Create a box of fidget toys that the child has chosen, eg elastic bands, blue tak, koosh ball, magnetics, and bean bags.
- Carry out chair press ups
- Fill a teddy or cushion with dried beans and sit with it on their lap or cuddle
- While lying down, roll a ball or 2 litre bottle filled with water firmly over arms, legs and body
- Giving the child an option to leave the situation or environment to go to a “safe place” such as a tent or quiet corner with beanbags and weighted cushions



There are also a number of daily tasks and chores which involve ‘heavy muscle work’ which can help to keep us calm and regulated, such as:

Hoovering, mopping the floor, cleaning the windows, carrying shopping bags, pushing the shopping trolley or carrying the basket, unloading the dishwasher, helping in the garden by pushing the wheelbarrow, carrying buckets and digging.

Any activity which involves the use of our muscles will help and can be used as tasks for children to earn pocket money.

If you would like this factsheet in another language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio, please call:

01228 603890

E:communications.helpdesk@cumbria.nhs.uk

Or write to Engagement and Communications
Voreda House | Portland Place | Penrith | CA11 7QQ



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