How to Use Calming Cards

An important tool in children’s ‘social emotional’ coping toolbox is the ability to monitor “big” feelings such as anger, sadness and worry and be able to change thoughts to increase feelings of relaxation and wellbeing. Of course this can be a very difficult skill for children and adults alike to master!

Calming cards can be used as a way of helping young children or children with cognitive delays learn to use ‘calming activities’.

Calming cards are small index cards, which contain a picture describing an activity the child can do that will help them feel better, if they are feeling sad, worried or angry. For example;

What sorts of things are helpful to put onto a calming card?

- Visuals to assist your child in understanding when they are experiencing a big feeling (e.g. pictures of different emotions)
- A reminder of a calming skill (for example, I can do bubble breaths, I can stomp my feet, I can find a quiet place).

Calming cards can be worn on key rings and kept in the child’s pocket, or multiple copies can be made and kept at home, in the kinder bag, etc. Calming cards need to be accessible. To begin with an adult can show the child how they are feeling and what they can do to feel better.

How to do it!

1. **Make sure your child is involved.** In order for calming cards to be most useful, each child needs to feel that the calming skills are helpful for them. This is more likely to occur if the child has participated in identifying and developing the skills depicted.

2. **Make it fun!** Children can decorate the cards and have fun making the cards their own (stickers, sparkles, colour, etc.)

3. **Fade the prompts.** All children will vary as to whether they need to be prompted to use their calming cards, (for example, some may need a verbal prompt “Sandra you look like you’re feeling sad that you didn’t win the lucky dip prize. Can you think of something you can do to feel better?” You may then offer to go through the calming cards together or show them one you know they like). Other children may be able to refer to their cards very quickly without reminding. It can be helpful to keep in mind that as children show they are more confident using their cards to manage challenging emotions, your role in prompting them to use the cards, can be ‘faded’ or reduced.

4. **Remember to use lots of praise!** Whichever stage your child is at, whether they can use the cards independently or they need adult assistance, it is important to use lots of praise whenever your child attempts to manage their own emotional responses to situations.

Prepared and Collated by the Education Program for Infants & Children Inc. Visit www.epic.edu.au for resources and training information.