**Getting ready: Supporting regulation to help children join in (plain version)**

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This resource is about helping your child feel calm, focused, and ready to join in with activities. We call this regulation. One way to do this is through movements that need lots of effort from muscles and joints. These are sometimes called’ heavy work’ activities. Actions include jumping, climbing, pushing or pulling, stretching, hanging, or carrying something a little heavy. Simple breathing exercises can also be helpful and you will find some breathing ideas on page 2.

Every child is different, so try a few things and see what helps them most. These are starting ideas for you to adapt and add your own - you know your child best.

**Activity ideas**

You can use the journey to your chosen space as a chance for some fun movements to get their body ready for eating, brushing teeth or messy play. Try repeating one action or use 2–3 different ones along the way. Here are some ideas you could try:

* Climb or crawl up stairs, then bump down on their bottom
* Carry a weighted toy or lap pad
* Pull and stretch a therapy/resistance band or an old pair of thicker tights
* Try animal walks like frog jumps, bunny hops, or bear crawls
* March with high knees and swinging arms - add a rhythm with counting or a song
* Walk slowly with exaggerated astronaut-like steps
* ‘Ski’ shuffle across a smooth floor with feet in small cardboard boxes
* Push a sturdy wheeled toy while bending over and placing both hands securely on it

Or try these activities, either on the way or once you’ve arrived at your space:

* Push against a wall with flat palms and straight arms (marking handprints can help)
* Turn round and press back or bottom into the wall as hard as possible, hold for a count of 5
* Do a simple yoga pose (search ‘Cosmic Kids’ for child-friendly options)
* Do ten jumps on the spot or onto a target - also try try jumping while holding hands
* Slowly “walk” hands up a wall and stretch tall on tiptoes, hold for a count of five
* Sit curled in a tight ball on the floor or sofa and squeeze arms around knees for a few seconds

Choose activities your child enjoys that calm or boost their energy levels, depending on need. Every child is different, so adapt or create your own as needed. The next page offers more ideas for using movement, play, and breathing strategies to support regulation throughout the day

There are many ways to support your child’s regulation beyond “getting ready” activities. This page introduces everyday active play, simple breathing strategies, and calming sensory activities that can help your child feel more comfortable and engaged - even on slower or more difficult days.

**Active play every day**

Creating opportunities for physically active play spread throughout the day, including outdoor play, helps children develop their gross and fine motor skills and sensory systems. This helps children learn new ways of responding and can have a positive impact on their ability to engage in everyday tasks and activities including eating and brushing teeth.

**Breathing**

Simple breathing activities can help children lower their heart rate and manage responses to stressful situations. Try an appealing visual aid such as an expandable breathing ball or soft toy for ‘Teddy bear breathing’. Try ‘Five finger breathing’ or deeply smelling a favourite scent and then blowing out through the mouth as if blowing out a candle.

There are lots of simple breathing strategies online. Experiment to find one your child can do and enjoy.

You may also find it useful to include a fun activity that creates calming deep pressure around the mouth. These can also help regulate breathing. See [here](https://www.autismtoothcare.com/toothbrushing/preparing-to-brush/getting-ready-to-brush/getting-you-your-child-ready) for ideas.

**Regulating activities for days when your child struggles to get up and move**

* Gently rock your child forwards and backwards or side-to-side combined with a hug
* Swing in a blanket, Lycra swing or hammock
* Prepare the body with squeezes to legs, arms, hands and shoulders
* Massage arms and legs with or without lotion or talc
* Try a weighted lap pad, animal or weighted blanket, no more than 10% of their body weight
* Offer a big bear hug, or give them a soft toy or cushion to squeeze
* Give a firm back rub
* ‘Sandwich’ your child between settee cushions with their head free and provide a press down over their body. Follow their lead to get the amount of pressure right.
* Invite your child to lie on a comfortable, supportive surface and roll a therapy, gym or peanut ball slowly up and down their body. Check in with your child to get the pressure right
* Offer a fidget tool or toy that needs firm squeezing or stretching
* Try hugging or leaning against a vibrating cushion
* Curl up or stretch out in a body sock or pull a piece of Lycra fabric round back and shoulders
* Pull them along on a blanket ‘magic carpet’ to get to where you need to be