



Comfort Items... in the Early Years

Tip Sheet

A comfort item is a toy, an outfit or an object that a child accesses for comfort. Accessing comfort items can support with regulation across the day. It may also include an action such as spinning a wheel, twirling hair, or chewing. It might not even be the same thing every day!

Why is a child accessing a comfort item?

They may do this to support and maintain regulation if they are feeling stressed or worried. For example, the comfort item might be held close at the start of the day and then slowly let go as the child settles into the day and feels more confident.

There can be lots of scenarios in an early childhood setting that might make a child feel stressed. Examples include:

- **Social pressures:** to engage and play with peers or to say goodbye to family.
- **Routine pressures:** moving between activities or trying to remember where their belongings are.
- **Sensory pressures:** negotiating noises, smells, and sights of a busy environment.
- **Internal pressures:** feeling tired or hungry.



If the comfort item does not cause any safety concerns, there is no need to remove or reduce access to it. A child accessing their comfort item should be viewed as an indicator that the child is feeling dysregulated.





Sometimes the comfort item can get in the way of play...

For example, the child may need to carry it with two hands which means they can't use their hands for an activity. Or it might be risky in other ways, such as a choking hazard. In these instances, educators may like to find and explore replacement options with the child.

How can educators support the use of comfort items?

Below are some possible solutions to common scenarios:

If...	Try...
The item is too big to carry	Find a special place where it can be viewed or handled when needed. The child could carry a picture or a smaller version of the object.
The item is a choking hazard	Trial exchanging the item for a similar texture that is safe to chew. This may include food or having a water bottle close by. If using sensory chew, this should be attached to quick release lanyard.
Other children also want a comfort item	Consider ways for all children to keep something special with them. They might like to display photos or bring things in for show and tell.

Educators can also support children by finding opportunities to build a sense of safety and resilience in other ways