Creating a safe space

A safe space or calm corner is an area within the classroom or suitable place in the school, that children can access when they become overwhelmed and dysregulated, to help them to calm down.

The use of this area should help raise awareness of the need to self-regulate and promote the development of independence in identifying and using coping strategies. These spaces also support social-emotional learning because they provide children with tools to manage and regulate their emotions; to help them calm down, feel safe and regroup when they are overcome with big emotions at school. Reasons to visit the safe space may include:

- having a difficult day

- needing a moment

- feeling frustrated with a social situation

- missing family members

- feeling worried, sad, scared over events (e.g., life/family events, or events within school)

- anger over a disagreement or an overwhelming expectation

Although safe spaces are helpful for all children, they are especially effective for children with social emotional and mental health needs. These children often come to school feeling sad, scared, or angry. Having a safe space allows them to relax enough to learn, which is vital for self-regulation.

The child will move to his/her safe space with their trusted adult to calm down when distressed

Advice & Recommendations:

The area should contain resources and materials to support children to identify and describe their feelings e.g., scales, faces, writing materials, as well as resources and materials for calming and promoting self-regulation e.g., soft furnishings (blankets, padding, cushions), stories, sensory tools and aids (ear defenders, stress balls, fiddle toys, weighted blanket). The area can be supported by adults or peers as appropriate.

Examples of different spaces designed to promote self-regulation within a classroom base:

Safe spaces don't have to be elaborate or expensive. You just need a cozy nook in the classroom (where you can still see the child and the child can see the classroom).

Best practice for safe spaces

If you decide to implement a safe space, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Avoid using the safe space as a time-out or instruct a child to go to the safe space. Children should choose when they need the safe space to transition from upset to calm. You may invite or guide a child to the safe space if you think it would be helpful, but it shouldn't be a command.

- Introduce the safe space gradually. Talk to children about the purpose of the safe space. Discuss tools and strategies they can use to calm down while in the safe space. Model how to use the safe space, and post visuals nearby that show children what to do.

- You may even appoint a trusted safe space helper to guide children through the process when they're feeling upset.

- Ask children to help design the safe space. What items would help them feel safe and calm? Items in the safe space may include those listed above, in addition to headphones, stories or soothing music or nature sounds, and manipulatives that give children something to do with their hands
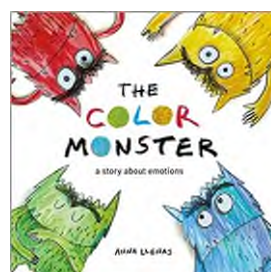
Useful Links:

Resources to include within the safe space:

Calm corner ideas

How do you feel today – Emotion chart
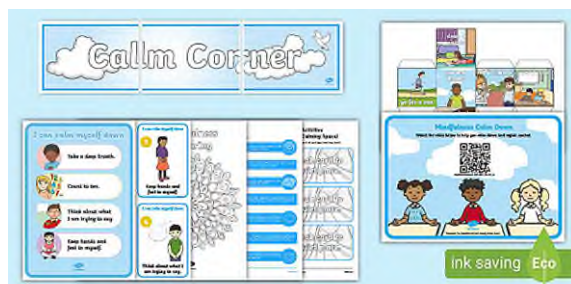
- [ELSA resources](): Managing strong feelings resources

- [Little Parachutes](): picture books that help children cope with worries, health issues and new experiences (big and small)

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