

Hot as a chilli – using the garden to calm down

Many of the methods described above are also appropriate to calm children with heightened emotions.

Managing big emotions –

1. Remind myself it never okay to hurt others
2. Take 3 deep breaths or go into your head and count to 10
3. I need to use my words to explain how I feel and what I want to happen
4. Ask for help to solve the problem
5. Take time to calm down

8 ways of getting students to calm down

Explicitly teaching students to use these techniques will give them strategies to use whenever they are feeling angry

- Take a deep breath – breathing deeply helps your body relax and calm down more quickly, especially when you are angry.
- Count to 5 – count to 5 slowly, either aloud or in your head. It will give you time to stop and think before you react to something that made you feel angry. This helps you learn to control your impulses.
- Blow into your hands – Take a deep breath and blow onto your hands. This will give messages about the strength of your breath back to your brain and help you relax as you concentrate on your breathing.
- Put your hands in your pockets
- Make a fist and relax it – squeeze your hands tightly shut and then relax them. It will help to let go of the tension you are holding in your body because you got upset.
- Acknowledge the triggers – it is really helpful to understand what happens to your body when you get angry. Think about what your face feels like and where you can feel tension in your body.
- Do a body scan – start at your head and slowly focus on each part of the body, moving down to your toes. When you find an area of tension, stop and relax those muscles for a moment before you carry on.
- Ask for a hug – when you feel like one, a hug can make everything better. Ask someone you feel comfortable with to give you one. Adults: use your common sense and school policies to guide you here before recommending this one.

Often asking an upset child to take a **deep breath** is too hard. You can use the outside area to help them do this as a specific activity. Pick a piece of grass or pick up a leaf, lay it on a flat hand and blow it off with the biggest breath. Slow your breath and try different types of breath. Repeat until the effect of deep breathing is reached.

Scrunching **dry leaves** is a great stress release or calm down activity for students who need it. The scrunched leaves can be added to the compost. If this is something worthwhile in your school, students can collect leaves from the playground or field and they can be stored near the compost bin in a wire cage or open air bin.

Using a **parachute** or a piece of fabric, cover the surface in leaves. Get several students hold the corners and move the parachute up and down vigorously, tossing the leaves into the air. The leaves can symbolize tensions or anger that you are getting rid of.

Cool as a Cucumber, Hot as a Chilli Mindfulness Ideas for all school staff to use the garden as a space of calm

Heavy Work – using the large muscle groups in the body (think quads and biceps) not only works the muscles and joints, it stimulates the proprioceptive receptors which give us our sense of body awareness, how it relates to space, how it moves and how the different parts are related, helping to develop gross motor skills. Most importantly for many students though, it can regulate the neurologic system and activate the organising centres of the brain resulting in a calm and focused brain and body.

Students who need it will benefit from the sensory input of engaging the large muscle groups by carrying something heavy. It might be filling a bucket or watering can with water and watering the garden, hammering in posts, or filling the wheelbarrow with something heavy that needs to be moved. Raking leaves, digging and moving soil or compost are more heavy work activities, and even bending at the hip to check seedlings or reaching up to touch the branches of a tree.

Of course, it is important to make sure that students are using safe practices to do heavy work. Make sure they are using their backs safely and that heavy work is at a weight that they can handle!

See here for more information:

<https://kidsgrowingstrong.org/proprioception/>

Working with soil not only enhances the tactile system but also exposes the body to bacteria that develops the immune system. It has been proven to improve mood and decrease anxiety. Students can dig or sieve soil, turn compost, or even just get their hands dirty. Feeling and rubbing different plant parts can give some students a rewarding tactile experience.

Glitter jar – Fill a clear plastic bottle or jar $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way with water. Fill the rest with clear glue or a tube of glitter glue, glitter and a few drops of food colouring. Put the lid on. You might like to tape it on so it won't get opened accidentally. When a student needs to calm down, get them to shake their anger into the jar, then out the jar down and focus closely on the glitter. The glitter will swirl like the student's own whirling thoughts. As the glitter slows down and settles the student should slow their breathing down and settle their emotions. You might like to keep the glitter jar somewhere safe and easy to access in the garden space for the times they need some time out.

Sensory input: give a big tree a really tight hug. Grip really tight and tell it why you are feeling angry. If you can, breathe out and leave the feeling with the tree. The tree can breathe the anger into the air when you have gone.