

## **New Ways to “Calm Down”**

When my dad yelled “Calm down!” he didn’t mean “Find a quiet place within yourself” or “Take a deep breath and blow out slowly.” “Calm down” was his code for “Stop what you’re doing, turn down the noise.” My father became a parent before there was research on concrete ways to help children step out of a state of agitation or anxiety and into a feeling of well-being. However, he did emphasize the value of outdoor physical activity every day, something we know now is one of the best antidotes to depression.

It seems important to mention the growth of our knowledge about promoting well-being during May, Mental Health Awareness Month. Parents and teachers today are more knowledgeable about the importance of encouraging children to talk about feelings underlying behavior rather than demanding that they stop feeling or behaving a certain way. We look for the reasons for the behavior.

Last week the parent of a Meher School second grader in the rush of getting ready for work asked her daughter why she seemed to be upset about everything that morning. Her daughter confessed she was nervous about taking a test. “I told her how great it was that she told me and gave her a long hug that made us both feel better.”

Today we know the importance of adults being able to empathize with and validate children’s difficult feelings, so they don’t feel compelled to act them out. We are also armed with information about how to support children to self-soothe on the spot when they are experiencing agitated emotions.

Here are some quick calming techniques:

- Recent research shows that hugging for 20 seconds reduces stress hormones in the blood and increases oxytocin. Long hugs also support feelings of trust and optimism.
- Counting to a high number helps switch reactions to the thinking side of the brain.
- Singing or humming a tune can bring about a state of calm and reduce anxiety.
- Clenching and releasing fists helps a child be aware of body tensions and let go of them.
- Drinking cold water can stimulate the vagus nerve, slowing down the heart rate and supporting a feeling of calm.

- Running, jumping, and roughhousing release pent-up energy.

As a community, there are countless ways we nurture one another's beliefs that we each matter equally and deserve to feel safe, accepted in our uniqueness, and loved.

The Equity & Inclusion Committee has focused on [wonderful classroom activities](#) that reflect advances in our understanding of the importance of our role in supporting children's mental health.