In an earlier Incredible Years Parent program we discussed how using emotion coaching can build children’s emotional literacy so they can begin to articulate their feelings to others. This is a foundational step for children to being able to eventually regulate their own emotions. Once children can recognize and express their feelings, parents can then begin to teach them some self-calming strategies. Because children are visual thinkers and love imaginary play, it is effective to use stories, puppets, pictures and role plays to help them practice calming thoughts, positive visual images, deep breathing, coping self-talk and using words to express their feelings and needs.

Here are a few things you can do with your child using the Incredible Years Calm Down feelings thermometer handout and Tiny Turtle puppet. Each of these scenarios would be done in one 5-minute sitting and at different times when your child seems relaxed and interested in some puppet play. Try to keep these scenarios simple, fun and imaginative and follow your child’s lead.
Puppet Scenarios

Tiny Turtle Explains How the Thermometer Works

- Tiny Turtle puppet introduces the Calm Down Thermometer and explains how it works. For example, “Hi! I am Tiny Turtle. I want to tell you about this amazing feeling thermometer that can measure your feelings.” Your turtle puppet can tell your child he is feeling sad, mad, worried, or frustrated. Or, Tiny may be feeling happy, calm, relaxed and proud. While Tiny talks about each feeling, point to the place on the thermometer that shows Tiny’s feeling (red or hot for angry vs. blue for cool or calm). You can also ask your child to point to the color on the thermometer and move the arrow to the place that represents Tiny’s particular feeling. When your child points to the place on the thermometer, you can ask him or her to show you that feeling face.

- Tiny Turtle tells your child a story about a time he was mad (someone teased him, or took his toy — pick a situation that your child can identify with). He explains how he took three deep breaths to get back into the blue section of the thermometer. For example, Tiny says, “One time someone made fun of me because I move so slow, and I was up here in red feeling mad. I took three deep breaths and practiced smelling a flower and blowing out a candle. Then I came down into blue. I felt much calmer.”

Ask your child to practice taking deep breaths with Tiny Turtle and let him or her move the thermometer arrow down from red to green.
• Tiny Turtle asks your child to tell a time he or she felt angry, sad, excited or safe. (Use a variety of comfortable and uncomfortable feeling words.) For example, Tiny asks, “Have you ever had someone make fun of you? How did that feel? Can you move the arrow to show how you felt?” When your child shares a feeling, help him/her move the arrow to represent the feeling. If the feeling is an upset feeling, have your child practice taking deep breaths and moving the arrow down.

• Using the Calm Down Thermometer, Tiny Turtle asks your child what feelings the faces on the thermometer represent. For example, “See these feeling faces on this thermometer, what feelings do you think they are?” When your child names a feeling, praise their understanding and ask them to show you that feeling face.

Tiny Turtle Explains How to Calm Down

• Tiny Turtle explains how he recognizes an uncomfortable or upset feeling and says, “stop.” Then he goes into his turtle shell to take deep breaths. For example, “One time someone stepped on my foot, and I was mad. I said “stop” and went in my turtle shell and took deep breaths like this [demonstrate deep breathing]. Then I felt better.” Ask your child to practice this with Tiny Turtle using an imaginary shell. Young children will often curl up on the floor and pull their shirts over their heads. You might also use a blanket or cardboard box to represent the turtle shell. Elementary school-aged children may want to visualize an imaginary invisible shell, or a magic teasing shield that makes hurtful words bounce off.
• Tiny Turtle explains how he uses his **happy place visualizations** when he is in his shell to help him calm down. For example, “*When I am nervous I think about a time I learned to ride my bike and felt really proud. Or, when I am afraid or sad I think of my teddy bear and that helps me feel safe.*” After Tiny has explained his happy or safe places then he can ask your child where her/his happy place is and how your child can think of this happy place while in the turtle shell. This exercise can help your child develop some **positive imagery** of things to think about when in the shell.

    ![Image of Tiny Turtle]

• Tiny Turtle explains what he says to himself when he is in his shell. For example, “*When I am in my shell I say to myself, “I can do it, I can calm down and try again.”*” Ask your child to repeat these words with Tiny and do it together.

• Tiny Turtle asks your child to think about when to use his turtle power. Then Tiny asks your child to show him how to use it. For example, “*What makes you angry or frustrated? So when you are up here in red on the thermometer, how can you get yourself down here in green?*” Praise your child for showing you or Tiny how to take deep breaths, think of his happy place, or use positive self-talk.

**Remember: When using Tiny Turtle, follow your child’s lead and ideas and praise his/her willingness to practice taking deep breaths, using happy place memories and positive self-talk. Make these play scenarios fun, imaginative and interactive.**

For more information, please visit: [www.incredibleyears.com](http://www.incredibleyears.com), and see “Wally’s Detective Books for Solving Problems” (set of 4), “Calm Down Thermometer Poster” and “Tiny Turtle Puppet”. To order materials, visit [www.incredibleyears.com/order/](http://www.incredibleyears.com/order/)