

CALM Technique by Jennifer Kolari

Scientists now know that strong bonding between people increases reward chemicals in the brain which have proven to increase trust, de-escalate situations, increase compliance and decrease anxiety. As teachers and those who work with children we are intimately responsible for this brain development. Through the calm technique we can help to give the children with which we work the tools for resilience, social health and happiness.

KEEP CALM AND TEACH ON!

C- CONNECT

True connections are done through communication. How are you communicating? Does the child you are talking to get a feeling that you care and love them when you are talking with them? Do you feel a sense of connection with them as you talk to them?

Ways to connect:

- 1. Get on their level.**
- 2. Talk with them. (Dictating orders does not count as a form of connected communication.)**
- 3. Put distractions aside and deeply listen to what the child is communicating without judgement.**
- 4. Use a non-defensive stance so that the child feels safe.**

A-AFFECT

This is Affect matching. If the child looks sad you look sad. If they look scared you look scared. You show with your face the emotion that they are feeling. You may not be experiencing the same emotions but you're letting them know that you really understand their experience in that moment.

L-LISTEN

Paraphrase, clarify and summarize or **wonder out loud** all with that affect. **Have them feel that they have really been heard.**

M-MIRROR

Sit in that moment with the child and let them share what they are feeling. You can empathize but don't try to fix it. (Fixing comes later) You want the child to feel like you are the person who really gets them.

Examples of the CALM technique:

SCENERIO: A child wants to sit in a certain chair and right before they get to the chair another child sits in it. What does the child who wanted the chair do? They throw themselves onto the floor kicking and screaming. Our reactions **without** using the CALM technique might be this....

“You need to stop kicking you are going to hurt someone. There are plenty of other chairs you can use. Here is one right here.” (You go to move the chair so the child can see it. As you move it the child takes their foot and kicks the chair over.) “We do not kick chairs! That is NOT safe! You are not making a good choice right now. You can either sit down or go to the wall till you calm down. What would you like to do?” (Child begins to throw toys. Teacher goes over to the child and begins to pick them up.) “Ok since you are not being safe and not making good choices I will choose for you. You need to go sit over here until you can calm down.” (As the teacher begins to pick up the child the child begins to hit the teacher and the situation escalates out of control.)

Our reaction to the above scenario **with** the **CALM technique**:

“You really wanted that chair and _____ took it! That is one of your favorite spots to sit! You look so upset!” You pause and gauge the reaction of the child. If they seem a bit less upset you proceed. (Using a non-defensive stance) “I am sorry that you were not able to get that chair before _____ since I know how much you wanted that chair. (Proceed using the CHAT method) I have a favorite chair at my house that I always like to sit in. It is a big soft chair. These chairs aren’t very soft though.” Pause and again gauge the reaction of the child. If they seem to be de-escalating you can go into the problem solving mode. (This is where you offer possible solutions that you come up with. Such as asking if the person who took the chair would mind changing chairs or suggesting that the child use some of the calm down strategies that you have been teaching them. Or offer a new calm down idea if one comes to mind in that moment.)

A word about Power Struggles:

When the child calms down and the **Challenging Behavior** is over, **do not bring up again**. When we continue to talk about Challenging Behaviors and bring them up, we are giving that behavior power! For children who often feel out of control they will seek control and use those behaviors to exert that power (regardless if that is negative for them.)