



## **Walker Consulting**

### **A Guide for Families Setting Up and Using a Calming Area at Home**

*This guide has been developed by Walker Consulting and distributed to schools to share with families interested in improving their approaches to supporting the social-emotional-behavioral growth of their children at home. If you have any questions, please contact John Verre, Director of Consulting, Walker, Inc., [jverre@walkercares.org](mailto:jverre@walkercares.org)*

#### **What is a Calming Area?**

A calming space provides children the opportunity to calm during times of heightened emotions and behavior. A calming space is most useful for children who outwardly express and/or inwardly feel anger, frustration, anxiety or sadness through behavior (tantrums, aggression, emotional turmoil). This space provides children with an opportunity to calm their thoughts and reactions and regain emotional balance.

#### **Where and How to Set-up a Calming Area in your Home**

- The Calming Area should be a comfortable spot in your home. This is not a place of punishment but a safe, comforting place with familiar items. This should be an area not too separate so you can still see or hear your child, but a comfortable spot, easily reached by your child. It could be as simple as an area that has a bean bag chair, rocking chair, a man-made tent or even a large box filled with favorite stuffed animals. **What is most important is that the space is agreed upon by the family and used only for the purpose of calming.**
- Every calming area will look different, unique to a child's sense of comfort and calm – a favorite stuffed animal, special blanket, a special soft chair, small homemade tent or box which includes engaging, repetitive activities.
- **Examples of Items Found in a Calming Area:**
  - Visuals describing calming strategies - deep breathing sequence, choice board for calming
  - Manipulatives providing self-calming reminders and promoting independent use of space
  - Calming tools that focus on the child's specific sensory preferences (visual, auditory, tactile)
    - Mindfulness jars (empty soda bottles filled w/water, glitter, glue and sealed with superglue)
    - Books, magazines (with moveable parts 'Brown Bear Brown Bear' or textures)
    - Calming music and appropriate headphones
    - Soft items; e.g., bean bags, large pillows, rugs
    - Weighted items; e.g., blankets, neck wraps, balls, stuffed animals filled with rice
    - Movement furniture; e.g., rocking chair, sensory pillow
    - "Tight space"; e.g., small pop tent, tunnel, box

### **Preparing Your Child to Use the Calming Area**

- During a time when your child is calm, work with your child to decide what strategies work best during times of dysregulation. Explain to your child that what you learn will help in your creation of a calming area within the home.
- Practice or role-play the use of the space and review the reason for the calming area and how to use the space.
- If developmentally appropriate, engage your child in the creation of the calming area (location, look, feel, tools utilized, etc.).

#### **Important Reminders for Children:**

- The calming area is a tool to help a child become calm during times of big emotions.
- Using the calming area is a sign that the child is working on becoming calm and can be used by any member of the family.

### **The Calming Process**

A Calming Time may be initiated by either the child or an adult.

- If necessary, the adult provides a menu of calming tools (You may want to rotate the types of tools in the area to keep the area engaging to the children).
- The adult walks away to provide the child with space to calm. You may check in on the child, but the child should feel like they have the time and space they need to work on calming.
- When the child returns to the activity, the adult should positively reinforce the child celebrating their good choice and hard work.

#### **Final Thoughts:**

Calming strategies are necessary for children to learn and practice. Teaching your child to cope with extreme emotions will provide a lifelong skill.