



Calming Strategies for Children

Source: GoZen.com

Navigating childhood challenges can be stressful, and sometimes deep breathing isn't the solution that works for your child. When your child is in need of tension relief, try one of these techniques:

1. **Try an inversion.** For centuries, Yogis have understood the calming power of bringing the head below the level of the heart, otherwise known as inversion. Whether it's relaxing in child's pose, bending over to touch your toes, or practicing a headstand, inverting the body has a restorative effect on the autonomic nervous system, which controls the body's response to stress.
2. **Visualize a quiet place.** Research has shown that visualization is beneficial for a range of populations to reduce stress levels. Ask your child to close their eyes and picture a calm, peaceful place. Then, gently guide them to slowly start to build up a picture of how it looks, smells, and feels to be there.
3. **Drink water.** Dehydration has been linked to a reduction in mental performance. Pour your child a tall glass of cold water and have them sip it slowly. You can try this with them and observe the calming effect this has on your own nervous system.
4. **Sing out loud.** Everyone knows the sweet relief associated with rocking out to your favorite tune. But the physical act of singing out loud, even if it is off key, has been shown to release endorphins, the "feel good" chemical in the brain.
5. **Do the "Downward Facing Dog" pose.** Just like inversions help reset the autonomic nervous system, the yoga pose known as Downward Facing Dog in particular has the added benefit of activating several muscles in the arms, legs, and core. This stretch helps muscles begin to burn additional blood glucose that is made available by the body's fight or flight response.
6. **Paint it out.** Not only does painting give the brain something to focus on other than the stressor, but participating in visual arts has been linked to resilience to stress in general. If the thought of dragging out the tempera gives *you* stress, have your child try "painting" with shaving cream on a plastic shower curtain in the yard. Not only is clean up a breeze, but your child will smell great when they are finished.
7. **Jump rope.** Set a timer for 2 minutes, put on some music, and challenge your child jump to the beat of the song. If your child isn't able to jump rope, playing hopscotch is a great alternative.
8. **Jump high.** Challenge your child to a jumping contest to see who can jump highest, longest, fastest, or slowest. This is another great way to get in some exercise to help your child blow off some steam.

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9. **Blow bubbles.** Just like blowing on a pinwheel, blowing bubbles can help your child gain control of their breathing and thus, their mental state. Bonus: Running around popping bubbles is just as fun as blowing them.
10. **Take a hot bath.** After a long day at work, there is nothing more relaxing than laying in a bathtub of hot water with the lights turned down and no interruptions. The same holds true for kids. Use bath time as a chance to help your little one unwind from the activities of the day. Introduce a few simple bath toys and allow your child to relax as long as they need to.
11. **Take a cold shower.** While the complete opposite of a hot bath, cold showers actually have a restorative effect on the body. Not only do cold or even cool showers reduce inflammation in the muscles, it improves heart flow back to the heart, and leads to a boost in mood. One study on winter swimmers found that tension, fatigue, depression, and negative moods all decreased with regular plunges into cold water.
12. **Have a cozy drink.** There is a reason why many people herald September as the beginning of Pumpkin Spice Latte (PSL) season. Drinking a warm drink on a cool day makes your body feel warm, almost like a hug from the inside. Giving your child a warm hot chocolate or warmed milk with a splash of vanilla will elicit the same response you have over that first sip of your PSL.
13. **Blow out a candle.** Light a candle for your child to blow out. Then re-light it and move it further and further away from them, so they have to take deeper and deeper breaths to blow it out. This is a great way to practice deep breathing, while making a game out of it.
14. **Watch fish.** Have you ever wondered why there is always a fish tank in hospitals and medical centers? The University of Exeter in the UK did, and found that watching fish swim in an aquarium reduces blood pressure and heart rate. Better yet, the larger the fish tank, the greater the effect. The next time your child needs to calm down, take them to the local lake, hatchery, or aquarium for a little fish-watching therapy.
15. **Count backwards from 100.** Not only does counting give your child a chance to focus on something other than what is bothering them, counting backwards offers an added concentration challenge without overwhelming their brain.
16. **Repeat a mantra.** Create a mantra that you and your child can use to help them calm down. "I am calm" or "I am relaxed" work well, but feel free to get creative and make it something personal to you and your child.
17. **Breathe into your belly.** Most of us breathe incorrectly, especially when we are in a stressful situation. Have your child think about their belly like it is a balloon. Tell them to breathe in deep to fill the balloon and breathe out to deflate it. Repeat this simple process 5 times and notice the effects.
18. **Shake a glitter jar.** "Calm Down Jars" have been making their way around Pinterest for a while now, but the concept behind them is sound. Giving your child a focal point for 3-5 minutes that is not the stressor will allow their brain and body to reset itself. These jars can be made simply from sealed canning jars filled with colored water and glitter or with baby food jars filled with warm water and glitter glue.
19. **Go for a run.** Running has been shown to reduce stress, and can sometimes be more effective than a trip to the therapist's office. Going for a 10 minute jog can not only

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affect your child's mood immediately, its effects on their ability to cope with stress can last for several hours afterward.

20. **Count to 5.** Just when it seems as though they "can't take it anymore", have your child close their eyes and count to five. This form of 5-second meditation offers the brain a chance to reset itself and be able to look at a situation from a different perspective. It also gives your child a chance to think before they act in a volatile situation.
21. **Talk it out.** For children who are able to verbalize their feelings, talking about what is bothering them gives them a chance to let you know what is going on while processing it for themselves. The trick is to resist the urge to "fix" the problem. Your child needs you to listen and ask appropriate questions, not offer unsolicited advice.
22. **Write a letter in the voice of your BFF.** We would never talk to our best friend in the same critical way we talk to ourselves. The same is true for our children. Tell them to be kind to themselves, and ask them what they would tell a best friend to do in their situation.
23. **Decorate a wall.** We're not talking about paint and decor, but poster tack and pictures from magazines or printed from the internet can give your child a chance to create large-scale temporary art in any space. The creative process is what is important, not the end result.
24. **Create a vision board.** Have your child cut out words and pictures from magazines that speak to their interests, desires, and dreams. Then have them glue these pictures and words onto a poster board to display in their room. Not only does the process of creation allow them to think about what they want from life, displaying things they love gives them an opportunity to focus on what is really important when they are upset.
25. **Give or get a bear hug.** Hugging allows your body to produce oxytocin, a naturally occurring hormone in your body necessary for immune system function. Not only does a 20 second hug reduce blood pressure, increase feelings of well-being, and reduce the harmful physical effects of stress, both you and your child will reap the benefits!
26. **Walk in nature.** According to Stanford scientists, walking in nature has been proven to improve cognition and reduce stress. Even if you do not have time to spend the 50 minutes researchers did, taking a 15 minute walk in nature works can be just what your child needs.
27. **Envision your best self.** This is a great way to motivate your child to work toward a goal. Have them write down where they would like to see themselves in a week, a month, or a year, with this specific goal in mind.
28. **Blow on a pinwheel.** Similar to the candle exercise, blowing on a pinwheel focuses more on controlled exhalation rather than deep inhalation. Tell your child to make the pinwheel go slow, then fast, then slow to show them how they can vary the rate at which they blow out the air in their lungs.
29. **Squish some putty.** When a child plays with putty, the brain's electrical impulses begin firing away from the areas associated with stress. Try a store bought putty or make your own.
30. **Take up pottery.** Much in the way playing with putty fires electrical impulses in your child's brain, sculpting with clay or throwing pots can have a similar effect. It also has

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the added benefit of being considered “active learning”, a powerful condition that allows your child to learn through exploration.

31. **Write it out.** For older children, journaling, or writing their feelings down can have a profound effect on their mood, especially if they can do so without the fear of having it read. Give your child a notebook to keep in a safe place, and allow them to write about how they feel, assuring them you will not read it unless they ask you to.
32. **Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude.** A cousin to “write it out”, gratitude journaling has been linked to better performance in the classroom as well as a reduction of stress outside of learning environments. Having a separate notebook only for things your child is grateful for will give them the freedom to keep their journaling activities separate.
33. **Name your emotion.** Often when children become overwhelmed, it is because they have difficulty identifying the negative thoughts they are having. Whether your child is quick to anger, panic, or obsess to ensure things are perfect, ask them to give this feeling a name, and help them talk back to it. For instance, by asking your child, “is Mr. Perfect bothering you again?” you can work together to help them challenge their perfectionism, rather than fight them over it.
34. **Rock in a rocking chair.** Not only does rocking in a rocking chair provide non-weight bearing strengthening to the knees and core, its repetitive nature offers stress-relief as well. Rock in a rocking chair with your child or allow them to rock by themselves as a way to self-soothe their frenzied emotions.
35. **Push against a wall.** This trick is perfect for allowing the body to get rid of stress hormones without having to go outside or even leave the room. Have your child try to push the wall over for 10 seconds, 3 times. This process allows the muscles to contract in a futile attempt to bring the wall down, then relax, releasing feel-good hormones into the body.
36. **Crinkle tissue paper.** Babies are inherently aware of this trick as one of their favorite things to do is crinkle paper. Not only does crinkling tissue paper provide a satisfying noise, the textural changes in your child’s hand sends sensory feedback to the brain in a pathway away from those associated with stress.
37. **Pop bubble wrap.** Anyone who has received a package in the mail knows the joy of popping row after row of bubble wrap. The same material can be found at most retailers and dollar stores and be cut into manageable pieces for stress-relief anywhere, anytime.
38. **Roll a tennis ball on your back.** An old physical therapy trick, rolling a tennis ball on your child’s back will give them a gentle massage when they are most in need of a calming touch. Focus on the shoulders, neck, and lower back as these are typical places where the body holds tension.
39. **Roll a golf ball under your feet.** Rolling a golf ball under your child’s feet can not only improve circulation, but there are pressure points on the bottom of the feet that relieve stress and relax the muscles of the feet and legs. Roll over the entire sole of your child’s foot using various pressures for maximum benefit.
40. **Go to your calm down space.** Having a designated “Calm Down Space” in your home gives children an opportunity to retreat when they feel out of control and rejoin the

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group when they need to. It is important to make this space comfortable so your child wants to visit it when they are in need of a self-imposed “time out”.

41. **Play music.** Music has a profound effect on mood, sleep, stress, and anxiety. Use a variety of musical styles to set the tone in your home, car, or your child’s room.
42. **Have a dance party.** Adding a physical component to your musical enjoyment gets your kids moving and is a fun way to be active. Crank up the tunes and have a dance party in your living room when your child is in a bad mood and watch their mood transform.
43. **Do a primal yell.** Sometimes all of your child’s emotions are simply too much to contain in their body. Have them stand with their feet shoulder width apart and imagine their feelings boiling up from their toes through their legs and body, and out of their mouths. They don’t have to yell words, or even maintain a certain pitch, just whatever comes out that feels good to them.
44. **Change the scenery.** How many times have we thought to ourselves, “Just walk away,” when confronted by a big emotion? Your child may simply need a change of scenery in order to calm down. If you are inside, head out. If you are outside, find a quiet space indoors. Either way, change the scenery and you will likely change the mood.
45. **Go for a walk.** There’s a real reason people go for walks to clear their heads. Not only is the fresh air and exercise restorative, but the natural rhythm walking creates has a self-soothing quality. Take your child on a walk, and they may even open up to you about what is on their mind.
46. **Plan a fun activity.** When you are in an anxious moment, it can seem as though the walls are closing in and the world will come to an end. Some children need to focus on what is ahead of them in order to reset their internal dialog. Plan something fun to do as a family, and let your child have a say in it. Any topic that will get them focused on a future something to look forward to can be helpful.
47. **Knead the bread.** Grandmothers around the world will tell you that the process of bread making is a tremendous stress relief. Simple recipes are abundant online that allow your child to get their hands dirty turning and pushing dough. The best part is that at the end, you have homemade bread to show for it!
48. **Make a bracelet.** Crafting in general can facilitate a state of “flow” or a state characterized by complete absorption in an activity. The same concept can be extended to knitting, crochet, folding laundry, or any activity where your child forgets their external surroundings.
49. **Get on a bike.** Bicycling for children has largely become a thing of the past. With the introduction of bicycle lanes and paved trails in urban areas, bicycling is safer than ever and can be a powerful form of self-soothing. Not only is it easy on the joints, it promotes balance, exercise, and can be done with the whole family.
50. **Take a coloring break.** It’s not without good reason that restaurants give children coloring; it gives them something to focus on and can be a great mindfulness activity that reduces anxiety. Make a trip with your child to pick up some crayons and markers, and get them excited about filling in the pages of a coloring book.

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