

Big Feelings, Full Buckets - You've Got This

A free resource for families

A note from Katie

As a head teacher, October is when I started seeing the wobbles turn into proper meltdowns, over things that seem tiny on the surface. As a mum, I had the same experience at home: a full meltdown over cleaning teeth, when really it was never about the teeth. Six or seven weeks in, with no half term yet and the evenings drawing in, tanks are running low.

It's Never Really About the Teeth

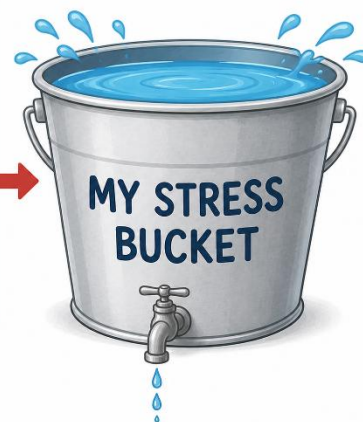
Think of your child's stress like a bucket. Every worry, tiredness, sensory overload and unfamiliar routine adds a little water in. Some days it drains out fine. Other days it doesn't, and the smallest thing tips it over. By October, children have been in new routines for six or seven weeks with no break, the clocks are changing and the days are getting darker, so buckets that were coping in September start running full. A meltdown over cleaning teeth isn't bad behaviour. It's a bucket that's already at the top. Calming tools can be used to drain the bucket before it gets too full.

Signs your child's bucket is getting full

- 💧 **Meltdowns over small things** - the reaction is always bigger than the trigger, like a full-blown meltdown over cleaning teeth.
- 💧 **Less patience with siblings** - squabbling or snapping at brothers and sisters more than usual.
- 💧 **Becoming argumentative** - pushing back on everything, even things they'd normally just get on with.
- 💧 **A change in tone of voice** - sharper or ruder than usual, often the first sign something's building.
- 💧 **Big feelings at pickup or bedtime** - the day held it together; home is where it's safe to let go.

A word on tone of voice

How you respond matters as much as the words. If your child speaks to you sharply, try: Then say nothing more; just carry on. When they rephrase, don't praise the change, just respond calmly and move on. It may escalate a little at first, so stick with it. Over a few weeks, a calmer tone gets a quicker response, and the rudeness fades.



"You sound angry, and that's okay. Take some space. It's not okay to speak to me that way. Try again." (For younger children explain specifically "Try again, speaking more kindly and calmly.")

7 CALMING TOOLS FOR OCTOBER TRY THIS AT HOME

Breathe Balloon breathing at bedtime: hands on tummy, breathe in slowly like filling a balloon, out slowly like letting the air go. It works best right before lights out.	Ground Squeeze and release: tense each muscle group for 5 seconds, then release, working from head to toe.
Move Bucket shake-out: shake arms, legs and whole body for 20 seconds, like shaking water off.	Nature A puddle walk or leaf hunt for younger children; for older children, a solo bike ride or a walk with headphones in works just as well.
Mindfulness Bucket check-in: ask directly, "What's filling up your stress/worry bucket today?"	Self-talk Encourage a simple phrase that names the feeling and do something to help: "It all feels too much, I need to (go outside / squeeze my hands / have a drink of water) to help myself."
Bedtime A 10-minute chat before lights out. Talking helps the brain settle the day's events before sleep, so a few minutes to listen matters more than it looks. Note anything for tomorrow in a special notebook, so it's held for problem-solving later.	

Want extra support with the big feelings this term? If the big feelings are becoming a daily pattern, we'd love to help your family find ways to keep the bucket manageable. For hands-on tools to try together at home, take a look at our [printable resources](#) in the Anchor & Bounce Etsy shop. If you'd like to talk it through, we're happy to work with you directly or alongside your child's school. Just drop us a line at hello@anchorandbounce.com.

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Big Feelings Full Buckets

A tool kit for families to help manage big feelings and worry buckets

Poster to help teach about the stress/worry bucket



What is my Stress & Worry Bucket?

Imagine you have an invisible bucket inside you. The water in your bucket represents all the stress, worries and big feelings you are carrying. Tricky things that happen can add more drops of water.

When your bucket gets too full, it can overflow, making you feel upset, anxious, angry or overwhelmed.

The good news is we can do things to drain some of the water out and help ourselves feel calmer.

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Sort these cards out and sort into two piles - FILLS MY BUCKET, DRAINS MY BUCKET. Then using the DRAINS my bucket cards - choose one idea to use each week.

I didn't get enough sleep.	Put cold water on your wrists	Lots of little things have gone wrong	Drizzle in for 1 and out for 6	Focus on things that are here and now - like your breath - what can you hear?	I had an argument with a friend
Play games or do something with a cat/grow up - to build connection.	I keep thinking about all the things that went wrong today	Reduce screen time	My routine suddenly changed	I focus on all the things I can't do	I'm feeling a cope
At bedtime read a book or listen to an audio	Spend 10 minutes outside	My heart in this moment is enough	I do a hobby - football, painting, Lego	I think someone was unkind	I feel my body rising as I breathe in
It is too noisy	I go to sleep earlier	I move my body - walk, run, jump	I have too much to do	I've chosen that thing that's best for me	I remind myself it's okay to feel not okay
I squeeze and release my muscles	I keep thinking about it	I talk to someone I trust	I feel rushed	I rest - reading a book, listening to music, drawing, anything calming and not too stimulating	Something didn't go the way I expected
There is too much going on around me	I have a drink of water				

Self-regulation strategies

Bingo

How to Play 'Draining the water' Bingo

Each square has a self-help strategy that can help drain some water from your stress and worry bucket.

Choose a square and try the strategy. When you've done it, tick it off or cover a counter.

Keep going until you get a full line across, down or diagonally.

Can you get BINGO (all of the strategies completed) and discover which strategy helps you feel calmer?

Go for a walk in nature. Find at least 3 things you could print with when you get home	Squeeze and release the shoulders up to your ears
Lay on your back. Raise & shake your arms and legs	At bedtime, tell a grown up of anything that's on your mind. Note them down in a little book
Take a walk in nature for 10-20 minutes	Balloon Breathing straight after school
Balloon breathing when feeling sad	Look in the mirror and say I am feeling worried so I will try to help myself.

What adds to your bucket?

Lots of things can add drops to our stress and worry bucket. Sometimes it might be one big thing, and sometimes lots of small things happen close together.

- Things that might fill my bucket include:
 - Feeling sad or not getting enough sleep
 - Worrying about something that might happen
 - Having too much to do
 - Feeling nervous or something feeling difficult
 - Arguments or feeling out with someone
 - Feeling left out or lonely
 - Someone saying or doing something unkind
 - Lost money, being pushed or too much going on around me
 - Feeling hungry or thirsty
 - Being tired
 - Not being ready
 - Plans for routine changing
 - Trying something new or unfamiliar
 - Not taking time for that something I need
 - Feeling like someone is listening or understanding

Cut out the bucket below, colour it in and pop it on the fridge at home. Then, on the droplets on the next page, write examples of things that fill YOUR stress or worry bucket. Cut them out and stick them on the bucket. To practice self-awareness, add them to the worry bucket when they come up day to day.

Everyone's bucket is different. Something that adds a tiny drop to one person's bucket might add a big splash to someone else's.



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Daily Journal

Print one of these for each week for a month

Monday (What's filling my bucket today?)

What did I do to drain it out?

Tuesday (What's filling my bucket today?)

What did I do to drain it out?

Wednesday (What's filling my bucket today?)

What did I do to drain it out?

Thursday (What's filling my bucket today?)

What did I do to drain it out?

Friday (What's filling my bucket today?)

What did I do to drain it out?

Saturday (What's filling my bucket today?)

What did I do to drain it out?

Sunday (What's filling my bucket today?)

What did I do to drain it out?

Things that you are worried, stressed or angry about fill the bucket

Things you do that create a calm, comfortable feeling in your mind and body drain the bucket.

Journalling exercises

Games - Bingo and table games



Roll again!

Choose any player to move 2.

Do balloon breathing for 20 seconds.

Follow the special action

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Etsy

For hands-on tools to try together at home, take a look at our [printable resources](#) in the Anchor & Bounce Etsy shop.