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Dear Families,

I hope that this letter finds you and your family healthy and well. I know it has been a challenge to create a new sense of normalcy, not only for our children but also for ourselves. During the regular school day, teachers and staff use a variety of Conscious Discipline strategies to assist students in moments of stress, overwhelm, and when they simply need a break. As partners, we can continue to work together to help our children maintain a daily routine and help remind them of these strategies:

Begin each day with a **Brain Smart Start** (no longer than 5 minutes):

- *Unite* with morning prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance
- *Disengage Stress* with deep breathing
- *Connect* to one another with an activity including touch, eye-to-eye presence, and playfulness
- *Commit* by making a personal or group commitment: “Today, I will ____.”

Composure is the prerequisite skill adults need before disciplining children, regardless of how crazy the outside world appears to be. *As adults, our internal state helps to regulate our children’s states.* Following are some strategies and tools that are helpful to children and adults in reclaiming power by actively calming in times of distress:

The **Active Calming** three-step process:

- **Take three deep breaths.** Deep breathing is often referred to as S.T.A.R. breathing. **S**mile, **T**ake a deep breath **A**nd **R**elax. Students are also familiar with pretzel, balloon, drain, magazine, and cookie breathing.
- **Affirm to yourself**, “I am safe. Keep breathing. I can handle this.”
- **Wish well** by opening your heart and seeing the preciousness of the person with whom you are interacting.

A **Safe Place**, “Calm Corner”, or “Peace Place” is a research-based tool for learning that can be helpful for children. A safe place is *not* a Time Out zone used as punishment, it is a peaceful place where children go to regain composure and learn and practice the skill of self-regulation. Children will practice breathing, identifying their emotions, participating in calming activities and problem solving. Most importantly, remember, the parent is the portable Safe Place for the child and it changes with age: it starts in the womb, then moves to the parent’s chest, then the lap, then a designated external Safe Place, and ultimately children will carry their Safe Place within themselves as inner peace.

Download Calm: When a child is upset, we will either catch our children’s upset or they will catch our calmness, emotions are contagious. If we want a child to calm down and cooperate, we must become calm and cooperative as the adult. Help your child download calm in an upsetting situation by following the steps:

- Upload calm into your body.
- Mirror and notice the child’s body language: “Your feet/body/face are going like this...”
- When the child makes eye contact, take a S.T.A.R. breath.
- Offer the child choices or provide specific instructions.

Take care,

Julie Speer
Assistant Principal

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Saint Mary Academy is to educate students spiritually, academically, emotionally, and socially through a curriculum rooted in the Roman Catholic faith. Students are educated in a manner which fosters academic excellence, provides a supportive atmosphere and develops students to be responsible, moral members of their church and community.

