

Rapid Resets

Quick Ways to Calm an Emotional Flood

As we know, children can lose control of their emotions for various reasons, and the behaviors we witness are generally unplanned. And since anxiety can look like defiance, adults often respond in counterproductive ways. When children are stressed, the amygdala, in the downstairs brain, is triggered, and the "fight or flight" response takes over. This hijacking of the brain makes it hard for children to be reached through conversation resulting in a disruption in the current environment. Implementing rapid resets can calm children and get their brains back "online."

When children are out of the zone, and their "lid is flipped," the sympathetic nervous system has been fully activated, and they don't recognize what is happening. The reactions we see are based on each child's current developmental stage, communication skills, and emotional competency. Also, some children have an anxious type temperament and are more likely to react in a stronger way.

Luckily, the body has a natural reset button in the parasympathetic nervous system called the vagus nerve. This nerve runs from the brain stem, through the face, to the thorax and abdomen. When it's stimulated, it sends a message to the brain that it can relax and the body calms down. When children experience a flood of emotions resulting from stress, the vagus nerve has to be activated to get children back to a teachable mindset. Then, and only then, can we begin to engage them in a logical, age-appropriate discussion of the situation and make a plan for next time.

So how do we get children back to a place of reasoning? By hacking into the parasympathetic nervous system with effective methods.

- 1) **Deep Breathing:** We all know taking deep breaths is a go-to solution for calming the body. However, Dr. Lucy Norcliffe-Kaufmann, an associate professor of neurology at NYU, suggests long, deep breaths but making the exhale longer than the inhale. The reason: when we exhale, the vagal activity is highest, and the heart rate is lowest. This creates a quicker calming effect. For younger children, this can be more easily done by blowing bubbles or a pinwheel or whistling.

- 2) **Humming or Singing:** Since the vagus nerve runs along both sides of the voice box, engaging children to hum or sing when they are in an emotional flood will calm them. This is used much like the way yoga incorporates “ooms” during a session, which brings about calmness by activating the vocal cords, in which the vibration sparks the vagus nerve.

- 3) **Physical Movement:** In general, any movement will essentially take the mind away from intense feelings and increase **endorphins**. However, specific movements can expedite calmness. Cat-cow pose works through the **digestive** system and spine where the vagus nerve resides. Also, activities that involve **crossing** the mid-line activate both sides of the brain to work together, so thinking becomes more balanced.

In the classroom, it's often hard for a teacher to stop everything for children experiencing different anxiety levels, so utilizing rapid resets is critical. This can bring the entire **class** back to a more relaxed state while also nurturing emotional self-regulation. The **SKILLZ** program incorporates this by using Teaching SKILLZ, such as redirecting, prompting, and intrinsic motivation. The **Parent SKILLZ** curriculum is also infused with vital information to keep parents attuned and patient during their child's emotional floods.

When we teach children quick and easy resets for stressful times, we encourage more emotional self-regulation and promote greater emotional resilience. By doing this, we

counteract the dangerous effects of stress and arming children with the tools for happiness and improved overall health.