Calm Down Kits

Creating a calm down kit is a great way to teach children of all ages how to manage their emotions, reduce anxiety, and self-soothe. They can be referred to by other names (anger toolkit, quiet time box, etc.) but are endlessly customizable and adaptable for each child (or adult) in the family.

WHAT IS IT?

The basic idea is to set aside a box, basket, bin, or some type of container filled with items or activities that are soothing.

Some ideas include:

- Crayons, pencils, and paper to draw or write about feelings, write an apology letter, or just scribble
- A soft toy, pillow, or blanket
- Sensory bottles (check online for some fun ideas!)
- Music (iPod or CD player pre-loaded with relaxing music)
- Play-doh
- Books (books about feelings are a nice way to help children learn about emotions and how to deal with them)
- Legos, puzzles, or other quiet activity that requires focus

The possibilities are endless! Check out Pinterest or other Internet blogs for additional ideas.

The age and developmental skill level of the child should be considered when choosing items to include. Things like Play-doh and Legos may be great for a 6-year-old, while a teenager may prefer to listen to music alone.

WHEN SHOULD MY CHILD USE IT?

A calm down kit can be used to de-escalate after a tantrum, settle down before bedtime, manage anxiety before school, or occupy a bored child.

HOW SHOULD IT BE USED?

Discuss with your child the signs that they are beginning to escalate, feel anxious, or feel stressed. Let them know that they are capable of coping with this, then share the calm-down kit with them.

Younger kids may need some practice with the kits. Stay nearby while they explore the items. Avoid suggesting which item/strategy to try unless you see an escalation in their anxiety and they need direction.
You may want to include both individual activities and joint activities in the calm down kit. The child can choose whether they want some alone time or if they want time with another person who can model calm behavior.

Calm down kits work well when placed in a room or area that is also soothing and minimally stimulating, such as a corner of the living room away from the TV, or in the bedroom. Kits can also be made portable and available in the car, at the doctor’s office, or anywhere else where a child might feel stressed or behavior problems occur.

HOW SHOULD IT NOT BE USED?

• DON’T use it as a punishment.

Calm down kits are meant to be a positive coping strategy for a child to use when they choose. Suggesting times it may be helpful is great, but forcing a child to use it is not helpful.

• DON’T get discouraged if kids forget to use it at first, or if some things don’t seem to help calm the child down.

It may take some time and practice for kids (and parents) to get the hang of it and find items/activities that work. Even things that work for a while may suddenly no longer be effective. Luckily the kit is versatile and can be changed to keep things fresh.

Ask your children if they would like a reminder to use the calm down kit and, if so, what/how they would like you to remind them (certain words or body language may be triggers that further upset a child and may result in their refusal to use the kit). If a child struggles with choosing an activity, limit the number of items to choose from.

• DON’T be afraid to think outside of the box.

If having a box of toys/items out all the time isn’t practical in your household, or to include items that don’t fit in the kit, write items or activities on slips of paper and place them in a jar for the child to choose one. Another idea that works well with younger children is to take pictures of the child using various calming items and place pictures in a photo album.

Calm down kits are meant to be flexible and easy to use, so get creative, explore ideas online, and find what works for your family!