

## The Contention Hug

The contention hug is a structured and intentional act of holding designed to create a secure and nurturing environment where the individual feels seen, valued, and emotionally supported. It is not merely a physical gesture but a profound interaction aimed at fostering emotional regulation and reconnecting individuals to their innate sense of safety.

### Key Principles:

1. **Attachment and Connection:** The hug serves as a tool to strengthen emotional bonds, often used in parent-child relationships or therapeutic contexts.
2. **Emotional Regulation:** It helps soothe emotional dysregulation, particularly for individuals experiencing anger, fear, or distress.
3. **Reparenting Dynamics:** For adults or children with unresolved trauma, the hug mimics the secure and loving presence often associated with parental care.

### How to Perform the Contention Hug

The contention hug is not a casual embrace but a deliberate and therapeutic process. Below are the steps to guide its implementation:

#### Preparation

1. **Set a Safe Space:** Choose a quiet, private environment where the individual feels comfortable and unthreatened.
2. **Obtain Consent:** Explain the purpose of the hug, and ensure the individual is willing to participate. Consent is crucial, especially in therapeutic settings.

#### Execution

1. **Positioning:**
  - o Sit in a comfortable position with the individual facing you or sitting on your lap, depending on their size and comfort level.
  - o Wrap your arms securely around their back, creating a cocoon-like enclosure.
2. **Gentle Pressure:**
  - o Apply firm but gentle pressure, enough to feel grounding and supportive without being restrictive or overpowering.
3. **Sustain the Embrace:**
  - o Maintain the hug for an extended period (typically several minutes), allowing the individual to gradually relax into the embrace.
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- o Be attuned to their body language and emotions. If they become distressed, pause or adjust the hug.

## Engagement

1. **Verbal Reassurance:**
  - o Speak soothing words or affirmations, such as, "You are safe," or, "I am here with you."
  - o Maintain a calm, steady tone of voice.
2. **Nonverbal Communication:**
  - o Use soft breathing, a relaxed posture, and slow movements to convey safety and acceptance.

## Closure

1. **Gradual Release:** Do not abruptly end the hug. Ease out of the embrace gently while maintaining verbal or visual connection.
2. **Debrief:** After the hug, discuss the experience. Ask the individual how they felt and share your observations.

## Applications of the Contention Hug

### Trauma Healing in Adults:

- o Facilitates emotional release and the reconnection to a sense of safety and belonging.

## Using the Contention Hug Outside Therapy

- **Parents and Caregivers:** To calm children during moments of distress or tantrums.
- **Partners:** To support each other during emotional challenges.
- **Close Friends or Family Members:** To offer comfort and reassurance during times of stress or anxiety.

## Steps:

### 1. Create a Safe and Comfortable Environment

- Choose a quiet space where both individuals can relax without external distractions.
- Ensure privacy to help the individual feel secure and avoid potential embarrassment.

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## 2. Understand the Need for Consent

- Always ask the other person if they are comfortable with the hug. For example:
  - With a child: "Can I hold you to help you feel better?"
  - With an adult: "Would a hug help you right now?"
- Respect their decision if they decline, and offer alternative support, such as sitting nearby or holding hands.

## 3. Positioning for the Hug

- **For Children:**
  - Sit on a couch, chair, or the floor with the child facing you or sitting on your lap.
  - Wrap your arms gently but securely around them, covering their back or shoulders.
- **For Adults:**
  - Sit or stand in a comfortable position where both individuals can relax.
  - Embrace firmly but gently, with your arms encircling their back.

## 4. Apply Gentle Pressure

- Hold firmly enough to create a sense of containment and security but not so tight that it feels restrictive or uncomfortable.
- For smaller children, you can softly place a hand on their head or cradle their body for added reassurance.

## 5. Stay Present During the Hug

- Use deep, slow breaths to signal calmness and help the other person regulate their breathing.
- Remain emotionally attuned, paying attention to signs of relaxation or discomfort.

## 6. Use Gentle Words or Silence

- Speak soothingly if appropriate. Examples include:
  - "I've got you. You're safe."
  - "It's okay to feel upset. I'm here with you."
- If words are not helpful, simply hold the person quietly, letting the physical connection convey your support.

## 7. Allow Time for Relaxation

- Maintain the hug for at least 2–5 minutes, or until the individual shows signs of calmness (e.g., relaxed breathing, softer body tension).
- Avoid rushing; let the person determine when they are ready to disengage.

## 8. Release Gradually

- When ending the hug, do so slowly and gently. Continue offering verbal or visual reassurance to ensure they don't feel abruptly cut off.
- Afterward, stay close or offer to talk if they want to share their feelings.

## Tips for Success

### For Parents:

- Use the contention hug during moments of distress (e.g., after a tantrum or a bad day at school) to help children feel emotionally grounded.
- Practice regularly in non-crisis moments to build a stronger emotional connection.

### For Adults:

- Use it with a partner or close friend to support each other during challenging emotions, such as stress, sadness, or overwhelm.
- Be mindful of personal boundaries, especially if the relationship is not accustomed to physical gestures of comfort.

### For All Relationships:

- Always respect the other person's boundaries. If they seem uncomfortable, stop and ask how else you can help.
- Avoid using the hug when emotions are too heightened or physical resistance occurs, as it may escalate distress.

## When and Why to Use the Contention Hug

- **During Emotional Outbursts:** Helps calm intense emotions like anger, fear, or sadness.
- **To Foster Connection:** Strengthens bonds and provides a sense of belonging.
- **As a Preventive Tool:** Regular hugs can reinforce feelings of safety and reduce the likelihood of emotional dysregulation over time.

## Important Considerations

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1. **Know the Limits:** The contention hug is not a substitute for professional therapy, especially for individuals with severe trauma or unresolved emotional issues.
2. **Be Patient:** Not everyone will immediately feel comfortable with this practice. Give them time to adapt.
3. **Consistency Matters:** Regular use can deepen trust and foster emotional resilience.