

Calming & Grounding at School

Simple strategies to help children feel safe, settled and ready to learn.
Choose a few, practise when calm and adapt them to the individual child.



1 Notice early signs

Help the child recognise:

- Faster breathing or heartbeat.
- Tight muscles, hot face or shaky hands.
- Feeling restless, stuck, tearful or irritated.

Act early, before feelings become overwhelming.

3 Use the five senses

Quietly notice:

- 5 things you can see; 4 you can feel.
- 3 things you can hear; 2 you can smell.
- 1 thing you can taste or are grateful for.

Shorten the list if time or attention is limited.

5 Take a movement reset

Try a brief, purposeful movement:

- Wall pushes, stretching or chair push-ups.
- Carry books, deliver a message or get water.
- Walk to a planned quiet space and back.

Agree how movement breaks can be requested.

7 Use calm self-talk

Practise a short phrase:

- "I am safe. This feeling will pass."
- "I can do one small step at a time."
- "I can pause and ask for help."

Keep it on a card, bookmark or device.

9 Make asking for help easy

Agree a discreet way to communicate:

- A help card, coloured card, gesture or phrase.
- "I need a pause" or "Please repeat that."
- Offer choices: quiet space, water or movement?

Never require an explanation during overwhelm.

2 Breathe slowly

- Smell the flower; gently blow the candle.
- Breathe in for 3 and out for 4.
- Trace each finger: in going up, out going down.
- Keep shoulders relaxed; repeat 3-5 times.

Stop if focusing on breathing feels uncomfortable.

4 Feet, hands & muscles

- Press both feet firmly into the floor.
- Push palms together or hold the chair seat.
- Squeeze and release fists under the desk.
- Name three sensations: hard, cool, rough...

Deep pressure can help the body feel anchored.

6 Use sensory support

Depending on the child, try:

- Ear defenders, earplugs or a quieter seat.
- A discreet fidget, chew item or weighted lap pad.
- Cool water, a familiar scent or reduced lighting.

Check which tools soothe rather than distract.

8 Safe space & safe adult

- Identify a named adult and backup person.
- Agree a calm space before it is needed.
- Decide how long to pause and how to return.
- Use a calm voice, few words and no demands.

Connection and co-regulation come first.

10 Recover, reflect & return

Once the child is calm:

- Offer water, time and a predictable next step.
- Reduce work briefly; support a successful return.
- Later, notice what helped without blame.
- Update the plan and celebrate self-advocacy.

Regulate first. Reason later.

Regulation support is a need — not a reward, punishment or way to avoid reasonable adjustments.