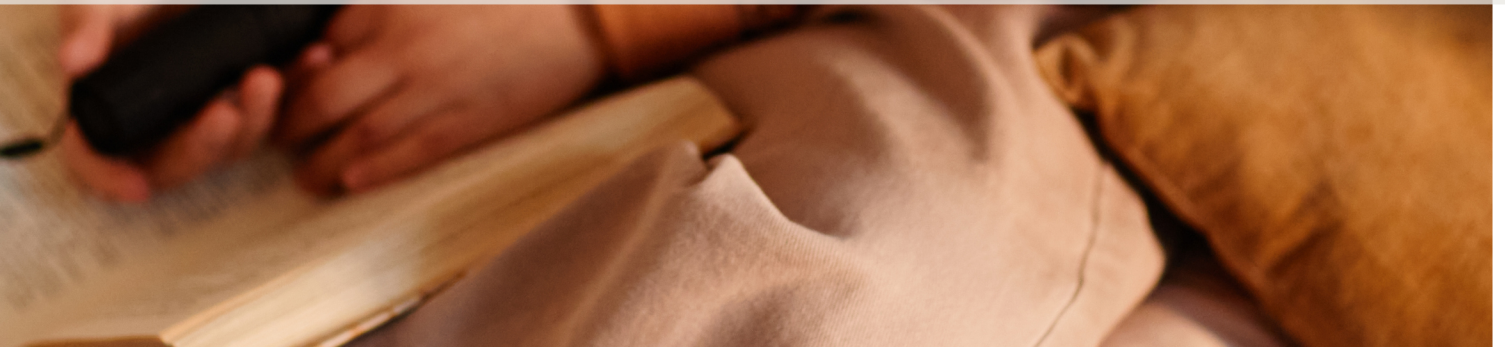




# CREATING CALMING SPACES

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A Practical Guide to Calming Spaces  
for Classrooms and Homes







A **Calming Space**—sometimes referred to as a calm-down corner, cozy corner, or quiet spot—is a simple yet powerful tool that can support young children’s emotional and sensory development.

This resource is designed to help you create a nurturing space where children can:

- Take a break when they feel overwhelmed
- Learn to recognize and manage their emotions
- Practice self-regulation and self-care skills
- Explore calming sensory tools in a safe environment

Whether you're a teacher, childcare provider, or caregiver, this guide will walk you through the benefits of Calming Corners, how to set one up, and how to use it effectively to support all children, including those who may be showing signs of Autism or other developmental differences.

If you or a family member you work with has concerns about a child’s development, know that **support is available**. The **Autism Society Inland Empire** offers guidance, resources, and connections to services through our dedicated Resource Specialists.

[info@ieautism.org](mailto:info@ieautism.org)

**951.220.6922**

Thank you to Dr. Dawn Arias, OTD, for her help in developing this resource and to Children’s Network for their financial support. We’re grateful for their commitment to the well-being of children and families in our community.

**CONTACT US**





# What does the research say about using a CALMING Space?

**Research supports the use of calming space (also known as calming corners or regulation zones) in preschool and early childhood classrooms as effective tools for promoting emotional regulation, reducing disruptive behavior, and supporting overall well-being.**

- **Supports Emotional Regulation and Learning.** Quiet corners offer a safe and structured space where children can pause, reflect, and employ self-regulation strategies. Studies show that when children are taught how to use these spaces effectively, they are better able to manage their emotions, which in turn improves focus, behavior, and academic engagement. <sup>1</sup>
- **Normalizes Emotional Rest.** According to educational research, calm corners help normalize the idea that taking a break to manage emotions is a healthy and necessary part of learning. This shift in classroom culture supports mental health and emotional literacy from an early age. <sup>1</sup>
- **Reduces Stigma and Builds Skills.** When integrated into daily routines, such as being part of a classroom station rotation, quiet corners are seen not as punishment, but as a positive, proactive tool. This approach helps all children, not just those with behavioral challenges, develop the lifelong coping skills they need to thrive. <sup>2</sup>
- **Design Matters.** Effective quiet corners include sensory tools (such as fidget items, soft textures, and calming visuals), clear behavioral expectations, and privacy elements. These features help children feel safe and supported while they regulate their emotions.<sup>1</sup>
- **Inclusive and Empowering.** Research also highlights that quiet corners are especially beneficial for children with sensory processing challenges, autism, anxiety, or trauma histories. They empower children to take control of their emotional state in a respectful and developmentally appropriate way. <sup>2</sup>

1. Brasfield, Michelle, et al. "Classroom Calming Corners: Peaceful Spaces for Times of Transition." International Journal of the Whole Child, vol. 9, no. 2, 2024, <https://libjournals.mtsu.edu/index.php/ijwc/article/view/2563>.

2. Ewert, Cristina. Influences of Privacy on Emotional Regulation in Elementary Classroom Calming Corners. Trinity Western University, 2023, <https://www.twu.ca/sites/default/files/2023-05/Ewert%20KT.pdf>.



# Who Might Need a Calming Space?

A Calming Space can be beneficial for any child, but it is especially helpful for those who experience sensory processing differences, such as sensitivity to noise, lights, or crowds. These calming spaces offer a safe and comforting environment where children can take a break, regulate their emotions, and process overwhelming sensory input. Ultimately, any child might need a moment of peace during a busy day, and a quiet corner provides a supportive space to meet that need.



**1 in 6 children  
have sensory  
processing  
difficulties.**

## Who Could Benefit from a Calming Space?

- Children with sensory sensitivities—such as those who are easily overwhelmed by noise, lights, or busy environments—often find comfort in a calm, low-stimulation space.
- Children who are feeling overwhelmed by big emotions like anger, sadness, or anxiety can be given a chance to cool down and reflect. Tired or overstimulated children can use the space to recharge.
- It can be especially helpful for children with diagnosed conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, anxiety, sensory processing disorder, or developmental delays, as it provides a predictable and supportive environment.
- Shy or introverted children may use the space to recharge after social interactions
- Children experiencing stress, transitions, or separation anxiety can find emotional safety there.
- Children who are learning self-regulation skills, offering a peaceful environment to practice calming strategies.



# Benefits of having a Calming Space:

1. **Supports Emotional Regulation:** Helps children recognize and manage big feelings like frustration, sadness, or anger in a safe, supportive environment.
2. **Encourages Independence:** Teaches children to notice when they need a break and choose calming strategies on their own—building lifelong self-regulation skills.
3. **Reduces Classroom Disruptions:** Provides a proactive alternative to outbursts or meltdowns, allowing children to cool down before emotions escalate.
4. **Promotes Sensory Regulation:** Offers a low-stimulation space for children who feel overwhelmed by noise, lights, or busy classroom activity.
5. **Fosters Social-Emotional Learning:** Reinforces skills like empathy, self-awareness, and coping through visual supports, calming tools, and gentle guidance.
6. **Creates a Safe Space:** Gives children a predictable, comforting area where they feel secure, seen, and supported.
7. **Supports Diverse Needs:** Especially helpful for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, anxiety, sensory processing challenges, or those navigating stress or transitions.
8. **Builds Classroom Community:** Normalizes emotional needs and encourages a culture of care, understanding, and self-care—for every child.





# Creating a Safe Space

We like to call it the “Calming Space,” but feel free to name it whatever fits your classroom best!

Whether it’s a Cozy Corner, Calming Space, or Quiet Corner, the heart of the idea stays the same: it’s a safe, nurturing space where little ones can take a break, manage big feelings, and return to learning with a refreshed and focused mind.

**The best part? You don’t need a big budget or a lot of space to make it meaningful.**

A few thoughtful touches—like soft pillows, calming visuals, or a favorite book—can go a long way in helping children feel supported and secure.



Picture from Pocket of Preschool.  
<https://pocketofpreschool.com/safe-place-or-cozy-corner-for-little-learners/>

**The Calming Space is not a time-out space—it’s a positive, supportive area designed to help children learn about their emotions and how to manage them. It should never be used as a punishment, and children should never be forced to go there.**

**Instead, the Calming Space is a choice-based space where children are empowered to take a break when they need it. It’s a place to pause, breathe, and reset—so they can return to classroom activities feeling calm and in control.**





# Setting up a Calming Space

**Creating a Calming Space involves 3 key steps:**

1. Designing the Physical Space
2. Equip the Area with Calming Tools
3. Teaching Children How to Use It

## Step 1: Designing the Physical Space

Start by selecting a quiet, low-traffic area of the classroom that can be slightly enclosed to offer a sense of privacy, while still remaining visible to staff for supervision. The goal is to create a space that feels safe, comforting, and inviting.

Provide a clearly defined, soft seating area that is large enough for one child only. This helps reinforce the idea that the Cozy Corner is a personal space for calming down. Seating options may include:

- Bean bag chair
- Cushions or floor pillows
- Soft chairs
- Yoga mats or gymnastics mats
- Flexible seating tools like wobble cushions or movement seats
- Blanket - soft not weighter

These soft surfaces help children feel physically comfortable and emotionally secure, encouraging them to stay as long as they need to regulate their emotions.

### **Keep It Inviting... but Not Too Fun.**

The cozy area should be comforting, not a play zone. Avoid toys or overly stimulating items that might make it more appealing than classroom activities.

# Setting up a Calming Space

## Step 2. Incorporate Sensory and Visual Tools

Once the physical space is set up, the next step is to thoughtfully stock it with tools that support self-regulation, emotional expression, and sensory needs. The goal is to create a safe, cozy environment where children can calm down, feel supported, and return to learning when they're ready.

### Comfort & Soothing Items

- Stuffed animals or baby dolls: Offer comfort and companionship; include accessories like blankets or bottles for nurturing play.
- Pillows and plushies: Provide tactile comfort and a sense of security



### Sensory Tools

Incorporate sensory materials to help students release tension, calm down, and regulate their emotions. Some of our favorites are Monkey Noodles, Popper Toys, Play-Doh, Sensory Stickers, Squishy Balls, Glitter Tubes, Sensory Bottles, or Lava Lamps. Sensory tools cater to different preferences, allowing students to engage their senses in a way that feels most comfortable for them. See our Resource page for ideas on where to purchase. These should cost less than \$20.



# Setting up a Calming Space

## Sensory and Visual Tools



### Tools for deep breathing

Promote mindfulness and deep breathing with items like a pinwheel or teach students a breathing game with Belly Buddy.

Belly Buddy Game: Have kids lie down with a stuffed animal on their bellies. Ask them to breathe deeply and watch their toy move up and down. Deep breathing is a fundamental self-regulation tool that can be utilized to calm pretest jitters and refocus during a challenging task.

### Scented markers

Drawing and coloring provide opportunities for creativity, and soothing or familiar scents help ease anxiety—triggering relaxation responses.



# Setting up a Calming Space

## Books

Especially those focused on relaxation, emotions, empathy, and friendship.

### Some of Our Favorite Books

**“A Little Spot of Emotion Series”** by Diane Alber. Covers a wide range of emotions with engaging visuals and simple strategies for managing them. Ages 3-7 years.

**“Breathe Like a Bear”** by Kira Willey. A calming book that teaches breathing exercises through animal characters. It’s ideal for mindfulness and calming down. Also has *Breathe Like a Bear Mindfulness Cards: 50 Mindful Activities for Kids*. Ages 3-6 years.

**“Headphones”** by Dana Meachen Rau. A simple, relatable book that introduces the idea of using headphones to manage overwhelming sounds. Great for introducing sensory tools. Ages 4-8 years.

**“Listening to My Body”** by Gabi Garcia. Encourages children to tune into their physical sensations and emotions, promoting self-awareness and regulation. Ages 3-8 years.

**“The Color Monster: A Story About Emotions”** by Anna Llenas. This series uses colors to represent different emotions, helping children identify and talk about their feelings. Ages 2-4 years.

**“When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry...”** by Molly Bang. A classic that helps children understand and express anger in healthy ways. Ages 2-5 years.

**“Wiggles, Stomps, and Squeezes Calm My Jitters Down”** by Lindsey Rowe Parker. A beautifully illustrated story about a child navigating sensory overload and finding ways to self-regulate. It’s inclusive and affirming. Ages 4-6 years.



# Setting up a Calming Space

## Adding Movement to a Calming Space

Movement is calming for preschoolers because it helps regulate their nervous system, release built-up energy, and support emotional self-regulation. Movement can help children release energy, regulate their emotions, and transition back to the group more smoothly. Here are some preschool-friendly ways to incorporate movement into your calm-down space:

- **Stretching Cards:** Include laminated cards with simple stretches (e.g., “Reach for the sky,” “Touch your toes,” “Butterfly legs”). Use visuals so children can follow along independently.
- **Animal Movement Prompts:** Add cards or posters with calming animal movements:
  - “Slither like a snake” (slow belly movement)
  - “Float like a jellyfish” (gentle arm waving)
  - “Walk like a turtle” (slow, heavy steps)
- **Mini Yoga Poses:** Introduce a few basic yoga poses like:
  - Child’s Pose (resting)
  - Tree Pose (balance)
  - Cat-Cow (gentle back movement)
- **Breathing with Movement:** Combine breathing with motion:
  - “Smell the flower, blow the candle” with arm movements
  - “Rainbow breaths” – arms make a rainbow shape while breathing in and out
- **Add a Push Wall:** A push wall is a designated spot where children can safely push against a wall to release energy and calm their bodies. It helps with self-regulation and provides deep pressure input, which many children find soothing.



Photograph:

Promoting Young Children's Social and Emotional Health Young Children, March 2018, Vol. 73, No. 1  
<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2018/promoting-social-and-emotional-health>

# Setting up a Calming Space

## Sensory

**Headphones and calming music or soundscapes.** Soft music or nature sounds create a calming atmosphere. The calming corner becomes a sensory retreat, offering not just visual and tactile stimulation but also auditory tranquility. An inexpensive place to get headphones locally is Harbor Freight stores.



## Visual Tools

**Visual supports** are powerful tools that help young children understand, communicate, and succeed in the classroom. At the preschool level, many children are still developing language skills, attention spans, and emotional regulation. Visuals give them the extra support they need to thrive. Some of our favorite resources:

- [Pocket of Preschool Safe Place for Little Learners](#)
- [TPT Calm Down Techniques - Calm Down Corner, Books, Posters, and Supports](#)





# Setting up a Calming Space

## Types of Visual Tools for Preschoolers

Providing cues - both visual and verbal to engage children in appropriate social behavior has been shown over time to improve their social behavior with their peers (Bovey & Strain 2005). There are many different types of visual tools that you might find helpful:

- **Visual Schedules:** Show the sequence of daily activities (e.g., circle time, snack, play, clean-up). Helps children anticipate transitions and reduce anxiety.
- **Rules Posters:** Use pictures and simple words (e.g., “Use kind hands,” “Raise your hand”). Reinforce positive behavior with consistency.
- **Feelings Charts.** Help children identify and express emotions. Can be paired with mirrors or calm-down strategies.
- **Choice Boards:** Offer visual options for activities, snacks, or centers. Promote autonomy and reduce power struggles.
- **Calm Down Steps:** Display step-by-step visuals for self-regulation (e.g., breathe, squeeze, talk). Place in a calm down corner or quiet area.
- **Transition Cues:** Use visual timers, stop signs, or “first/then” boards. Support smoother transitions between activities.

### Tips for Using Visuals Effectively

- Keep it simple: Use clear images and minimal text.
- Be consistent: Refer to visuals regularly, not just during challenges.
- Model their use: Show children how to use visuals during routines.
- Make them accessible: Place visuals at child eye-level and in relevant areas.



Effectively Implement a Calm Corner in your Classroom in 6 Steps - The Social Emotional Teacher blog

[.thesocialemotionalteacher.com/effectively-implement-a-calm-corner-in-your-classroom-in-6-steps/](https://thesocialemotionalteacher.com/effectively-implement-a-calm-corner-in-your-classroom-in-6-steps/)

# Setting up a Calming Space

## Types of Visual Supports



Such a Little While Blog

[suchalittlewhile.com/calm-down-corner-printables/](https://suchalittlewhile.com/calm-down-corner-printables/)

### Visual Cards on a Ring

Perfect for portable use individual support (for children who need reminders or communication help) (take them to the playground, hallway, or calming corner)

Examples:

- Emotion cards
- Calming strategies
- First/Then choices
- Transition steps
- Movement, or yoga cards

Tip: Laminate and hole-punch the cards, then attach them to a binder ring for durability.

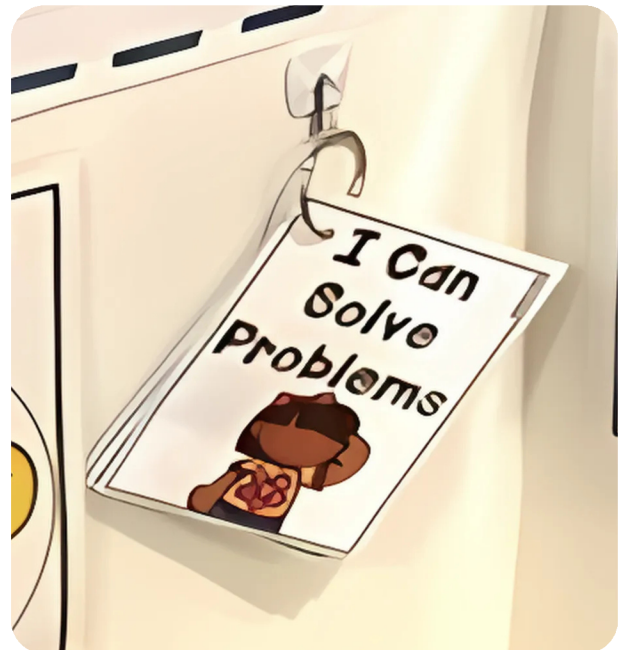
### Visual Cards

Perfect for:

- Hands-on interaction (children can hold, choose, or match them)
- Choice-making and communication

Examples:

- Snack or activity choices
- Behavior reminders
- Story sequencing
- Classroom jobs



Picture from Pocket of Preschool.

<https://pocketofpreschool.com/safe-place-or-cozy-corner-for-little-learners/>



# Setting up a Calming Space

## Posters and Wall Charts

Perfect for:

- Whole-class visuals that stay in one place
- Reinforcing routines, rules, and learning concepts
- Can be made with velcro and laminated cards so can be changed

Examples:

- Daily schedule
- Classroom rules
- Feelings chart
- Alphabet, numbers, shapes
- “How to calm down” steps

Tip: Use visuals at eye level for children and refer to them often during the day.



Picture from Pocket of Preschool.

<https://pocketofpreschool.com/safe-place-or-cozy-corner-for-little-learners/>

## DIY or Purchase Visual Supports?

### Where to Purchase Visuals

You can find ready-made visuals and resources on:

- Etsy – Search for printable classroom visuals and calm-down tools.
- Teachers Pay Teachers – Great for teacher-created visual supports and behavior charts.
- Pinterest – Browse for free ideas, templates, and inspiration.

Check out our Resources for suggestions or search for your own!

### How to DIY

Template Options:

- Use free templates or create your own in PowerPoint, Canva, or Word. Choose clear, simple images (real photos or clipart). Add large, easy-to-read text.
- Draw Your Own: Use markers or crayons to draw pictures. Let children help decorate to build ownership!

Materials You'll Need:

- Printer (or markers if drawing by hand)
- Cardstock or thick paper
- Laminator (or clear packing tape for durability)
- Scissors
- Velcro dots, magnets, or binder rings
- Hole punch (for ring visuals)
- Tape or sticky tack (for wall visuals)

# Setting up a Calming Space

## Step 3. Teach Children About the Space

Once your Cozy Area is set up and equipped with calming tools, it's essential to teach children how to use it effectively. This ensures the space is used as a tool for self-regulation, rather than as a time-out or escape from responsibilities, and helps children develop lifelong emotional skills.

### Introduce the Space During Calm Moments

- Introduce the Cozy Area when children are calm and engaged, not during a moment of distress.
- Use a group meeting or circle time to explain what the space is for and how it can help.

### Explain the Purpose

- “This is a space you can go to when you feel upset, overwhelmed, or just need a break.”
- Reinforce that it's a choice, not a punishment.

### Set Clear Expectations

- When to go: When feeling big emotions or needing a quiet moment.
- What to do: Use calming tools, sit quietly, or look at books.
- How to return: When ready, calmly rejoin the group and continue with classroom activities.

### Model the Process

- Role-play scenarios: “I’m feeling frustrated. I think I’ll go to the Cozy Corner and take some deep breaths.”
- Demonstrate how to use the tools you have provided: squeeze a stress ball, look at a book, or deep breathing .



# Setting up a Calming Space

## Teach Children About the Space

### A Sample Script to Help Explain the Calming Space to Preschoolers



“Friends, I want to show you a very special place in our classroom. It’s called the **Calming Space**. This is a quiet, comfy spot where you can go when your body or your feelings need a little break. Maybe you’re feeling sad, mad, tired, or just need some time to calm down—and that’s okay!”

“In the Calming Space, you can read a book, hug a stuffed animal, look at pictures, or take deep breaths. You can whisper to yourself or stay quiet like a little mouse. It’s a peaceful place just for you.”

“You can stay in the Calming Space until you feel ready to come back and join the group. If you ever need help, you can raise your hand or ask a teacher quietly. You’re welcome to bring a soft toy or a quiet activity from the shelf, but this space is just for one person at a time so everyone gets a chance to feel calm and safe.”

“Remember, everyone needs a break sometimes—even teachers! The Calming Space is here to help you feel better whenever you need it.”

# Possible Challenges with the Calming Space & Helpful Tips

## **More Than One Child Wants to Go**

Sometimes, several children may want to use the calming space at the same time. This could be a sign that the whole class might benefit from a calming group activity like deep breathing, stretching, or a quiet story.

## **The Corner is Being Used Too Much**

Initially, many children may want to leave their activities to visit the cozy area simply because it's new and exciting. That's normal! Over time, with gentle reminders that it's a space for calming down or taking a short break, the excitement should settle.

If a child is asking to go during every activity, they might be trying to avoid something that feels too hard or overwhelming. It might be helpful to examine those activities—are they too challenging, not engaging enough, or perhaps just not as inviting as the cozy space? If a child is still overusing the corner, you can use a timer to help each child take a short turn in the cozy space.

## **The Child Needs a Break, but Isn't Asking for One**

Gently approach the child and say something like, "It looks like your body needs a break." Offer the quiet corner as a calm, safe space and use visual cues or calming tools to help them settle. If possible, give them a choice (e.g., "Would you like to take a break or sit with me for a minute?"). Stay nearby if they need support, and when they're ready, invite them back to the group with encouragement.

# MORE RESOURCES



## Blogs and Websites with Low Cost or Free Resources

**Headstart - Visual Support:** <https://headstart.gov/children-disabilities/article/visual-supports>

**The Social Emotional Teacher:**  
[thesocialemotionalteacher.com/blog/](https://thesocialemotionalteacher.com/blog/)

**Pocket of Preschool:** <https://pocketofpreschool.com>

**PreKinders**  
[prekinders.com/calm-down-corner-printables-ideas-free/](https://prekinders.com/calm-down-corner-printables-ideas-free/)

**Such a Little While Blog**  
[www.suchalittlewhile.com/calm-down-corner-printables/](https://www.suchalittlewhile.com/calm-down-corner-printables/)

## Examples of Calming Sensory Items

- Beanbag Chair
- Rocker Chair

### Popper toys

- [Poppers for 1-3 year olds](#) - Amazon
- [Popper balls](#) - Amazon

### Squishy balls

- [6 pack of Squishy balls](#) - Amazon
- [Googly Puffer Ball Rubber Stretchy Spike Ball](#) - Amazon

### Monkey Noodles

- [5 pack of Monkey Noodles](#) - Amazon







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