



Modulation Activities

There are many ways to support your child or teen with *regulation*, or bringing energy and feelings to a comfortable and effective level. Some activities can be used in moments of distress, but many may be useful to build into daily routines. Support your child in experimenting: every child is different!

Choose activities that are naturally modulating, such as:

- Play (alone or together)
- Sports
- Expressive arts, dance or theater
- Yoga
- Reading
- Listening to music
- Crafts

Use sensory strategies, such as:

- **Sound:** Listen to music, use headphones or noise machines to drown out noise
- **Touch:** Provide hugs, weighted blankets, soft pillows, stuffed animals, cool stones, things to fiddle with, chewable jewelry
- **Smell:** Provide lotions, use air fresheners, fill the air with the scent of cooking
- **Taste:** Share a favorite food
- **Sight:** Provide pictures of safe people and favorite places. Minimize visual stimulation

Provide gross motor opportunities, such as:

- Small trampolines
- Opportunities to run, jump and play
- Exercise balls or yoga balls
- Balance beams
- After-school dance parties

Create a dedicated comfort zone:

- Make it in a safe place, preferably just for the child or teen
- Fill it with materials that are safe, comforting and sensory
- Have the child or teen practice using it when he or she is calm

Additional activities to support modulation include:

Breathing activities, such as:

- *Deep breathing with movement and sounds.* You be the model. Say: “We are going to practice deep breathing with movement and sounds. When I raise my arms up [*demonstrate*], I am going to take a deep breath in. When I bring my arms down, I am going to exhale, making a sound, like this: ooooooooooooooooooh. You can make any sound that you wish to make. OK, on the count of three, let’s practice together ... ”
- *Bubble breathing:* You be the model. Use a jar of bubble mixture and a wand. Breathe slowly into the wand, emphasizing slow breathing slowly to make a large bubble.
- *Deep breathing with a straw.* Remind your child or teen that deep breathing is the fastest way to send a message to the brain that everything is OK. Give him or her a straw and a small piece of paper. On the count of three, ask the child or teen to take a deep breath in (expanding the belly out so that it looks and feels like it is filling with air). The goal is to hold the small paper on the end of the straw. After a count to four, prompt the child or teen to exhale, allowing the paper to fall to the floor.
- *Pillow breathing.* Have child or teen lie on floor with pillow or stuffed animal on stomach. Teach him or her to breathe so that pillow or animal rises and falls with each breath.
- *London Bridge breathing.* Have children or teens raise their arms (like in game London Bridge). Breathe in as arms go up; breathe out as arms come down. See how slowly they can move their arms up and down.
- *Breathing with imagery.* Have children or teens imagine taking a deep breath and blowing out birthday candles. Or have them try to paint the opposite wall with their breath, or smell flowers, then blow a dandelion puff.

Focus activities, such as:

- *Focus bell.* Explain that you will be ringing a bell. Encourage the child or teen to focus on the sensory experience of sound. Encourage them to practice their deep breathing while listening. Notice the change in sound as time passes. Say, “Raise your hand when you no longer hear the sound.”

- *Memory game.* Ask the child or teen to be mindful of his or her environment and study all the things in the room. Then ask, “Please close your eyes. Now recall an item in the room that is white.” You can modify this by selecting a few items (toys, pens, objects, etc.) and placing them in the middle of the table. Have the child or teen focus on the items for one minute. Then say, “Close your eyes,” while you remove one item. The final step is to give the child or teen an opportunity to guess the missing item.
- *Grounding.* Have children tune into their senses, using concrete, easy-to-hold stimuli, such as:
 - Magic wands
 - Magic rocks
 - Worry stones
 - Piece of velvet cloth
 - Small stuffed animal
 - Glitter cream
 - Pleasurable smell
 - Stress balls

Movement activities or games, such as:

- *Dice game.* The goal is to practice breathing or light movement. You roll the dice. Then choose a movement for you and the child and teen to sustain to the count indicated on the die. For example, roll your shoulders to the count of 10. Or wiggle your nose to the count of seven.
- *Stretching.* Lead the child or teen in gentle movement and stretches.
- *Simon says.* Review the rules to Simon says. Remember that in Simon says, there is a leader (Simon) and followers. The follower is to follow the leader’s actions—but only when the leader says “Simon says.”
- *Head, shoulders, knees and toes.* Play this game with younger children to expose them to music and movement at the same time.

Music activities, such as:

- *Relaxation with music.* Play some relaxing music and have the child or teen listen to it mindfully. Remind the child or teen to breathe while listening.
- *You’ve got the beat.* “We are going to create music together today. Each of us is going to have a turn creating a beat using our hands and body. We will take turns being the leader or creator of the beat. The rest of us will follow the leader.” You can do this exercise with movement, too.

- *Musical instruments.* Gather several types of musical instruments. Demonstrate the sound of each. Say, “Close your eyes or turn your back (if comfortable).” Ask the child or teen to identify the sound and link it to a specific instrument.