



# Being Calm

## "Children SEE - Children DO"

### RIRO Resilience Activity Module for Parents & Children (birth to 7 years)

#### INTRODUCTION

This module contains fun activities for parents and children that promote resilience by supporting the ability to calm oneself which leads to emotional regulation. Each activity takes less than 20 minutes. The activities can be done "as is" or be accompanied by discussion about the importance of calming. This module complements the *Flexible Thinking*, *Positive Outlook* and *Understanding Feelings* modules.

#### RESOURCES in this MODULE

- **GRAB & GO** – activities for facilitators working with individual parents and children (pp. 1-2)
- **Group activities** – plus homework, other resiliency resources and engagement strategies (pp. 3-5)
- **Parent Tip Sheet** and **Poster** – parent handout with ideas on participation and helping.

#### KEY CONCEPTS

- Getting and staying calm is a skill that supports emotional regulation – a critical ability that supports resilience.
- Parents can coach children in deep breathing to relax themselves and gain control of their emotions.
- When parents model calmness in everyday life, children learn how to get and stay calm.
- Children, as well as adults, respond to the emotions and reactions of those around them. When adults remain calm, it helps children become calm in the moment.

#### MATERIALS NEEDED (depending on activity)

- Wads of paper of different sizes or cotton balls
- Bubble-making liquid and blower (see online for bubble making recipes)
- Parent Tip Sheet

#### PREPARATION/ ONLINE RESOURCES

[www.reachinginreachingout.com](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com) (RIRO professional resources)

<http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-parents-selfcontrol.htm>



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#### ACTIVITIES

While these are meant to be fun activities, parents may find it helpful if facilitators explain: 1) the role that calming has in the development of resilience, and 2) how children learn about calming and regulating emotions by watching their parents calm down in everyday life.

#### #1: "Three Deep Breaths"

##### Parent

- Show parent how to practice "three deep breaths" with full inhales and exhales.
  - Facilitator says: "Breathe IN, 1, 2, 3; Breathe OUT, 1, 2, 3" and repeats several times.
  - Facilitator gradually lengthens the time between breaths by counting more slowly.
- Ask parent to speak (in front of the child) about what the parent is doing and then comment on the difference in his/her bodily tension level.

## Parent and Child

- Have parent face the child and take three deep breaths together.
  - Facilitator says: “*Breathe IN, 1, 2, 3; Breathe OUT, 1, 2, 3*” and repeats several times.
  - Then parent is asked to speak the words as child and parent practice breathing together.
- Note: Blowing on the child's cheek may help the child pace his/her breathing.

## #2: “Cotton Ball Hockey”

### Parent and Child

- Use a cotton ball (or small paper wad) as the “puck.”
- Direct the parent and child to blow the puck across the table or floor.
- Have parent and child play a “hockey” variant:

*Option 1:* Parent and child can be across from each other and take turns trying to get “a goal” by blowing the puck into the other's hands (or other defined spot on opposite ends).

*Option 2:* Parent and child can work together to blow puck toward a certain target. (They can be next to each other, or across from each other, blowing toward a point away from them.)

## #3: “Blowing a Balloon”

### Parent / Parent and child

- Tell parent and/or child:
  - “*Pretend you are blowing up a balloon.*”
  - “*Start with arms at your side.*”
  - “*Make the bubble bigger and bigger with each breath and raise your arms over your head until they make a circle.*”
  - “*For the last breath, when your arms are in a big circle, give a BIG sigh as your arms go slowly down and your balloon deflates.*”

## #4: “Parent and Infant Activities”

### Parent and child

*Option 1:* Ask parent to:

- Hold infant on parent's chest and breathe slowly for two minutes.
- Ask parent to notice if the infant becomes calmer.

*Option 2:* Ask parent to:

- Breathe while looking into the infant's eyes.
- Breathe out gently on different parts of the infant's body (hands, feet, tummy, cheeks, tops of the head) and then smile (for toddlers, you can also name the body parts).



**NOTE: Encourage parents to make sure that they and their children get enough sleep.** Research suggests that adding as little as a half hour to children's sleep times can help increase self-regulation, alertness and school performance and decrease irritability, impulsiveness and restless behaviour. Here are some general guidelines for children and adults: infants 14-16 hours, toddlers 12-14 hours, school-age 10-12 hours, teens 8-9 hours and adults 7-9 hours. For more information, here are links for the Canadian Pediatric Society and the Mayo Clinic

[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/healthy\\_sleep\\_for\\_your\\_baby\\_and\\_child](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/healthy_sleep_for_your_baby_and_child)  
[www.mayoclinic.com/health/how-many-hours-of-sleep-are-enough/AN01487](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/how-many-hours-of-sleep-are-enough/AN01487)

## GROUP ACTIVITIES

*NOTE: These group activities are designed for professionals and paraprofessionals who have completed RIRO Resiliency Skills Training Program and who have group facilitation experience.*

### Parent group (no children present)

- Talk about the importance of controlled breathing in becoming and staying calm.
- Direct parents to notice their own tension levels.
- Then lead them through “Three Deep Breaths” exercise on pp. 1-2.
- Ask them to notice the change in their tension level.
- Have group members discuss any differences they feel in their bodies. (optional)
- Facilitate discussion on different ways to help children breathe deeply. Use parent examples and add other suggestions (see “Take Home” options).
- Emphasize the importance of deep breathing and role modeling it with children.
- If time allows, and group is able, discuss situations where three deep breaths can help.

### Parent-child group

- Set up different stations with activities – blow pretend balloons, bubbles or play cotton ball hockey.
- Have parent-child dyads rotate through the activities OR have parent-child dyads all do the same activity at the same time. *(Option 1 encourages movement and underlines that there are different choices at the same time, while Option 2 may have less potential for chaos!)*
- While participants are doing the activities, facilitator may encourage parents to enjoy the activity, be aware of role modeling opportunities, and watch for how the children respond *(especially positive responses)*.
- After activities, make a statement about the importance of breathing in staying calm and thinking effectively. *(Explain the physiological reason why breathing helps us calm down, if appropriate.)*
- Have parents practice three deep breaths with their children while facilitator points out how deep breathing calms us and what a difference just three breaths is making in the children and parents.

### Facilitators’ suggestions

- Works best with children over 2 years and approximately the same age.
- May need to plan to use alternate activities and “Take Home” ideas for a full session.
- Lead parents through the list of activities on the Parent Tip Sheet (Being Calm).
- Encourage parents to put poster on fridge or other highly visible space to remind them to deep breathe.

### TAKE HOME OPTIONS (for individual parents or groups)

- Do “Three Deep Breaths” before each meal, at bedtime or during transition times during the day.
  - Have preschoolers practice with and without actions (e.g., blowing up a balloon).
  - Parents can explain to older children that they can choose when they want to make a great big balloon and when they want to keep it small. Parents can demonstrate by making a circle with their arms raised over their heads.
- For more resilience building, think of things parent can say along with the deep breathing to calm him/herself, support a positive outlook, increase understanding or to keep trying, e.g.,
  - *“I can stay calm. It’s not the end of the world.”*
  - *“Things will work out.”*

- *"I can do it."*
  - *"This will only last a short time."*
  - *"Just stop and breathe."*
  - *"I'll figure this out."*
- Have parents experiment and find what helps them and their children feel calm and in charge of their emotions. Then make a list of things that help such as:
    - a certain tone of voice
    - movements
    - thoughts
    - colors
    - visualization or stories
    - scheduling rest, play or food
    - activities (exercise, sports, creative hobbies, etc.)
    - certain people

### THINGS PARENTS CAN SAY TO THEIR CHILDREN

- *"Let's..."*
    - *practice being peaceful*
    - *pause a bit*
    - *cool off*
    - *relax*
    - *take it easy*
    - *stop and breathe*
  - *be very quiet*
  - *settle our spirit*
  - *get still inside*
  - *be cool as a cucumber*
  - *keep slow*
  - *breathe slower*
- *"I'll stay calm."*
  - *"Things will work."*
  - *"You can do it."*
  - *"This will only last a short while."*
  - *"We'll figure this out."*



(Ask parents what other ways they can think of to talk about getting and staying calm.)

### SUGGESTED OPENINGS/ APPROACHES with PARENTS and CHILDREN

#### Role modeling...

Role model with parent (example):

- *"I have had such a busy day, I need to just focus (or calm myself) a moment. (Then do deep breathing 3 times). Good, now I can think better /pay attention better/ feel better/ decide more easily."*

Role model with parent and child (varies depending on child's age)

- Hold infant and breathe while parent watches facilitator.
- Have toddler imitate parent's breathing (perhaps after imitating other actions).

#### Questions you could ask...

- *"How does your child calm him/herself?"*
- *"What have you found that helps keep your child calm?"*
- *"Do you know that you can really help your child get and stay calm by showing him/her how to breathe deeply?"*

#### Things you could say...

- *"Research shows that children think better when their body is calm. Being able to calm ourselves helps us recover from difficult experiences. One of the best ways to calm our body and mind is to breathe*

*deeply. It is something that can be done anywhere, any time. Let's practice, and then let's see if we can get your child to try it, and then I'll show you some games you can play together that help calm children."*

### **Things you could point out...**

- Ask parent to notice the difference in tension level inside his/her body after three deep breaths.
- Point out changes in breathing or tension level in parent and child.
- Use "descriptive feedback" and modeling to support calming, flexible thinking, helping, and accepting mistakes.
- Getting down at a child's level and deep breathing will encourage the child to deep breathe, too.

NOTE: Many people who believe that deep breathing doesn't help them are those who inhale very quickly and shallowly and exhale the same way. Explain that it is the slow inhalation and exhalation that really helps to calm us, especially exhaling.

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

#### **Books**

- RIRO's online "Children's Booklists" to support resilience:  
<http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-booksKids.htm>
- Selected children's storybooks about calming:

Bang, M., **When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry** (1999)

*A young girl finds that being in nature can calm and distract her from intense, angry feelings. This is a good source to talk about anger and brainstorm ways to handle it in helpful ways.*

(Recommended for children 2.5 yrs.+)

Carle, E., **Little Cloud** (1996)

*It's calming to watch different pictures and shapes formed by moving clouds.* (Recommended for children 1yrs.+)

Collins, L., **Maisy Goes to the Library** (2005)

*Maisy's planned quiet time at the library is interrupted when she and her friends laugh together at an uproariously funny book. But then, Maisy calms herself down and follows through with her quiet-time plan.* (Recommended for children 2 yrs.+)

Lite, L., **A Boy and A Bear** (1996)

*A boy and a polar bear share a friendship and learn how to relax together.* (Recommended for children 2 yrs.+)

Lionni, L., **Frederick** (1967)

*The story demonstrates acceptance of different people's strengths and contributions and highlighting visualization as a useful coping strategy in times of stress.* (Recommended for children 4 yrs.+)

Kahn, R., **Ruler of the Courtyard** (2003)

*Set in Pakistan, the story tells of a young girl who harnesses her courage and calms herself so she can conquer her fear of the courtyard animals.* (Recommended for children 4 yrs.+)

McCain, B.R., **Grandmother's Dreamcatcher** (1998)

*Kimmy is nervous about being without her parents for a week while they look for a new place to live. But her Grandmother helps Kimmy make a dreamcatcher to conquer her fears and bring her sweet dreams.* (Recommended for children 3 yrs.+)



# Being Calm

When parents are calm, children learn to calm themselves, too.  
Staying calm helps us handle life's challenges.

## SHARE “being calm” with your child...

- **Do calming activities together**
  - Take deep breaths together. *“Breathe in while I count to 3. Now breathe out while I count to 3.”*
  - Pretend to blow up a balloon.
  - Blow a cotton ball across a table.
- **Point out when your child is being calm**
  - *“I see that you are breathing slowly. You look calm.”*
  - *“Holding your stuffed animal helps you calm down, doesn't it”.*
  - *“Your face looks relaxed – you are staying calm.”*
- **Talk about being calm**
  - *“Let's take some deep breaths together before we go outside.”*
  - *“I feel so much better after I have taken a few big breaths.”*



## ASK your child about being calm...

- *“You took some big breaths in and out. How do you feel now?”*
- *“Let's think together. What are some things that help us stay calm?”*

## PAUSE and THINK about calming throughout the day...

- First thing in the morning
- At bedtime
- Before and during a new activity
- When you're frustrated or anxious.
- When you are in a hurry.

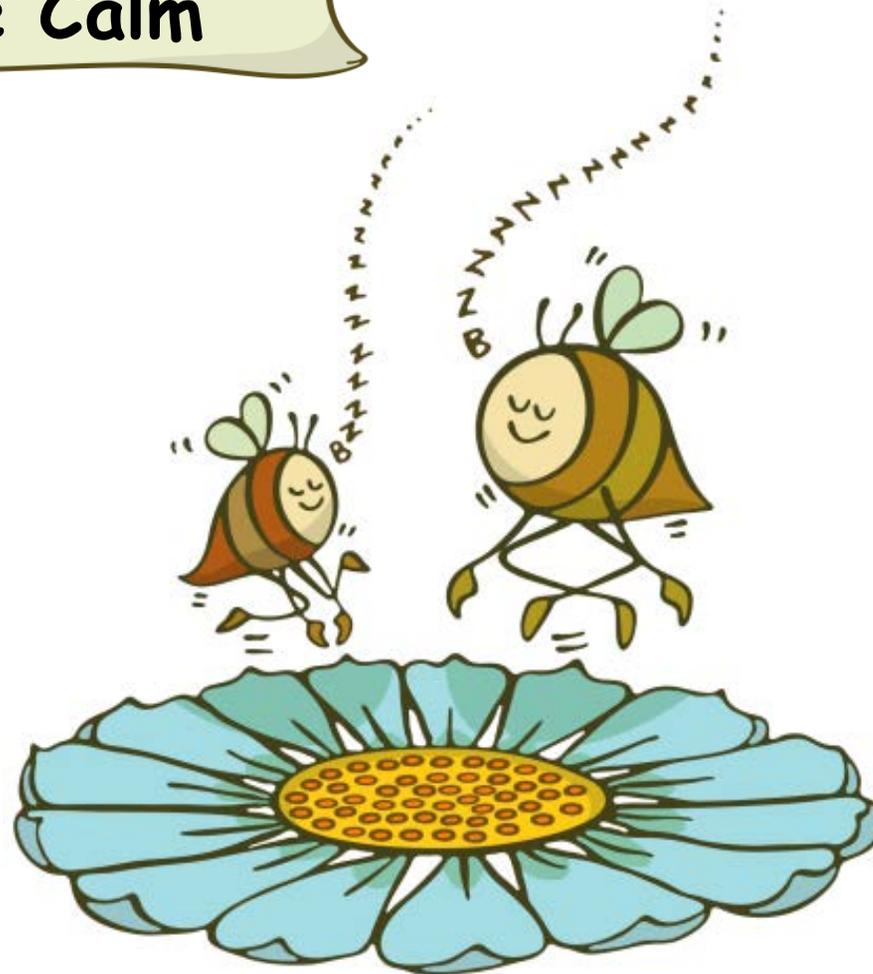


## AND babies and toddlers, too!

- Let your little one watch you taking deep breaths.
- Gently blow your breath out slowly into your little one's face. Then smile.
- Hold your baby chest-to-chest and breathe slowly for a few minutes – your baby will feel calmer, too.

**More FREE online resources to build your child's resilience**

[www.reachinginreachingout.com/parents](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/parents) (videos, books, parent stories, articles, newsletter and more)



Take Deep Breaths!