



# Disability Services

Community and Home Support SA

## Information Sheet

### Alertness—Calming

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.

<p><b>Low revs</b> Tired No energy Not moving around much</p> 	<p>Good for rest and sleep</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><b>Cruising</b> Focused Paying attention</p> 	<p>Good for learning Good for listening to instructions</p>	
<p><b>High revs</b></p> 	<p>Good for active outdoor play</p>	<p>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.</p>

It is important to try and 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

To help your child's "engine" slow down.

- ▶ Deep pressure massage
- ▶ Swing slowly back and fourth on a swing/ hammock
- ▶ A warm bath
- ▶ Sit in a quiet room
- ▶ Listen to softer, calm music
- ▶ Hold a fidget toy
- ▶ Snack on chewy food
- ▶ Sipping from a sports bottle.



### Ideas for Alerting

To help your child's "engine" rev up.

- ▶ Light tickly touch
- ▶ Do some physical activity
- ▶ Hold a fidget toy
- ▶ Listen to lively up beat music
- ▶ Change body positions and have regular opportunity to move
- ▶ Snack on crunchy food
- ▶ Sipping from a sports bottle.



## More information

If you would like further information, please call your Child and Youth Service occupational therapist at Disability Services.

The DFC Library and Information Service (Disability Collection) has resources and books on this topic, including *How Does Your Engine Run? A Leader's Guide to the Alert Program for Self-Regulation* by Williams & Shellenberger, 1996.

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