

Food and Play Help Children and Youth Self-Regulate

Food and play can help a child or youth to settle their nervous system. We all know that children and youth who are hungry have a harder time self-regulating. We know that they use activity to help them self-regulate. This information is to spark ideas of things to try that might help your child or youth settle.

Food

Sucking

The action of sucking is comforting and nurturing and can help a child settle. We have included some beginning ideas for you to think about what might work for your child.

- Warm milk
- Water from a bottle
- Drinking through a straw
- Sucking on a hard candy

Chewing

The action of biting into something hard or chewy can help to calm a child on alert who is feeling activated or unsettled.

- Toast and jam
- Peanut butter and jam
- Granola bars
- Chewy foods, candies or gum
- Carrots
- Apple
- Cookies

Comfort from **Sweet, Salty and Warm** Spices

Think about all the requests for snacks that kids make. How might we tailor the snacks to help them feel comforted?

Citrus foods can increase alertness

- Orange
- Grapefruit

Play Activities

Play activities can help children and youth to regulate their nervous systems.

Large Muscles

- Crawling
- Climbing
- Lifting
- Digging
- Pulling - tug of war, walking the dog on a leash
- Hanging from monkey bars – upright or upside down
- Pushing - riding a bike
- Wrestling

Balance

- Rolling
- Swinging
- Rocking, See-saw
- Spinning
- Jumping - on a trampoline, off a step

Touch

- Sitting on a ball
- Hugs
- Squeeze toys, stress balls
- Making things with playdoh

Nighttime

- Colouring
- Warm bath
- Bedtime stories
- Being wrapped in a warm towel
- Wrapped up tight in a cozy nest with blankets
- Cuddling with stuffed animals
- Warm water bottle

If a child needs to become more alert

- Running
- Spinning, rolling
- Swinging

Note: Children who are prone to aggression may become aggressive when involved in games that use fast movements such as running, kicking or hitting balls. These actions mirror the fight-flight pattern.