

Several Ways to Help Children Regulate

by John Hoffman

When we want jumpy children to settle down, we often use discipline tactics like raising our voice, making mild threats, or giving orders. But sometimes when children are all wound up, it has a lot to do with how they feel inside. Here are some ways to help children calm down without scolding or shouting.

- **Play with fidget toys or chew sugarless gum.** Many children find it easier to control their behaviour with something in their hands or mouth. Chewing can stimulate the production of brain chemicals that help children calm down. Think about the children who chew on their sleeves or pencils. Why do they do it? Because it helps them feel a little calmer.
- **Be active for a brief time.** Although it might seem like a paradox, physical activity—like running around the outside of the house once or twice, or doing a few jumping jacks—can sometimes help children feel less jittery inside in a way that helps them get ready to focus on homework or other activities that require concentration, following directions, or listening.
- **Play calming music.** Soothing background music can help children settle down. It doesn't have to be your child's favourite music, but some children concentrate better with quiet, unobtrusive music playing in the background.
- **Eat a healthy snack.** Young children are often out of sorts or unfocused when they are hungry. Sometimes they don't even realize they are famished. All they know is they feel awful. A snack of apples and cheese or crackers can put them right back on track. Consistent meal and snack times can help to prevent hunger-based behaviour problems from occurring.

Keep in mind that when children are feeling out of sorts because of hunger they often don't realize that what they really need to do is eat something. Although it may be tempting to try to push children to eat in these situations, that often backfires. The best thing to do is try to ease them into it. If you can get them to take that first bite, their natural appetite usually kicks in, and they'll eat eagerly and feel better quickly. This can also apply when children are tired and need to go to sleep or switch to a calming activity. Children aren't always in touch with what's going on inside them. That's why they need our help to ease them in the right direction.