A calm corner that children actually use, and that gives you your lesson back

A practical guide for K-5 teachers, school counselors and occupational therapists: where the corner goes, what goes in it, the four-step routine children learn, ten short lessons to teach it, and what to do when it is not working.

Free to copy for use in your own school. Written with AI software by King AI, an AI studio, for Fidgetkind Calm Corner (KING HOLDINGS VENTURES LLC). It is a classroom routine, not a therapy program: plans for an individual child belong with your counselor, OT, school psychologist and the child's family.

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1. What a calm corner is, and what it is not

A calm corner is a small, clearly marked place in the classroom where a child can go for a few minutes to notice a big feeling, use a tool to settle their body, and come back to learning. The child chooses to go (or accepts an offer to go), uses a timer, and returns. Nothing about it is a punishment.

It is

- A skill-building routine: children practice noticing, naming and regulating feelings.
- Short: five to ten minutes on a timer, then back to the group.

- Available to every child, not only to children who are struggling.
- Taught, practised and reviewed like any other classroom routine.

It is not

- Time-out, a consequence or a place you send a child "to think about what they did".
- A reward space or a toy shelf.
- A way out of work that a child finds hard (see section 8).
- A replacement for support from the counselor, OT or a behaviour plan.

The single most important design choice: children must believe the corner is a good place. If it is ever used as a consequence, it stops working for everyone. Use your existing consequence system for consequences and keep the corner separate, in words and in practice.

2. Setting it up: place, size and sightlines

- **Where you can see it.** You should be able to see the child's face from where you usually teach. A corner behind a bookcase is calm for the child and blind for you; turn the bookcase so it screens the corner from the class, not from you.
- **Away from traffic.** Not next to the door, the sink, the pencil sharpener or the line-up spot.
- **Small.** Room for one child (two at most) on the floor cushion. A big space invites a crowd.
- **Soft and plain.** The cushion, the basket of tools, the poster at the child's eye level, and very little else. Busy walls work against the point.
- **The timer within reach** but sitting on a shelf, so it is a choice to start it.
- **A clear name.** Call it one thing and use it every time: "the calm corner", "the peace place", "the reset spot". Let the class vote on the name in lesson 1.

If your room has no corner to spare, a cushion and basket by a wall with the poster above it work. Some teachers use a small rug to mark the space; the point is that children can see where it begins and ends.

3. The tools and how to introduce each one

Introduce one tool a day (see the lessons). Show it, model how to use it quietly, name the one rule that goes with it, and let every child try it once before it goes in the basket. Tools that are not introduced become toys.

Tool	What it is for	The rule to teach
Large squeeze balls	Big muscle squeezes for anger and frustration: squeeze for a count of five, let go for five.	Squeeze, don't throw. The ball stays in your hands.
Textured balls (5 textures)	Noticing touch: helps a worried or scattered child come back to the present by naming what they feel ("bumpy, cold, ridged").	Feel it and describe it in your head.
Quiet hand fidgets (orbs, cube set)	Small repetitive movement for restless or anxious hands.	Hands only, quiet only, it stays in the corner.
Stretch tubes	Pairing movement with breath: stretch slowly while breathing in, let it close while breathing out.	Stretch slowly, never toward a face.
Flip timer	Makes the visit short and predictable; the child decides when to start it.	Start it when you sit down. When it ends, use the return step.
Floor cushion	A clear, comfortable place to sit; a visual boundary of the corner.	One body on the cushion.
Feelings and calm-plan poster	Names feelings with faces and shows the four steps, so a child does not need to read well to use the corner.	Point to how you feel.
Strategy cards (printables)	Breathing and body strategies a child can pick when they do not want a tool.	Pick one card, try it twice.

Swap tools for a child's needs on your counselor's or OT's advice. Some children need heavier input (wall push-ups, carrying books) that does not fit in a basket; that belongs in their individual plan.

4. The four-step calm plan

Every visit follows the same four steps. They are on the poster and on card 1, with a picture for each so non-readers can follow them.

1. **Notice.** "My body feels..." (hot face, tight fists, fast heart, tummy ache, wiggly legs). Children learn that feelings show up in the body first.
2. **Name.** Point to the feeling on the poster. Naming it is part of calming it.

3. **Choose.** Start the timer and pick one tool or one strategy card. Use it until the timer ends.
4. **Return.** Ask yourself "Am I ready?" Put the tool back, give the teacher a signal (thumbs up, or a card turned over), and rejoin the group. If you are not ready, flip the timer once more and then check in with the teacher.

The return step is the one that is most often skipped and the one that makes the corner work. Teach it on purpose, practise it, and praise it ("You came back on your own, that's the hardest part").

5. Ten mini-lessons for the first two weeks

Each lesson takes 8-12 minutes, best at morning meeting or right after a transition. Do them before the corner opens for real use, then keep it open.

Day	Lesson	What children do
1	Why we have a calm corner	Talk about a time they felt a big feeling. Introduce the corner, its purpose and its name (vote).
2	Feelings live in our bodies	Body-map: where do we feel mad, worried, sad, excited? Act out and guess feelings from faces on the poster.
3	Breathing we can take anywhere	Practise three strategy cards: square breathing, five-finger breathing, smell-the-flower / blow-the-candle.
4	Squeeze and let go	Introduce the squeeze balls; tense-and-release count of five; the "squeeze, don't throw" rule.
5	Notice with our hands	Introduce textured balls and hand fidgets; describe what you feel in three words.
6	Stretch and breathe	Introduce stretch tubes paired with breath. Practise slow, slow, slow.
7	The timer and the four steps	Teacher models a whole visit out loud (Notice, Name, Choose, Return). Children walk through it in pairs.
8	Coming back	Practise the return signal and re-joining an activity already in progress. What do I do if I missed the instructions?
9	Sharing the corner	What if someone is already there? Use the sign: wait, use a strategy card at your seat, or ask the teacher.

Day	Lesson	What children do
10	Our corner agreement	Class writes and signs three agreements (for example: we use it to calm down, we use tools gently, we come back when the timer ends). Post it in the corner.

After the two weeks, review the routine for five minutes after every long break (winter, spring) and whenever use drifts.

6. What to say: check-in and return scripts

Offering the corner (never sending)

- *"Your fists look tight. Would the calm corner help, or would you like to breathe here with me?"*
- *"You can take a calm-corner break. I'll save your spot."*

Checking in after a visit (quietly, 30 seconds)

- *"I saw you use the squeeze ball and come back. How is your body now?"*
- *"Point to how you felt before, and how you feel now."*
- *"Is there something you need from me to get started again?"*

When a child is not ready to return

- *"Flip the timer one more time. When it ends, I'll come over and we'll make a plan together."*
- *If a child is unsafe or does not settle after two timers, follow your school's support plan and bring in the counselor; the corner is not the place to manage a crisis.*

Words to avoid

"Go to the calm corner and think about what you did." "If you can't behave, you'll go to the corner." These turn it into time-out, and children will start to avoid it.

7. Keeping track without paperwork

A simple tally on the clipboard (printable 4) is enough: the child's initials, the time, and a tick for "came back on their own". Children can make the tick themselves. Once a week, look for three things:

- **Times of day.** Clusters after recess, before maths or before lunch point to a transition you can change.
- **Frequent visitors.** A child who visits many times a day may need more than the corner; share the tally with the counselor.
- **Return rate.** Most visits should end with the child returning on their own. If not, re-teach lesson 8.

Do not post the tally where children can compare names.

8. When it is not working

"Everyone wants to go."

Normal in week one: novelty. Keep the one-at-a-time rule, keep the timer, and keep going; it settles in a week or two. A short sign-up for a "try it" slot during free time helps.

"One child uses it to avoid work."

Keep it available, but make the work come with them: when they return, the task is still there and you help them start it. If the pattern continues, talk with the child about what makes that task hard, and with the counselor.

"Tools are being thrown or broken."

Take that tool out for a few days, re-teach its rule, and bring it back. Do not remove the corner.

"Nobody uses it."

Model it yourself: "I'm feeling frustrated, I'm going to take three square breaths." Make sure it was never used as a consequence, and check that the corner is not somewhere children feel watched by peers.

"A child is very upset and will not go."

Offer the tool at their seat. The corner is one option, not a requirement.

9. Adjusting for K-1, 2-3 and 4-5

K-1

Fewer tools in the basket at a time (three or four). Rely on the picture side of every card. Practise the four steps as a song or chant. The adult checks in after every visit at first.

2-3

Add the "rate it 1-5" scale before and after. Children start the timer and make their own tally tick. Introduce writing or drawing one sentence about what helped.

4-5

Call it a reset spot if "calm corner" feels young to them. Let students help choose and maintain tools. Add strategies they can use without leaving their seat, so the corner becomes one of several options.

10. Working with your counselor, OT and families

- **Counselor.** Share the class agreement and the weekly tally pattern. Many counselors teach the same feelings vocabulary in their lessons; use their words on the poster where they differ from ours.
- **Occupational therapist.** Ask which tools suit children on their caseload and whether any child should have a personal tool kept at their desk instead.
- **Children with an IEP or 504 plan.** Their plan comes first. The corner can support a plan's accommodations, but it is not a substitute for any of them.
- **Families.** Send the family letter (printable 5) in the first week so children hear the same words at home.

11. Cleaning, hygiene and safety

- Wipe hard tools with your school's approved disinfectant wipe weekly, and the same day if a child is ill. Let them dry before returning them to the basket.
- The cushion cover can be spot-cleaned; follow the care label.
- Check every tool once a week for cracks, splits or loose parts, and remove any that are damaged. Small parts can be a choking hazard for young children; supervise kindergarten use.
- The flip timer contains a small battery: keep it on a shelf as a teacher-managed item, and replace a battery only as an adult.
- Tools are for hands. No mouthing; if a child needs oral input, ask the OT about a personal chew tool rather than sharing one.

12. Printables

Print on card stock, cut on the lines, and laminate if you can. Every card has a picture side so children who do not read yet can use it.

Printable 1: The four steps (corner sign)



1. Notice

My body feels…



2. Name

Point to my feeling



3. Choose

Start the timer, pick one tool



4. Return

Tool back, thumbs up, rejoin

Printable 2: Feelings cards



Happy



Calm



Tired



Worried



Sad



Mad



Nervous



Frustrated



Surprised



Embarrassed



Excited



Left out

Printable 3: Strategy cards

Square breathing

Breathe in 4, hold 4, out 4, hold 4. Trace a square with your finger.

Five-finger breathing

Trace up a finger as you breathe in, down as you breathe out. All five.

Flower and candle

Smell the flower (in through your nose), blow out the candle (out slowly).

Squeeze and let go

Squeeze the ball for 5, let go for 5. Three times.

5-4-3-2-1

Name 5 things you see, 4 you hear, 3 you can touch, 2 you smell, 1 you like.

Wall push

Push the wall with both hands for 10, rest. Three times.

Stretch and breathe

Stretch the tube while you breathe in, close it while you breathe out.

Count back

Count back from 20 slowly. Lost count? Start again.

Hug yourself

Cross your arms, hands on shoulders, squeeze gently for 10.

Draw it

Draw how you feel, then draw how you want to feel.

Feel the texture

Pick a textured ball. Say three words about how it feels.

Ask for help

Turn this card over on the shelf. Your teacher will check in.

Printable 4: Weekly tally

Initials	Day	Time	Feeling (point or write)	Came back on my own ✓

Printable 5: Family letter

Dear families,

Our classroom now has a calm corner: a small, quiet space where any child can take a few minutes to notice a big feeling, use a tool to settle their body, and come back to learning. It is not a punishment. Over the next two weeks we are learning four steps together: **Notice** how my body feels, **Name** the feeling, **Choose** a tool or a breathing strategy, and **Return** when I am ready.

You can help at home by asking, "Did you use any of your calm steps today?" and by trying square breathing together (in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4).

If you have questions, or ideas about what helps your child feel calm, please let me know.

Thank you,

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Fidgetkind Calm Corner Teacher Guide, edition 1, November 2026. Free to copy for classroom use. Written with AI software by King AI, an AI studio. KING HOLDINGS VENTURES LLC, 217 Cloverfield Dr, Chillicothe IL 61523, hello@usekingai.com. Corrections and suggestions from teachers, counselors and OTs are welcome at that address.