

Appropriate release of frustration

An appropriate release of frustration refers to a safe, constructive way for individuals to express feelings of frustration, or any other emotion that may feel overwhelming, without causing harm to themselves, others, or their environment.

When provided with an alternative, safe outlet for emotions like frustration, individuals are less likely to engage in unsafe behaviours, such as hitting or shouting. Supporting appropriate releases of frustration helps to:

- **Reduce emotional escalation**
- **Build long-term self-regulation skills**
- **Promote emotional awareness and resilience**

Using an appropriate release of frustration will be most effective when used proactively, before an emotion become overwhelming. Therefore, it is important to identify and recognise the early signs of emotions, such as physical, emotional or behavioural signs. For example:

Early signs of frustration may look like:

Clenched fists
Fast breathing
Tense body or pacing
Loud voice, shouting or verbal outbursts
Increased irritability
Avoidance, withdrawal or refusal
Repetitive movements

When we notice the early signs of emotions like frustration or anger, it's not about stopping this feeling, but how we express and manage them that builds long-term resilience. Providing predictable, safe ways to release frustration can reduce the frequency and intensity of emotional outbursts over time.



Examples of appropriate releases of frustration

Physical releases

- Punching a pillow or punching bag/mitts
- Stomping feet or jumping on the spot
- Tearing paper or cardboard
- Throwing soft items at a target
- Smashing ice cubes on the ground outside
- Running laps or bouncing on a trampoline

Expressive releases

- Drawing or scribbling feelings
- Writing, typing or voice recording how you feel
 - Using emojis or communication cards to express feelings
- Playing drums or making loud music with instruments
- Making loud sounds into a pillow (e.g., growling, roaring)
- Listening to music that reflects how you feel

Sensory releases

- Squeezing a stress ball or putty
- Wall push ups or animal walks
- Using a vibrating cushion or weighted equipment
- Swinging, rocking, or other rhythmic movement
- Holding a cold object (with supervision)

How adults can support:

- **Offer controlled choices:** "Would you rather punch your pillow or stomp your feet?"
- **Model self-regulation:** Demonstrate how you manage your own frustration using similar techniques
- **Reinforce effort:** Provide specific praise for using strategies "You chose to walk away and take deep breaths — that was a great decision"
- **Practice strategies during calm moments:** Trying strategies when calm and regulated builds confidence and familiarity, making them easier to use when frustration builds