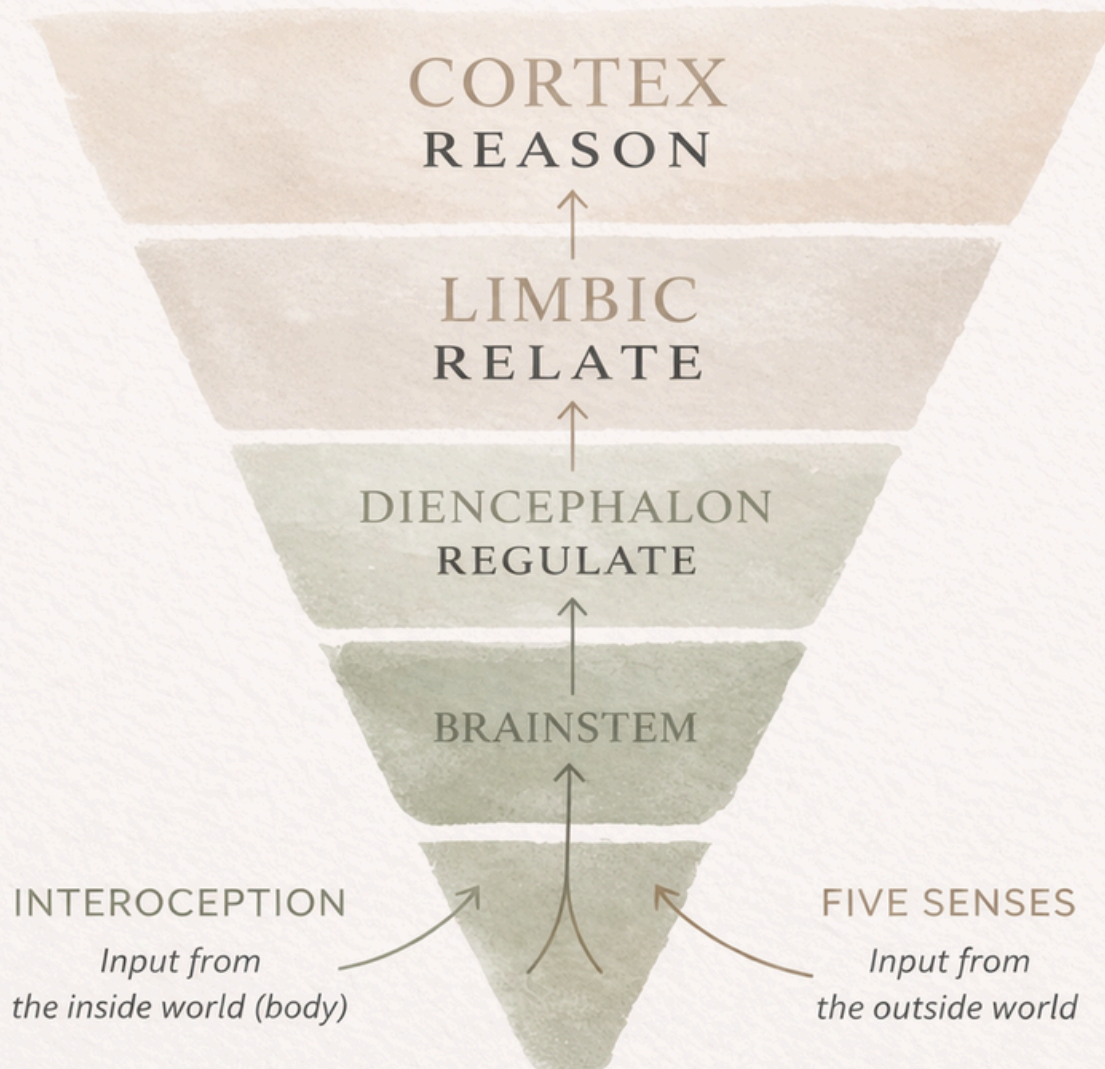


A CALMING TOOLKIT

for christian families



The Brain's Sequence of Engagement

Breathing: Slow Down the Nervous System

Breathing techniques are foundational for emotional regulation because they directly calm the nervous system. Slow, deep breaths signal safety to the brain and help move us out of fight-or-flight. For kids, learning to use their breath becomes a portable superpower—always available, no tools required.

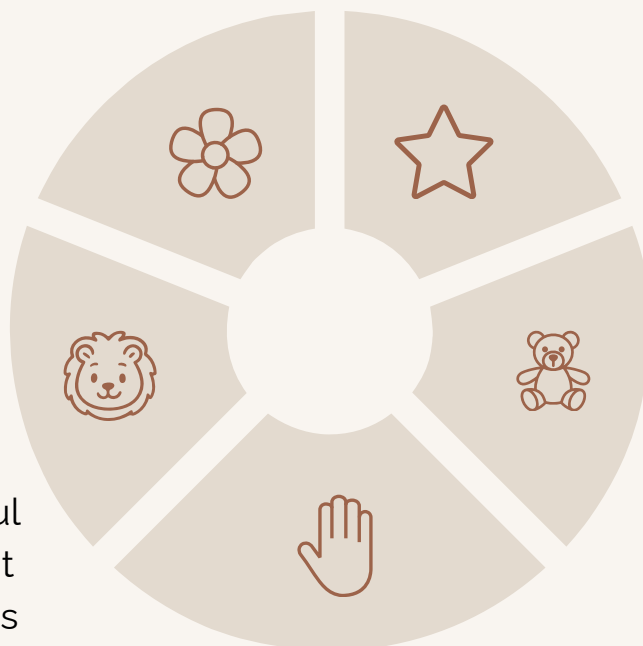
The key is keeping breathing engaging and concrete for young children. That's why these techniques use imagery and play. Instead of saying “take a deep breath,” we invite them to smell flowers, blow blow dandelions, or trace shapes. These playful approaches make breathing feel fun, not forced. And remember to model it—children learn regulation by watching us regulate.



Smell the Flower

Breathe in slowly through nose, blow the dandelion gently through mouth

Lion's Breath
Big inhale, then forceful exhale with tongue out and silly face—releases tension



Shape Breathing

Trace a triangle, box, rainbow, or star in the air while breathing along each side

Teddy Breathing

Place stuffed animal on belly, watch it rise and fall with each breath

Finger Tracing

Trace each finger while inhaling up one side, exhaling down the other

Nature: Reset with God's Creation



Stepping into God's creation has a calming power all its own. Even brief moments outdoors—fresh air, natural light, the feel of the earth—can shift the energy in your home and soothe the nervous system. For kids, nature sparks sensory wonder that helps them settle without pressure. Watch clouds, listen for birds, or collect leaves—simple moments that ground you in God's presence and put big feelings in perspective.

Barefoot Connection

Step outside barefoot for 30 seconds and feel the ground beneath your feet for instant grounding

Sensory Scavenger Hunt

Find 5 cool objects outside, listen for 4 nature sounds, touch 3 different textures, smell 2 flowers, taste 1 herb (or snack!)

Cloud Watching

Lie on a blanket and watch clouds drift by. Practice being present without needing to do anything

Sunshine Pause

Sit in the sun for one full minute, feeling warmth on your face for simple but powerful reset

Nature Collection

Pick up rocks, leaves, or sticks and sort by size or color—engages focus and curiosity

Water & Bubbles

Let your child watch water swirl or bubbles float through the air. These rhythmic movements help restore calm

Grounding & Sensory: Help the Brain Recenter

When emotions are overwhelming, the brain can feel scattered and chaotic. Grounding techniques bring us back to the present moment by engaging our senses. These strategies work because they interrupt the cycle of escalating thoughts and feelings by focusing attention on physical sensations. For both children and adults, sensory input can be remarkably calming—especially when we intentionally choose sensations that feel soothing and safe.



Cold Sensations

Hold ice pack or suck on ice



Cozy Wrap

Wrap up like a burrito in a soft blanket

Crunchy Snack

Chew carrots, pretzels, or apples



Warm Water

Wash hands slowly, watch the flow



Sensory Basket Ideas

- Smooth river rock to hold
- Soft cloth or velvet piece
- Scented lotion or essential oil
- Weighted lap pad or heavy book
- Squishy stress ball

Keep a simple “calm basket” of sensory items nearby so your child can choose what their body needs to feel calm.

Quiet Reset Ideas: When Overwhelm Is High

Sometimes the best thing you can do is reduce stimulation entirely. When overwhelm peaks—for your child or for you—a calm, quiet environment can make all the difference. These strategies dial down sensory input, slow the pace, and give the brain and body a chance to reset. Think of it as gently pressing pause on the chaos.



Quiet resets aren't punishments or time-outs; they're intentional moments of rest. Dim the lights, add soft worship music, or build a cozy blanket fort. Offer noise-canceling headphones, read a short story, or look through a favorite photo book. These still moments teach children that rest is a wise and healthy response to overwhelm.

Read or Look at Pictures



Snuggle together and read a favorite story (or 3!), look at baby pictures or photo album together.

Sensory Break



Noise-canceling headphones and a cozy corner give space for nerves to settle

Soft Music



Play gentle worship music or calming instrumental sounds in the background

Dim Lighting



Lower the lights and create a soft lamp + blanket fort for a calming retreat

Sensory Jar



Watch glitter jar slowly settle—mesmerizing and calming for anxious minds

Comfort Check-In



Stuffed animal "comfort check" where child shares feelings with their special friend

Creativity: Express Emotions Through Art

Creativity gives children a safe way to express feelings they don't yet have words for. When we invite them to draw, build, or create their emotions, we're helping them process what's happening inside their hearts. Art removes the pressure to communicate perfectly and lets emotions flow naturally—especially helpful for little ones still developing their emotional vocabulary.

These activities are intentionally low-pressure and focused on the process, not the final product. There's no right or wrong way to draw a feeling or build with blocks. The goal isn't beauty—it's expression and release. Keep simple supplies accessible so you can easily shift to creativity when emotions rise.



Drawing & Painting

Crayons, paper, or finger painting to explore feelings. Ask: "What color is sad? Is angry spiky?"



Tactile Expression

Playdough or kinetic sand for squishing and shaping emotions into forms.



Building Blocks

Use blocks or Legos to build together. Follow your child's creativity or help them build what their feeling.



Rip and Repair

Tear scrap paper during frustration, then glue pieces into art—a metaphor for hard things becoming beautiful.



Feelings Puppets

Make a paper bag puppet or draw faces to represent different emotions and tell their stories.



Chalk Art

Draw your mood outside with chalk, then wash it away with water—a powerful illustration that emotions are temporary.

Movement: Release Stress & Reset the Body

When big emotions arise, the body holds tension that words alone can't release. Movement is one of the fastest ways to help both you and your child regulate. Physical activity releases built-up stress hormones, gets oxygen flowing to the brain, and provides a healthy outlet for overwhelming feelings. These activities are quick, require no special equipment, and can be done anywhere in your home.



The beauty of movement-based regulation is that it works for all ages. Whether your toddler needs to burn off some energy or you need to shake off your own frustration, these simple activities create space for everyone to reset. Try choosing one or two favorites to use consistently, so your child begins to recognize them as helpful tools.



Quick Energy Bursts

- Do 10 jumping jacks together
- "Shake it out" dance break or freeze dance
- Animal walks: bear crawl, crab walk, frog hops



Gentle Movement

- Slow-motion walk & freeze (try taking turns holding the "remote")
- Gentle yoga: cat/cow, child's pose
- Stretch + freeze game



Team Work Fun

- Exercise together (Youtube: DannyGo, Miss Linky or BeWellPlayed)
- Carry something heavy (laundry basket, books, small weights)
- Play Follow the Leader

Fun & Play: Connect Before You Correct



In the middle of a meltdown, your child doesn't need a lecture—they need connection. Play is one of the fastest ways to rebuild emotional safety. When you meet your child with gentle, playful energy—even a bit of rough-and-tumble play if it fits the moment—you're saying, "I'm on your team, even when things are hard."

Remember: connect before you correct. A quick pillow fight, silly chase, or wiggle war might feel counterintuitive, but connecting to your child's energy with play helps regulate their nervous system first. Once that connection is restored, they're much more open to guidance and boundaries.

2-Minute Pillow Fight

Release tension through safe, playful throwing

Chase Game

Playful tag or hide-and-seek countdown to reset the mood

Tickle Monster

Nothing brings out the laughs and fun quite like tickling!

Push Against or Wrestle

Invite your child to push against your hands or wrestle you down.

Wiggle War

Who can wiggle the silliest? Laughter changes everything

Copycat Game

Mimic each other for 1 minute—builds attunement

Connection Practices: Soothing Togetherness



The most powerful regulation tool you have is your own calm presence. Children co-regulate with the adults around them, so when you stay grounded and connected, you become an anchor for their overwhelmed nervous system. Instead of sending your child away to “calm down” alone, these practices invite you to move toward them with compassion—addressing the emotional need first, then the behavior.

Simple phrases like “Come sit with me” shift the dynamic from isolation to safety. Eye contact, gentle touch, and co-regulation through breathing or rocking can de-escalate a moment far faster than a time-out. A 20-second hug releases oxytocin in both of you, literally regulating your nervous systems together.

1 Invite Closeness

“Come sit with me” instead of “Calm down”: move toward connection, not isolation

2 Physical Co-Regulation

Rock in a chair together or gentle swaying where your calm becomes their calm

3 Speak Their Story

Naming their experience as a story validates and helps them feel understood

4 Big Long Hugs

Long hugs releases oxytocin and regulates nervous systems—science meets love

5 Pray Together

Invite God’s peace and presence into the moment and model dependence on Him

Do You Desire a More Peaceful Home?



These tools are just the beginning. If this guide has been helpful, there's so much more available to support you. Emotional regulation isn't just about managing behavior—it's about creating a home where everyone feels seen, safe, and connected. It's parenting from peace instead of reactivity and helping children navigate their emotions with God's help.

Imagine a home where meltdowns don't derail your day, where you have practical tools and a Christ-centered framework to guide you. Where connection comes before correction, and peace becomes something you intentionally cultivate—moment by moment. That's the fruit of doing this work.



Coaching & Support

Get personalized guidance tailored to your family's unique needs and challenges



Christ-Centered Framework

Tools rooted in both science and scripture for lasting transformation



Community Connection

Community Connection
Join other parents on the same journey toward peaceful homes

Ready to take the next step? Visit www.listeninghearts.family/join to learn more about programs, resources, and coaching designed specifically for Christian parents seeking emotional regulation and deeper connection with their children.