



Relaxation Thermometer

Why is the Relaxation Thermometer Helpful?

Children who are experiencing strong emotions, but lack the ability to identify them (e.g. stressed, tense, calm, relaxed) may behave aggressively or in other undesirable ways to express what they are feeling. The relaxation thermometer is used to teach children how to “tune into” their emotions and then express to others, in a concrete way, how those feelings are impacting them before they act them out.



If we are able to provide a way for children to identify and share their emotions throughout the day we can help them to effectively manage themselves. Furthermore, if we can teach them the difference between “tense” (like a hard door) and “calm” (or relaxed like a sleeping puppy), then we can help them understand how to go from tense to relaxed.

How Can the Relaxation Thermometer be Used?

The relaxation thermometer can be used throughout the day as a means for children to check where they are emotionally and to help cue themselves and others as to how well they are regulating their emotions.

The bottom of the thermometer is the blue (or cool) section and feelings in this section could be “happy” or “relaxed.” The thermometer then goes all the way up to “angry” or “stressed out,” which is the red (or hot) section.

The relaxation thermometer should be explained to children after they have been taught how to recognize and “name” their emotions—possibly after being taught about Gingerbread Cutouts or being shown Emotion Charts, both are in the *Emotions* section of this toolkit.

Examples of how to explain the thermometer could be: “When you feel loose like spaghetti, where are you on the thermometer?” *Answer: blue end.* “When you are so mad that you feel like you are going to blow your top, where are you on the thermometer?” *Answer: red end.* Children **should be** encouraged to identify terminology that works for them such as referring to the red end as, ‘danger zone’ ‘hot button’ ‘code red,’ etc.

You can then have a child describe a recent conflict that led to an angry outburst. As the child describes what happened, you can write down words that describe the child’s thoughts, words and actions that paint a pattern of increasing anger. You can then show the child where he/she was on the thermometer at each step along the way. The child can then be shown ways to help regulate emotions.

Work with the child to develop a calming plan and practice it together, inviting him/her to point to where he/she is on the thermometer before and after practicing calming techniques.

