

THOSE 'HUGGABLE' HUGS

by Cindy S. Hansen

PURPOSE

To have youth think about types of hugs and the related feelings. To get the group to think of when it is appropriate to hug.

PREPARATION

Gather felt-tip markers, pencils and Bibles for everyone and two sheets of posterboard.

Make copies of the following question sheet for each member:

The Squeeze Quiz

1. Which hugs are you comfortable with? Why?
2. Which hugs are you uncomfortable with? Why?
3. What good feelings are gained from hugs?
4. What bad feelings are registered because of hugs?
5. How do you decide which hugs are appropriate?
6. How do you decide which hugs are inappropriate?
7. Why do some people feel comfortable hugging and others not?
8. Is it easy for you to hug friends? moms? dads? brothers? sisters? other relatives? Why? Why not?

OPENING

Begin this meeting with a rousing game of Hug Tag. One person is "it" and tries to tag someone else—by hugging. You are "safe" only when you are hugging some-

one else. Only two to a hug and you can't hug the same person two times in a row. You can hug for three seconds then you must hug someone else.¹ Try some variations with this game—have all players move in slow motion, hop on one foot or run backward.

THE 'MEAT' OF THE MEETING

Gather the group in a circle and introduce the topic of hugs by saying that "touch is not only nice, it's needed. Scientific research supports the theory that stimulation by touch is absolutely necessary for our physical as well as emotional well-being."² How many agree? disagree? Why? Explain that this meeting examines our feelings about touch, different kinds of hugs, and when it is and is not appropriate to hug.

Begin a pantomime time. Ask for two volunteers to stand in the middle of the circle. The leader says one type of hug—the two in the middle must use their imaginations and pantomime the hug. Examples:

- Grandmother hug
- Cheek-to-cheek hug
- Bear hug
- One-arm hug
- Stuck-record hug
- Neck hug
- Waist hug
- Quick squeeze
- Stiff hug

Ask the group to think of other types of hugs. Volunteers are changed after each hug is pantomimed. Write the names of the hugs on a chalkboard or posterboard for later reference. Discuss the types of hugs just demonstrated. Have the youth experienced these kinds of hugs? Distribute and have the youth answer the Squeeze Quiz.

Divide the group in half and have each group discuss the quiz.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:20. What is a holy kiss? Do you have a similar greeting at church? Passing of the peace? Morning greeters at the door? What do you do if you are in church and want to greet someone with a hug and the person is not comfortable with it? What do you do if you are uncomfortable with "huggable" greetings at church?

Read Matthew 8:3,15; 9:29; 20:34. Does Jesus use touch in his ministry? How? How do people feel from his touch? How do you think Jesus would feel about each of the hugs that were demonstrated in the pantomime time?

RESPONSE (OR CLOSING)

After the discussion, hand each group a piece of posterboard and a marker. Tell each group it is now full of "hug experts." Instruct them to make a list of hugging guidelines. Keeping in mind the earlier discussion of types of hugs, feel-

ings of hugs and Bible verses. What are some guidelines? Which hugs are unbearable? Which are okay? Example:

1. Never smother a person with a hug if it makes him or her feel uncomfortable.

2. One-arm hugs and quick squeezes are acceptable for making people feel welcome at a church service or youth meeting.

At the bottom of the posterboard, have each group write its philosophy of hugs or touches. Example: "As a result of this discussion and Bible study, we decide that friendly hugs are okay and should be easily administered. Keeping in mind Romans 16:16: 'Greet one another with a holy kiss,' we will, 'Greet one another with a holy hug.'"

Gather in groups of threes. Each person in the trio shares a concern or a thanksgiving. Pray silently together and end with an Oreo Cookie hug. (One person stands in the center of the other two and gets squeezed.) Allow each person in the trio to be the center of the cookie hug. End the session with one big group hug.

¹Lee Sparks, ed., *Try This One . . . Too* (Loveland, Colo.: Group Books, 1982), p. 29.

²Kathleen Keating, *The Hug Therapy Book* (Minneapolis, Minn.: CompCare Publications, 1983), p. 1.