

This weekend I found myself surrounded by families enjoying the outdoors. I sat and watched a mother and her child run across the field holding hands and it occurred to me that the image was both simple and profound.

I have always had a soft spot for handholding.

One of my most special memories is one of my grandmother and me holding hands as we walked up a hill in the snow on the way to the movie theatre. The memory brings back the sensation of contentment, safety and closeness that I was feeling as a five year-old girl in the company of a trusted adult.

I remember holding hands with my late husband as we strolled in Beacon Hill Park on a warm summer's day knowing that we were connected by love and history.

There is no doubt that I have a tendency toward sentimentality and I think that sentiment is a good fit with old-fashioned hand-holding.

There are so many connotations for hand-holding in our society and around the world. Some countries are culturally committed to holding hands as a way of showing affection and their handholding behaviour is a lot more visible than it is in Canada. We seem to be more reserved about reaching out and taking someone's hand unless it is between adults and children or young lovers who can't keep themselves from touching no matter where they are.

There are some pretty significant studies about hand-holding. This is a practice that is more and more under the microscope to better understand the effect it has on us emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. One study that focused on couples who had been together for 10 or more years identified that continuing to hold hands over the years resulted in better physical intimacy, as well as better relationships overall. Other studies examined the effect of hand-holding in hospitals when one person was undergoing stressful testing. When a significant other such as a spouse or a parent was there to hold the patient's hand, the heartbeat slowed and blood pressure lowered.

We have many examples in our society of middle-aged adults caring for elders. Holding the hand of an elder person can provide them with safety and support as well as a calming touch in the midst of their vulnerability. One of the common complaints of the elderly is that they do not have enough touch in their lives. When their spouses are gone, seniors have less opportunity to hug and kiss and hold someone's hand.

Holding someone's hand has many meanings. The most important is connection. Humans are social beings and we need to connect with other humans for our basic well-being. Hand-holding also sends the message of affection, trust, protection, comfort, safety, love and caring, and, at times, solidarity.

The next time you are walking beside a loved one, reach over take their hand in yours. I guarantee you'll get a good feeling.

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