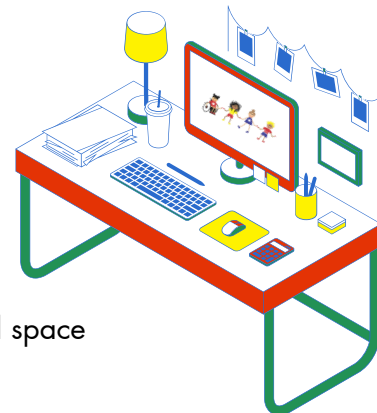


FROM THE DESK OF DR. JOHNSON, R. PSYCH.

CHILL SPOT, QUIET SPOT, CALMING CORNER OR PEACE CORNER:

A Place for Kids to Have Some Quiet Time to Relax and Regulate

by Dr. R. C. Johnson, R. Psych.



Every child experiences stress, overstimulation, and intense emotions, and learning to cope with these daily challenges can be difficult.

One effective way to help children find balance and calm is by providing a personal space for regulation and relaxation. This concept is similar to the Montessori Peace Corner, which offers children a safe and calming environment to reflect on their emotions, process their thoughts, and practice mindfulness. Drawing from my professional reading and experience with children and their families, I have adapted the Montessori idea to serve additional purposes. For instance, a space where a child can take a break after a busy school day—what I call a Cozy Corner—allows them to process their experiences, relax, and recharge for the remainder of the day. Additionally, this area can function as a Chill Spot, where children can work through their emotions and calm their bodies. This single space can effectively support multiple needs.

This Spot or Corner should be a private space where your child feels safe and secure. While it's often set up in a child's bedroom, I encourage families to consider other quiet, semi-private areas of the home if the bedroom isn't ideal. The key is finding a calming location, and there's no wrong choice as long as it provides a peaceful environment.

This space should include tools, resources, and comforting items that help a child relax, regulate their emotions, and calm both their body and mind. The Spot or Corner can serve many purposes, such as:

- A special place for a child to cope with their feelings
- A space to release built-up emotions
- A quiet refuge when the house or life gets too busy or noisy
- A retreat from the demands of the outside world
- A place where a child can prepare their brain for thinking and learning
- A calming area for when a child feels overwhelmed or upset
- A suggested break spot when a child needs to step away

When creating this "Chill Spot" or "Cozy Corner" (or another name that resonates with your child), it's important to consider their individual needs and characteristics. The design should be a collaborative effort between parent(s) and child to make it personal and effective.

In this space, a child should have access to tools that help them manage their needs. All items in the Spot or Corner must be safe for the child to use independently and pose no potential risks. Here are some suggestions:

GROUNDING ITEMS

- **Pillows:** Provide soft, comforting pressure that can be used to create a cozy, safe space. Hugging or lying on pillows can offer tactile input, which helps children feel more secure and calm. The softness also encourages relaxation, making it easier to reduce anxiety and focus on self-regulation.
- **Weighted lap cushion or weighted stuffed animal:** Provides calming pressure to help reduce anxiety and promote a sense of security.
- **Calming weighted lap pad/desk:** Offers calming pressure to help reduce anxiety.
- **Weighted vest or pressure vest:** Delivers deep pressure stimulation, which can aid in self-regulation and focus; best used with guidance from an occupational therapist.
- **Regular stuffed animals:** Provide comfort and can be hugged or cuddled to help soothe feelings.
- **Stretchy resistance bands:** Useful for sensory input and gross motor work, promoting focus and relieving excess energy.
- **Body sock:** Offers a snug, calming experience that helps promote body awareness and self-regulation.

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- **Small blanket:** Can be used for comfort and warmth, creating a safe space for relaxation.
- **Book of yoga poses or yoga activity cards:** Serves as a reminder and encourages movement and mindfulness.
- **Yoga ball:** Promotes active sitting and can be used for balance and core strength; also useful for bouncing.
- **Therapy putty or putty-like modeling material:** Provides tactile stimulation.
- **Sensory swing** (if space allows): Offers soothing movement.
- **Rocking chair:** Provides rhythmic motion that can help calm anxiety and promote relaxation; the gentle rocking can be grounding and comforting for children.
- **Bean bag chair:** Offers pressure input, which can be soothing for children. The soft, enveloping support of the chair molds to the body, creating a cozy, secure feeling that promotes relaxation and can help reduce stress or sensory overload.

AUDITORY SUPPORT

- **Noise-canceling headphones or soft earplugs:** Help reduce sensory overload from sounds.
- **Music player with calming song lists:** MP3 players work well—ideally with instrumental music, often from a favorite movie—to create a calming atmosphere and promote relaxation.
- **Audiobooks:** Engage children’s imaginations while providing a soothing narrative experience; a great way to distract and relax during stressful moments.
- **Sound machine:** Provide white noise or nature sounds for a calming effect.

VISUAL SOOTHING

- **Visual calm down cards:** Feature calming images or phrases to help children focus and ground themselves during stressful moments.
- **Sensory bottle or calm down jar:** Filled with glitter or beads, these provide a visual distraction and promote mindfulness as children watch the contents settle.
- **Light-up toys:** Engage children visually and provide a calming effect through gentle light patterns.
- **Flashlight:** Can be used for creative play or as a calming tool to direct focus and attention.
- **Plastic snow globe:** Offers a visual experience as the snow or glitter floats down, promoting relaxation and focus.
- **Kaleidoscope:** Provides a mesmerizing visual experience, encouraging curiosity and imaginative play.
- **Hourglass or lava lamp:** The slow movement of sand or liquid is soothing to watch and promotes mindfulness.
- **Twinkle or color-changing LED lights:** Create a calming atmosphere and visually engage children, helping them relax.
- **Magnetic sand timer:** Offers a unique visual experience as the sand flows, encouraging patience and focus.

AROMATHERAPY

- **Calming essential oil spray:** Provides soothing scents like lavender or chamomile to create a calming environment and promote relaxation; ensure the child is not sensitive to scents.
- **Smelling bottles:** Small containers filled with various scents that children can sniff, helping them identify calming smells and explore their sensory preferences.
- **Scratch-and-sniff stickers:** Engage children in a fun, interactive way while introducing different scents; can also serve as a reward for good behavior.
- **Lotions:** Lightly scented lotions provide a soothing tactile experience and promote relaxation through pleasant scents; ensure they are hypoallergenic and safe for children.
- **Calming herbal sachets:** Contain herbs like lavender, chamomile, or peppermint to provide a calming effect.
- **Scented markers:** Engage multiple senses by combining art with soothing smells.
- **Tea bags (unused):** Herbal teas with calming scents, such as chamomile or mint, offer a gentle sensory experience.
- **Aromatherapy stuffed animal:** Stuffed with calming scents like lavender to provide comfort and relaxation.

ORAL SENSORY TOOLS

- **Chew toy or chew necklace:** Provides safe oral sensory input, helping to calm and focus children who seek oral stimulation.
- **Chewing gum or lollipops:** Can aid in self-regulation by providing oral sensory input; be mindful of safety and choking hazards.
- **Crunchy snacks (e.g., saltines, pretzels):** Offer a satisfying texture and sound, which can be calming for some children; the act of crunching can also help release tension.

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- **Whistle, harmonica, party blowers, or similar:** Promote oral motor skills and offer a fun way to engage in sound-making, providing both auditory feedback and enjoyment.

TACTILE TOOLS

- **Tangle:** A twistable toy that encourages fine motor skills and provides sensory feedback, helping to reduce stress and anxiety.
- **Bubble Bottle:** Blowing bubbles engages breathing, sight, and touch, promoting focus and providing a calming activity.
- **Play dough or silly putty:** Offers tactile stimulation and can be molded into various shapes, providing a creative and calming sensory experience.
- **Pipe cleaners:** Flexible and easy to manipulate, they can be bent and shaped into various forms, promoting creativity and fine motor skills.
- **Stress balls:** Provide a tangible outlet for stress; squeezing can help release tension and promote relaxation.
- **Bubble wrap (cut into smaller pieces):** Popping bubbles can be satisfying and help relieve stress and anxiety.
- **Bag of tissue paper or phonebook to rip:** Offers a sensory outlet through tearing, which can be calming for some children.
- **Spinners:** Provide visual and tactile stimulation, allowing for focused movement and distraction.
- **Spinning top:** Engages the hands in a fun way while providing visual stimulation.
- **Slinky:** Can be manipulated in various ways, offering a sensory experience through movement and sound.
- **Textured balls:** Offer different textures for sensory exploration.

DEEP BREATHING

- **Bubble bottle:** Blowing bubbles encourages deep breathing and provides a fun, engaging way for children to practice calm, controlled breaths.
- **Pinwheels:** Blowing on pinwheels promotes breath control and offers a playful way to engage in deep breathing exercises.
- **Pompom or feather and straw:** Blowing a lightweight pompom or feather with a straw encourages focused breathing, helping children practice slow, controlled exhales.
- **Hoberman Sphere:** Expanding and contracting the sphere as you breathe provides a visual cue for deep breathing and mindfulness.
- **Breathing visuals:** Visual aids with diagrams or images that illustrate deep breathing routines can help children learn and practice different breathing techniques.

BRAIN RESET

- **Puzzles:** Encourage focus and problem-solving, providing a satisfying sense of accomplishment when completed.
- **Books to read:** Offer an escape into different worlds, promoting relaxation and stimulating imagination.
- **Blank notebook and writing/drawing tools:** Provide a space for creative expression and allow children to process emotions through art or writing.
- **Coloring books:** Offer a calming activity that helps reduce stress and enhance focus; coloring can be meditative.
- **Scratch art doodle pad:** Allows for creative expression without the mess of traditional art supplies; scratching off the surface can help process anger.
- **Small chalkboard, Magna-Doodle, Etch-a-Sketch, or Boogie Board:** Encourage creativity and processing emotions while being reusable and mess-free.
- **Activity books:** Provide a variety of engaging tasks that promote focus and offer a mental break from stress.
- **Photo album:** Can evoke positive memories and feelings, helping shift focus and encourage emotional processing.
- **Look and Find books:** Promote concentration and attention to detail while providing a fun, engaging way to take a mental break.
- **Building blocks or LEGO:** Encourage creative construction and focus.
- **Magnetic blocks, balls, or beads:** Offer opportunities for building and a sense of accomplishment.

Engaging with social media, video games, and messaging apps can increase elevate and disrupt emotional balance. Therefore, it's advisable to avoid access and the use of tablets or smartphones in a Spot or Corner.

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This list of suggestions does not include specific regulation strategies for the red, orange, or yellow emotional levels in a calm-down plan, as these are individualized and typically developed with the assistance of a child psychologist. However, you can discuss with your child which tools might be helpful when they feel angry or overwhelmed. You may notice that some tools appear more than once on the list because they serve multiple purposes. You may identify other helpful tools for your child that are not listed here.

Please avoid including every item in the Spot or Corner, as too many options can be overwhelming and lead to dysregulation. Review the list to identify which tools you feel comfortable with, and then discuss them with your child to determine together which items will be beneficial. You may choose to add a few items at a time and update them as your child's needs evolve. It's important for children to feel a sense of ownership in this process, so encourage them to identify which items are engaging and interesting to them. By creating a space where your child can retreat during times of stress or intense emotions, you reinforce the idea that taking a break is a positive and healthy choice.

Once the Spot or Corner is set up, you and your partner should spend time with your child (when everyone is calm) to explore the tools and activities together. Discuss how each item works and how it can help with relaxation, emotional regulation in both the brain and body, and recharging emotional batteries. Every child will require different levels of support to learn how to use their Spot or Corner, so you and your partner might take turns spending time in the space with your child, monitoring their use of the tools and providing guidance throughout the implementation process. It's also important to revisit the space occasionally to offer ongoing support.

Looking for ideas for a Chill Spot, Quiet Spot, Calming Corner, or Peace Corner? You can explore examples on Pinterest—I have a board titled *Chill Spot, Quiet Spot, Calming Corner* where I've gathered inspiration. I searched for both home and classroom setups to offer a variety of options. I also found that searching for 'book nooks' or 'reading corners' brought up some great ideas as well.

Pinterest Page - **Helping Children: Child Psychology Services** <https://pin.it/5wVHlvQpG>

