



Body-Based Regulation Strategies

For PDA children — at home and school

Body-based regulation strategies work directly with the nervous system — through movement, breathing, sensory input, and physical experience. In PDA, these strategies are most effective when offered as options rather than instructions, and explored voluntarily rather than prescribed.

How to introduce these

These are not tools to pull out during a crisis. They're best introduced during calm moments — "I found this interesting thing, want to try it?" — and then available when needed. Never insist on a particular strategy.

1. Breathing Strategies

- 4-7-8 breathing: inhale 4 counts, hold 7, exhale 8
- Box breathing: inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4
- Extended exhale: breathe in normally, breathe out slowly and longer than the inhale
- Balloon breathing: imagine inflating a balloon in your belly as you breathe in

PDA tip

- Model these for yourself first. Invite rather than instruct. The child may reject them initially — offer once, then leave the choice to them.

2. Movement and Proprioceptive Input

- Jumping on a trampoline
- Heavy lifting, pushing, or carrying (carry groceries, rearrange furniture)
- Climbing
- Bear hugs or firm pressure — only if welcomed
- Wall push-ups or chair push-ups
- Rocking (rocking chair, hammock)

3. Sensory-Based Strategies

- Cold water on hands or face (activates the dive reflex — slows heart rate)
- Ice cubes to hold
- Warm bath or shower
- Fidget tools, textured objects, clay
- Chewing (gum, chew toys, crunchy food)
- Weighted blanket



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- Strong smell (essential oils, smelling salts)

4. Grounding Strategies

- 5-4-3-2-1: name 5 things you can see, 4 hear, 3 touch, 2 smell, 1 taste
- Feet flat on the floor, feel the pressure and temperature
- Hold a familiar or comforting object
- Name the room you're in, describe it aloud

5. Nature and Environment

- Time outside — even 10 minutes
- Being near water — beach, river, pond
- Animals — patting a pet
- Looking at the sky or plants

6. Creative and Expressive

- Drawing, painting, clay, craft
- Playing a musical instrument
- Singing or humming (vagal nerve activation)
- Writing, journaling
- Building — LEGO, construction, stacking

7. Connection-Based

- Shared humour — watching something funny together
- Physical play (if welcomed)
- Parallel play — being in the same space without demands
- Stories, reading aloud together
- A pet's companionship

No single strategy works for every child or every moment. This list is a starting point for exploration — not a prescription.