

Alertness and calming — regulating your child's energy levels

Alertness is your child's energy level and ability to pay attention to what is happening around them.

Your child's alertness levels change throughout the day. This is a good thing.

During play and learning, it is helpful if your child's alertness levels are higher so they can be active, focused and pay attention.

When your child is going to bed it is helpful if they are less alert. This will mean that they will not be distracted by what's going on around them and will be able to fall asleep more easily.



Types of Alertness

Alertness can be described as being like a car engine. The engine might rev high, or low or somewhere in between. Depending on the circumstances the different revs can be good or not so good.

Low revs

- Your child is tired, no energy, not moving around much.
- Good for rest and sleep.
- Not so good if your child needs to keep alert and pay attention.
- Not so good if your child needs to be energetic and active.

Cruising

- Your child is focussed and paying attention.
- Good for learning
- Good for listening to instructions

High revs

- Your child is full of energy and ready to go.
- Good for active outdoor play
- Not so good if your child needs to sit still and pay attention.
- Not so good if your child needs to be calm and relaxed like at bed time.

It is important to try to match your child's level of alertness to the activity in which they are involved.

What can you do?

Think about whether your child's alertness matches what they are doing or what you would like them to be doing.

Ideas for Calming

- Deep pressure massage
- Swinging slowly back and forth on a swing or hammock
- A warm bath
- Sitting in a quiet room
- Listening to softer, calm music
- Holding a fidget toy
- Snacking on chewy food
- Sipping from a sports bottle.

Ideas for Alerting

- Light tickly touch
- Physical activity
- Holding a fidget toy
- Listening to lively upbeat music
- Changing body positions and having regular opportunities to move
- Snacking on crunchy food
- Sipping from a sports bottle.

More information

If you would like further information, please call your occupational therapist.

Recommended resources and books on this topic include *How Does Your Engine Run? A Leader's Guide to the Alert Program for Self-Regulation* by Williams and Shellenberger, 1996.

