

# Adults Can Help Children Create Calm Out of Chaos

by Janai Lowenstein

**First-grader** Josie was so excited. “Janai” she began, with beaming eyes and a steady voice, “two of my friends were in a big argument on the playground. I told them they should take deep breaths together to calm down. And they did it *together*. Then we played again.”

Josie and her friends were equally proud of their accomplishment. They all gained confidence. Josie accomplished something that many adults don’t realize is possible—that we can create calm in the midst of chaos.

Josie knew how to be calm herself in order to help her friends. If she had used a harsh tone of voice and become angry at them, their ears would have been closed to her words. Josie became a playground peacemaker. She learned about self-control and making good choices in the Self-Help Program in Drain.

In the whirling of an emotional storm, it is easy to get lost and not be objective. By knowing ourselves, developing an internal frame of reference and practicing self-help skills, we can learn to step out of the grip of that emotional storm. This empowers us to have more control in life, within ourselves, even if we cannot control the circumstances around us.

However, as Josie discovered, there are opportunities that allow us to help calm unnecessary chaos in our world.

A kindergarten boy shared that members of his family were upset and yelling at each other. He started to feel very upset. Then he took some deep breaths, remembering that he didn’t have to let his environment take control over him. He could be in control of himself, even if he didn’t like or couldn’t control what was going on around him. That day he earned his freedom.

A 6-year-old shared that he went for a walk with his parents one night. They got in a terrible fight on the edge of a bridge, forgetting he was there. In their chaos, they accidentally knocked him off the bridge.

Holding on to a tree limb, this child remembered the jingle he learned in class—breathe, think and make a good choice! He took those steps and was very proud of himself for getting back to safety. This frail little boy learned what it meant to trust himself.

Krystal, a kindergarten student, experienced the trauma of losing her home to fire. When the firefighters said it was cooled down and safe to go look around, Krystal said she knew she needed to take deep breaths. It helped her to go in and look at the remains of what once was her home.

With skills, a stressful situation is more manageable and less debilitating.

Tyson observed fellow students being upset and blaming each other at breakfast. He suggested they take deep breaths, calm down and stop blaming each other. He was so happy when they took his suggestion. Violence prevention is more noteworthy than acts of violence. Tyson was able to

keep himself detached from the angry commotion and chaos. He is a confident boy to be able to do this.

Here's how to help children strengthen their abilities to create calm. It is a priceless tool in blocking the tendency to succumb to peer pressure in later years. Know thyself. Calm thyself. Spread the calm.

- **Breathe deeply, slowly and evenly with your child.** Have breath breaks. Every time you come to a stoplight in the car, take a deep breath together, counting to five as you inhale and five as you exhale. Breathe through the belly, not the throat. In the house, use a painting or a plant, something physical, to be a cue for taking a deep breath each time you see or pass it. Create deep breath games with each other.
- **Body scan.** In addition to taking deep breaths, train yourself to scan your body and your child to scan her body internally to see if there is any extra tension building up. If so, breathe deeply through those body parts to release the extra tension. Make it fun. Ask your child to name body parts that you have to scan internally to see if there's tension build-up. Reverse roles.
- **Make up a chaos game.** Make loud noises and have your child practice breathing deeply and being in control of his thoughts, feelings, physical tension level and breathing. Switch roles. It's a guarantee he'll love making chaos for you to practice calm self-control.
- **Keep a tally on the refrigerator** to make a note with symbols or stickers for every effort made to practice calm in the midst of chaos. Sing each other's praises. This will empower children in their ability to feel needed, as well as know their caring does, indeed, make a difference!

Janai Lowenstein, M.S., international trainer, author, kids' TV producer and host, is the director of the Self-Help Program and co-founder of the Counseling Living Foundation, Drain, Oregon. Website: [www.cliving.org/kidrelx.htm](http://www.cliving.org/kidrelx.htm)

Original publication date: 8/28/00 – The Register Guard, Eugene, Oregon