

THE VALUE OF HUGS

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I don't think we can ever underestimate the value of a hug. We, who experience frequent hugs, don't always realize how fortunate we are. People who lose their partners or friends have told me that the greatest thing they miss is human touch. So what does a hug do? It is commonly said that it takes four hugs a day to survive, eight hugs a day to maintain a strong emotional level, and twelve hugs a day to grow.

Research states that hugs cure depression, boost the immune system, reduce stress, induce sleep, and invigorate and rejuvenate the mind and body. I saw a great clip on "YouTube" showing a guy named Juan Mann walking down Pitt Street in Sydney with a big sign saying, "Free hugs". Initially, nobody would go near him, but then a little old lady tapped him on the arm and asked for a hug because her dog had died that day and it was the anniversary of her daughter's death. One hug started an avalanche, one guy actually hurling himself at the hugger. Then the police banned Juan from hugging without \$250,000 insurance in case he hurt someone. He raked in the required 10,000 protester signatures and was allowed to continue. He even hugged a policeman.

If hugs are so beneficial to our well-being, then why do we not proactively pursue hugging one another? It has been said that most adults love to hug babies and animals, but some hesitate to hug another adult because they fear rejection. Physical touch of any kind has been banned in some schools. My husband, Brian, has been working with children all of his work life and these days he cannot comfort a child except to talk to them. He says many kids run up and hug him and, although he doesn't discourage it, he cannot overtly respond. Kids are crying out for assurance through human touch. We, as parents, need to be aware of the value of hugs, even if we have not experienced them as a child. Surely we want to have our kids experience the love and acceptance from adults that a hug brings.

Some people don't appear to want to be touched. I have always cuddled my kids whether they liked it or not. When my son was small he wasn't really what I would describe as a 'cuddle bunny', but I just kept hugging him anyway. Then when he was around 12 years old we were both sitting on the couch watching TV one night and he quietly took my hand and just held it. I couldn't believe it, but there it was! I just sat there and reveled in the simplicity of it. He has been a major hugger ever since.

Giving a hug is a choice. It takes an effort. It requires our acceptance of others. If you haven't been a hugger, then here are some starter suggestions. Look at people as you walk down the street, and as you catch their eye, smile at them. Ask if you can help. Say a kind word. Say, "Thank you." Say you are

sorry. All of these things validate the other person. When you see others' responses, then you will feel more confident to actually reach out and touch or hug another person. By embracing someone you are being vulnerable, letting someone within your personal space. It is letting your guard down so you can experience the love of others.

To trust and be trusted is one of our most precious values. Hug your kids and encourage them to be huggers too. Hug your friends and tell them how much you appreciate them. You may even be bold like Juan Mann and hug strangers. You will never know how this simple act of giving someone else value, can change someone else's perspective on life.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.