



## Making a Calming Box

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### THEORY

Expanding upon the metaphorical toolkit idea, this activity gives group members the opportunity to create a tangible calming box. Using actual objects that serve to distract and self-soothe are great for both children and adults in times of distress. **It is one thing to think about something, but another to provide an alternate activity or tangible soothing touchstone.** Tangible objects are especially helpful in times of emotional upset to give immediate comfort and can serve as a distraction, as well as offering alternative activities.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Supply boxes for each group member, or have them bring in their own. Boxes can be purchased reasonably at craft supply stores and even a dollar store. Small shoeboxes can also be used.

Introduce the activity by saying that in times of anger or any other emotional distress, having tangible reminders of life skills learned in the group will help them control their anger or other intense emotions.

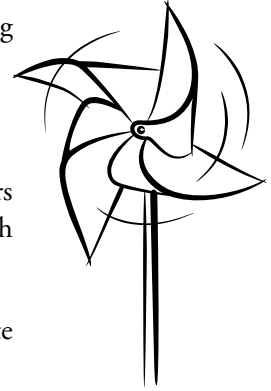
Have a variety of objects on a table in the middle of the room, and go over with the group how these items can help soothe them. This can be a fun brainstorming activity, as there are no right or wrong answers.

Examples include:

- **Deck of Cards, Crossword Puzzles or Sudoku** – Rather than being just symbolic, these objects in the box can provide alternate activities to cope with upsetting events.
- **Stress Ball** – Serves as reminder that a stress ball is like a stress resilient personality - it retains its shape, it is soft, it has no rough edges and it always bounces back – and it feels good to squeeze!
- **A Hershey Kiss** – Reminds us being kind is more important than to be right and is yummy to eat!
- **Glitter Calming Jar** – A glitter calming jar, made up of water, glitter and glue, can be great resource to help calm and settle our minds while the glitter settles to the bottom slowly after the jar is shaken (many recipes can be found on the internet).
- **A Journal** – Having a “go to” place to write out our thoughts in times of crises can help us stay calm and process emotions in a healthy way. It also helps to look over past entries to develop a healthy perspective.
- **A Smiley Sticker** – Helps us remember to stay positive and optimistic and look at the brighter side of a situation.
- **Small Toy Kaleidoscope** – Watch the colors change and turn. It can be very calming!
- **Bubbles** – Encourages deep breathing while blowing bubbles and watching them disappear.



- **Pinwheel** – Helps to focus on our breath as we blow slowly to turn the wheel by blowing slowly
- **Small Play Dough** – Good sensory outlet that you can mold and shape
- **Notecards with Pencils and Crayons** – Group members can draw some other reminders that have meaning or them, or even write some calming messages to themselves which basically serves as coping cards.
- **Decorative Note** – If time allows, you can have magazines, scissors and glue to decorate the box and even their notecards.



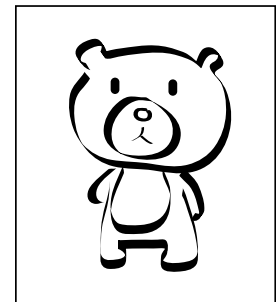
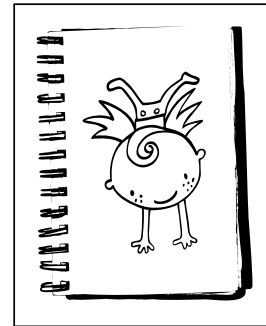
Encourage them to find other objects for their boxes when they go home that can offer them more resources when they need to “calm down.”

### **Calming Boxes for Kids**

When making calming boxes with children, you can use the following ideas to help children reflect on what they need to soothe themselves in times of distress. This will help them self-soothe in times of emotional arousal instead of acting out or acting impulsively.

Here are some ideas of things you might find calms kids down:

- **Personal photos** – as a baby, family members, friends and /or pets
- **An activity book** – word games, brainteasers, or Sudoku
- **A healthy snack** – like a granola bar or piece of fruit
- **Paper and pencil** – to write down thoughts
- **A favorite book**
- **Legos** – to build something
- **A bottle of bubbles** – to help breath deeply and slowly
- **A kaleidoscope** – to watch the changing design and embrace change
- **A glitter calming jar** – shake it up, and watch it settle
- **A balloon** – to blow up, tie and watch it float in the air
- **A stress ball** – to squeeze and bounce
- **A stuffed animal** – to hug
- **A deck of cards** – to play games like memory and solitaire



### **PROCESSING**

During this activity, encourage sharing of ideas among group members. Sharing ideas of what is soothing can be quite therapeutic in itself. At the end of the project, have members share with the group what they chose to put in their boxes, and discuss how their items will be used in times of distress. Periodically ask for feedback in subsequent group sessions on how they are using their calming boxes.