

Building Family Resilience

River Source Family Center in Chippewa Falls is all about strengthening families with young children. Their Calm Down Toolbox is a go-to resource for families in quieting stressful moments when big emotions are at play with their young ones.

The Problem

"Our own children helped us identify the need," noted Brenda Johnson and Amanda Rygiel, staff at River Source Family Center. They found themselves dealing with big emotions from their children that they couldn't explain or regulate, even with their professional background in early education. And as they spoke with other educators, they found they weren't alone — many families were in similar situations. They asked themselves what they could offer families to address the challenging emotions they were all experiencing with their children.

The Solution

The Calm Down Toolbox was an answer. Developed by Johnson and Rygiel, the toolbox is a place for caregivers and children to store things that help the child self-regulate, regain a normal heart rate, and center themselves. The project of creating the toolbox is designed for caregiver and child interactions, and together they create their own tools to store in the toolbox and then take it home. The process also helps caregivers identify and share their emotions.

"We wanted to make the toolbox interactive and give children ownership of what they put in their box," Johnson and Rygiel agreed. "Emotional literacy is so important, and this tool helps normalize the reality that everyone struggles with emotions."

Toolboxes are individual to the child they are created for. Examples of items families put in their child's toolbox include:

- Social/emotional books
- Pinwheels – they've created some from craft flowers

- Mindful activity cards – like, "do yoga," "do a craft," "blow bubbles"
- Playdough face supplies
- Bubbles
- A rice sock scented with lavender
- Caregiver resources
- Worry worm
- Sensory jars that the children create
- Essential oils to diffuse or use for reflexology/foot massage

The Results

Two years after its launch, families continue to use their toolboxes, and parents continue to extend their gratitude to River Source Family Center for the resource. The Center is now working with childcare facilities to offer Calm Down Toolbox creation events on site for families.



Amanda Rygiel (left) and Brenda Johnson (right) demonstrate a Calm Down Toolkit.

About River Source Family Center

River Source Family Center provides free services and classes for parents and caregivers. A variety of programs offer social interactions for adults and children, healthy child development opportunities, family togetherness, support, and resources. [Learn more.](#)