

RETURNING TO CALM

What is this developmental skill?

Returning to calm is the ability to recover emotionally after becoming upset. Emotional regulation is not about never becoming distressed; it is about learning how to return to a regulated state.

How does this normally develop?

Children repeatedly experience stress followed by comfort from trusted caregivers. These experiences strengthen the brain systems responsible for calming the body after activation. Eventually, children begin using these strategies independently.

How can neglect interfere?

Neglected children often experience prolonged stress without comfort. Their nervous systems may remain activated long after an upsetting event, making it difficult to calm themselves.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Stay upset long after a problem has ended.
- Escalate instead of calming.
- Need extended time to recover.
- Have difficulty sleeping after stressful events.
- Become upset again easily.
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Parenting Implications

Focus less on stopping emotions and more on helping your child recover. Quiet presence, predictable routines, physical comfort (when welcomed), and breathing together can help regulate the nervous system.

From Understanding to Attunement

Helping children return to calm is not rewarding bad behavior. It is teaching the brain how to recover from stress.