

EXERCISE: CREATING MY CALM CORNER

When your whole house feels overwhelming, you need at least ONE space that's yours and that feels calm. This doesn't have to be a whole room - it can be a corner, a chair, even just a 2-foot square area. The point is creating a tiny sanctuary where you can breathe. This is about control. You might not be able to control the whole house, but you CAN control a small space. And that small space can make a huge difference in how you feel.

Time Needed

Varies widely, from 30 minutes to several sessions, depending on your capacity and whether you need help

Energy Level

Flexible: can be adapted to your current physical and mental capacity

What You'll Need

Paper and something to write with

When to Do This

When you have the energy and support you need; this doesn't have to happen all at once

Before You Start: Know Your Needs

This exercise can be adapted to YOUR situation. Consider:

Physical capacity:

- Can you do physical tasks (bending, lifting, carrying), or do you need help?
- Do you have chronic pain or fatigue that limits sustained activity?
- Do you need mobility aids to access certain spaces?

Sensory needs:

- Are there textures, sounds, or smells that bother you?
- Do you need specific sensory elements (soft lighting, quiet, certain textures)?
- Will cleaning products or dust trigger sensory issues?

Executive function:

- Do you need help making decisions about what to keep/remove?
- Do you work better with someone guiding you step-by-step?
- Do you need external structure or accountability?

Mental health:

- Is this task emotionally overwhelming to do alone?
- Do you need breaks for emotional regulation?
- Would having support make this more doable?

There is NO shame in needing help, accommodations, or modifications. Work with what you've got.

How It Works

You'll identify a small space, clear it (with help if needed), claim it as yours, and then maintain it in whatever way works for your capacity. This becomes your anchor point in the chaos.

Step 1: Choose Your Space

Look around and identify a small area you could realistically claim and maintain given YOUR abilities and energy.

Options might include:

- A corner of your bedroom (even 2x2 feet)
- Your bed area (bed + nightstand)
- A chair and the space immediately around it
- A desk or table surface (just the top, not underneath)
- A windowsill or shelf
- A section of floor you can reach
- The top of a dresser
- Inside a closet if you can access it
- Even just a lap desk or tray table you can move

Choosing criteria:

- Small enough that you can manage it (with or without help)
- Somewhere you can physically access comfortably
- Somewhere you spend time or could spend time
- Somewhere you can reasonably defend as "yours"
- Somewhere that doesn't have sensory triggers you can't manage
- Somewhere that's not a main traffic area others will clutter

NOT recommended:

- Common areas you can't control (kitchen, living room)
- Areas requiring significant physical labor you can't manage
- Spaces you can't physically access safely
- Spaces you never use

My calm corner will be: _____

Accommodations I might need: _____

Step 2: Define the Boundaries

Clearly identify the exact boundaries of your calm corner.

This might be:

- The left corner of my room, from the wall to the edge of my bed
- My desk surface, just the top
- The area I can reach from my chair
- The nightstand next to my bed

Why boundaries matter: You need to know exactly what space you're committing to keep clear. If it's vague, it will spread into chaos. If it's defined, you can defend it.

Describe your calm corner boundaries (You can write, draw, voice record, or have someone help you map it out):

Step 3: Clear It - Choose Your Approach

There are multiple ways to clear your calm corner. Choose what works for YOUR situation:

Option A: Clear It Yourself Over Time

If you have moderate physical capacity and can work in short bursts:

- Work in 15-30 minute sessions
- Take breaks as needed
- Spread across multiple days if necessary
- Use tools to reduce physical strain (grabber tools, sitting while you work, etc.)

Option B: Clear It With Help

If you need physical assistance or decision-making support:

Who might help:

- Friend (in person or video call for moral support)
- Family member you trust
- Teacher, counselor, or social worker
- Professional organizer (some work with youth for free)
- Sibling

What to tell them:

- "I'm trying to create one small space that feels calm. Can you help me for 30 minutes?"
- "I need help moving things but I want to make the decisions about what stays."
- "Can you just be here while I do this? I work better with someone nearby."

There is NO shame in asking for help. Many people need support for organizing tasks.

Option C: Clear It in Stages

If your energy is limited or unpredictable:

- Stage 1: Remove obvious trash
- Stage 2: Remove items that belong to others
- Stage 3: Remove your items that don't belong here
- Stage 4: Decide what stays
- Stage 5: Clean if you have capacity

Each stage might take 10-15 minutes, or it might take a day. Rest between stages as needed.

Option D: Minimal Version

If you have very limited capacity:

- Choose the SMALLEST possible space (nightstand top, one shelf, a tray)
- Remove only what's obviously trash or not yours
- Don't worry about deep cleaning - just clear

This is still a victory

Step 4: Sort Items - Adapted Methods

As you clear (yourself or with help), items need to go somewhere:

If you can physically sort:

Four categories:

- TRASH (throw away now)
- NOT MINE (box or bag to return/relocate later)
- MINE: STAYS HERE (set aside temporarily)
- MINE: GOES ELSEWHERE (box to deal with later)

If sorting is overwhelming:

Two categories only:

- STAYS
(definitely belongs in calm corner)
- GOES
(everything else in one box/bag to sort later or never)

If decision-making is hard:

- Ask a helper to hold up each item and you just say, "Stay" or "Go"
- Don't overthink it
- Trust your gut

If you get stuck on items:

"Unsure" box:

- Put anything you can't decide on in a box
- Seal and date it
- If you haven't needed it in 3 months, it can go
- Don't let indecision stop you

Step 5: Clean It If You Can

Once it's clear, cleaning the space is ideal but not mandatory.

If you can clean:

- Wipe surfaces with what you have (even just a damp cloth)
- Sweep/vacuum if you can access tools and have energy
- Do what's possible, not what's perfect

If you can't clean physically:

- Ask someone to help
- Focus on just clearing - clean surface is better than cluttered even if dusty
- Use tools that make it easier (long-handled duster, sitting while cleaning)

If sensory issues prevent cleaning:

- Wear gloves if textures bother you
- Use unscented products or even damp paper towels if smells trigger you
- Take breaks if it's overwhelming
- It's okay to skip cleaning and just have it clear

The priority is CLEAR over CLEAN. Clear matters most.

Step 6: Intentionally Put Back Only What Belongs

Now—carefully—put back **ONLY** things that:

- Actually belong in and serve the purpose of this space
- Make you feel calm (not stressed)
- You can manage maintaining

What might belong in a calm corner:

- Items you use from this space regularly
- Things that bring you genuine peace
- Functional items for the space's purpose
- Comfort items that help you regulate

What does **NOT** belong in a calm corner:

- Anything that stresses you out
- Items you never use
- Things that belong elsewhere
- Anything that makes maintenance harder

If you have executive function challenges:

- Have someone help you decide
- Use the “have I used this in the last week?” rule
- When in doubt, leave it out
- You can always add things back later

Step 7: Set Maintenance Rules That Work For YOU to Build Healthy Habits

Your maintenance routine needs to match YOUR capacity.

If you have consistent energy:

Daily (2-5 minutes):

- Return items to their places
- Remove anything that doesn't belong

Weekly (10 minutes):

- Quick wipe-down or tidy
- Check that boundaries are holding

If you have variable energy:

When you have good days:

- Do a reset of your calm corner
- Don't push on bad days

Minimum maintenance:

- Once a week, spend 5 minutes returning it to baseline
- That's enough

If you have very limited capacity:

Simplified rules:

- If you bring something in, put it away before bed (or when you remember)
- Once a week, ask someone to help you reset it
- Even if it gets messy, reset it when you can—no guilt

Your rules need to be SUSTAINABLE for you, not perfect.

Step 8: Defend Your Calm Corner - With Boundaries

Your calm corner will be tested, but defense doesn't have to be physical or confrontational.

If others put stuff in your calm corner:

- Physical boundaries (if safe/possible/allowed):
 - Close and lock your door
 - Use a "do not touch" sign
 - Put items in a "not mine" box immediately when you have energy
- Verbal boundaries:
 - "This is my space, please don't put things here."
 - "Can you help me keep this one area clear?"
 - Practice the phrase and use it consistently

- When you can't defend in the moment:
 - Reset when you have energy
 - Accept you might need to reset more often
 - This isn't failure; it's reality
- If you're tempted to let it slide:
 - Recognize and remember how it feels when it's clear
 - Remind yourself you only have to maintain THIS space
 - Do a 2-minute reset even if it's not perfect
 - Something is better than nothing

Step 9: Adapt Maintenance to Your Reality

Maintenance looks different for everyone.

If you have ADHD or executive function challenges:

- Set a phone alarm for daily reset time
- Use visual reminders (photo of clear space on your wall)
- Pair maintenance with another habit (before-bed routine)
- Keep it VERY simple; complicated systems are more likely to fail
- Have a "reset buddy" text you reminders

If you have chronic pain or fatigue:

- Sit while you maintain when possible
- Use tools that reduce strain (grabber tools, lazy susan for surfaces)
- Lower your standards; "good enough" is fine
- Ask for help on bad pain/fatigue days
- Your calm corner can have a chair/stool permanently if you need to sit there

If you have sensory sensitivities:

- Choose items for your calm corner that feel good (soft textures, pleasant colors)
- Avoid anything with triggering textures/smells
- Maintenance can include sensory regulation (adjusting lighting, sounds)
- Your calm corner should work WITH your sensory needs

If you have depression or anxiety:

- On bad mental health days, your calm corner can just BE; you don't have to maintain it perfectly
- The goal is having a space that supports you, not one that adds pressure
- Reset when you can, rest when you can't
- This is a tool for you, not another burden

Using Your Calm Corner

This space is for:

- Decompressing when you're overwhelmed
- Doing activities that help you feel better
- Being somewhere that feels manageable
- Reminding yourself you can control something
- Practicing skills for your future home

Adapt its use to your needs:

- If you're physically limited, it can be a space you access from one position
- If you're sensory-seeking, include items that provide good sensory input
- If you need support, it can be where someone helps you with tasks
- If you need quiet, it's your escape

This space proves:

- You CAN create something that works for you
- You CAN maintain something at your capacity level
- You WILL be able to manage your own place someday that is adapted to your needs

Troubleshooting

"I don't have the physical ability to clear/maintain a space"

- Start with the smallest possible space (a tray, a lap desk)
- Ask for help without shame; many people need support
- Focus on what you CAN control (what goes on the space) even if you can't physically manage it alone
- Consider if a teacher, counselor, or social worker could connect you with support

"My disability makes it hard to maintain anything consistently"

- Lower your standards to match your capacity
- Maintenance can be "whenever you can" not "daily"
- The goal is improvement, not perfection
- Even a calm corner that needs frequent resets is better than none

"I have sensory issues with cleaning/organizing"

- Skip cleaning if needed; clear is more important than clean
- Wear gloves, use unscented products, take frequent breaks
- Have someone else handle triggering parts if possible
- Your calm corner can be "clear but not sterile" and that's fine

“My executive function makes this impossible”

- Work with someone who can help provide structure
- Use external systems (alarms, visual reminders, accountability)
- Simplify everything - fewer rules, fewer decisions
- It's okay if you need ongoing support

“I feel guilty needing help/accommodations”

- Many people need support for organizing; it's common
- Asking for help is mature, not weak
- Your calm corner WITH support is better than no calm corner
- Disability accommodations aren't cheating; they're access

Important Reminders

- **Your calm corner will look different than someone else's.** That's okay. It needs to work for YOU.
- **Needing accommodations or help doesn't make this less valuable.** The goal is having a space that supports you, however you create it.
- **Your capacity will vary.** Some days or weeks you'll maintain it easily. Some days or weeks you won't. Both are normal.
- **“Maintenance” is flexible.** It can mean different things at different times based on your energy, health, and circumstances.
- **This is practice and habit-building.** When you have your own place, you'll adapt it to your needs. You're learning what works for you now.

Real Talk

Creating and maintaining a calm corner when you have disabilities, chronic conditions, or neurodivergence AND you're living in a hoarded home is HARD.

You're dealing with:

- Physical barriers that limit what you can do
- Energy limitations that change day to day
- Executive function challenges that make organizing harder
- Sensory issues that make the process overwhelming
- Mental health struggles that drain motivation
- AND living in chaos that makes everything worse

That's a lot.

If you can create even a TINY calm corner - a nightstand, a shelf, a tray - that's huge.

If you need help doing it, that's fine.

If you can't maintain it perfectly, that's normal.

If it takes you three times longer than it would take someone else, that's okay.

The point isn't perfection. The point is having SOMETHING that's yours and feels manageable.

Your calm corner might be:

- Smaller than you wish
- Less organized than you'd like
- Requiring more help than you want to need
- Taking longer to maintain than seems "normal"

And it still counts. It still matters. You still did it.

Create it at your pace, with the support you need, in the way that works for your body and brain.

That's not a compromise. That's meeting yourself where you are.

And that's exactly what you should be doing.