

The Sensory - Calm Checklist for Adoptive Parents of Children Ages 3-7

A Trauma-Responsive Tool for Adoptive
Parents Raising Children Ages 3-7

Fear to Love Badge Rooted in the From Fear to Love
model by Bryan Post



SHORT EMOTIONAL OPENING

If your child's meltdowns seem to erupt from nowhere...
If bedtime, shoes, or loud places can flip your whole day
upside down...

If you feel stared at in public, exhausted at home, and
unsure what will help...

You're not alone.

And nothing is wrong with you—or your child.

You just need a plan that honors their nervous system.



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THE SENSORY- CALM CHECKLIST

3

THE SENSORY-CALM CHECKLIST

For Adoptive Parents of Children Ages 3–7

(Use this during any moment of overwhelm.)
(Simple. Clear. Regulation first. Connection always.)

1. Your First 5 Seconds

Pause. Don't move. Don't speak.
Inhale through your nose for 4 seconds.
Exhale slowly for 6 seconds.
Say quietly inside: "My calm is the medicine."

2. Create Instant Safety

Get low and soft: kneel or crouch.
Keep your face gentle, eyes soft.
Say: "You're safe. I'm right here."

3. Lower Stimulation Fast

Reduce noise: turn off TV, music, fans, or step away from chaos.
Reduce visuals: dim lights, move to a corner, car, or quiet aisle.
Reduce demands: no questions, no instructions, no corrections.

4. Use Calming Phrases (Short + Predictable)

Say one of these in a slow, warm tone:

- "I've got you."
- "I'm not upset."
- "You're not in trouble."
- "We'll get through this together."
- "Breathe with me when you're ready."



5. What NOT to Say

No lectures

No “Why are you doing this?”

No “Use your words.”

No threats

No consequences during overwhelm

(Their brain can't process it. Safety first. Logic later.)

6. Co-Regulate Without Pressure

Offer closeness, don't force it:

- “Do you want my hand?”
- “Do you want me close or a little space?”

Stay steady even if they push you away.

Your calm body is the anchor.

7. Help the Body Come Down

- Slow rocking
- Deep-pressure hug only if they lean in
- Wrap in a blanket or jacket
- Hand fidgets or a soft object
- Sips of water

(Regulation happens in the body—not the words.)

8. Reconnect After the Meltdown

When their breathing softens:

- “That was a big moment.”
- “Thank you for coming back to me.”
- “We're safe again.”

Keep it short. Keep it warm.





9. Prevent the Next Overwhelm

- Build predictability: “First home, then snack.”
- Use simple choices: “Blue cup or green cup?”
- Watch early cues: eye-glaze, whining, pacing, jumping, sudden silliness.
- Step in early with calm: “Looks like things feel big. I’m with you.”

10. End With One Loving Anchor

Say gently:

“No matter how big it gets, I stay.”

This becomes the nervous system’s new truth:

“I’m safe with my parent.”





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REAL SCENARIOS

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1. Grocery Store Sensory Meltdown

Trigger: Bright lights, noise, smells, choices.

Your feeling: Embarrassed, tense, worried everyone is watching.

Apply the Checklist:

- Pause 5 seconds.
- Kneel. Whisper: “You’re safe. I’m not upset.”
- Move to a quiet aisle or step outside.
- Offer water/breathing when ready.
- Reconnect: “We made it through.”

Calming Phrase:

“I’ve got you. We’ll take this slow.”

Expected Outcome:

Child softens, cries, or collapses into you. Nervous system resets. You both finish the trip more regulated.

2. Bedtime Overwhelm

Trigger: Transition from activity to separation and darkness.

Your feeling: Drained, frustrated, ready to be done for the day.

Apply the Checklist:

- Lower stimulation: quiet room, dim lights.
- Sit on the floor beside the bed.
- Soft voice: “This is hard tonight. I’m right here.”
- Gentle rhythm: back rub, slow breathing, humming.

Calming Phrase:

“You don’t have to fall asleep alone. I’ll stay until your body settles.”

Expected Outcome:

Child stops fighting sleep because safety returns. Their body releases into calm.

3. Transition Refusal (Leaving the Park)

Trigger: Shift from fun → uncertainty.

Your feeling: Rushed, anxious about the public scene.

Apply the Checklist:

- Get low.
- “Leaving is hard. I’ve got you.”
- Offer one tiny choice: “Walk or piggyback?”
- Hold steady through the protest.
- Carry if needed, staying soft and slow.

Calming Phrase:

“I know this is big. I’m staying close.”

Expected Outcome:

Power struggle dissolves. Child leans into you instead of fighting against you.



WHY THIS WORK

WHY THIS WORKS

A child with a trauma or sensory history isn't misbehaving—they're overwhelmed.

Their nervous system learned early that the world can be unsafe.

So loud sounds, quick transitions, or even simple requests can feel like danger.

When fear takes over, the thinking brain shuts down.

That's why logic, consequences, or lectures don't work. Safety must come first.

Your calm voice, steady breathing, and soft presence tell their body, "You're safe now."

Co-regulation is not a technique— it's the biological antidote to fear.

This checklist works because it follows the heart of the From Fear to Love model:

Regulate first. Connect always. Behavior will follow.



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ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR CALIFORNIA FAMILIES



If you live in California and feel like you need additional support, we have something for you.

There is currently one wraparound program in the state of California built entirely on the Fear to Love methodology. This is not a traditional behavior-based system. It is a trauma-responsive, relationship-first support model designed specifically for AAP adoptive families raising children with complex needs.

✦ • **This program offers:**

- A dedicated team trained in Fear to Love principles
- In-home and community-based support
- Emotional regulation coaching for both child and caregiver
- Connection-focused strategies that prioritize safety and healing
- Help navigating school, therapy, and family systems without blame or shame Support is offered for FREE for AAP Adoptive families.

You don't need to translate your reality to professionals who don't "get it."

You don't need to choose between support and philosophy.

This program speaks your language because it was built for families like yours.

To learn more about eligibility and next steps visit us [here](#) > www.leafwraparound.com



Healing doesn't have to happen alone. If you're in California, your team is already waiting.