

# The Power of Hugs

Often, in *Life Care Journey* sessions or other company functions, I will praise the power of hugs to lift one's spirits and bring positive emotional adjustment.

Among the leading advocates of this theory was the late Virginia Satir (1916 – 1988), an American author and psychotherapist, known especially for her approach to family therapy and her work with Systemic Constellations. Her most well-known books are *Conjoint Family Therapy*, *Peoplemaking* and *The New Peoplemaking*.



An article in *Reader's Digest* years ago mentioned Satir prescribing hugs for the blues. The magazine quoted her as saying, "Our pores are places for messages of love and physical contact. Four hugs a day are necessary for survival, eight for maintenance and 12 for growth."



I like this happy prescription!

And the centers of Life Care and Century Park, along with the residences visited by Life Care at Home, have become laboratories where Satir's theory is proven true every day.

Hugging is receiving more and more recognition in medical circles as an aid in treating some physical illnesses, thereby helping in relieving pain, according to Dr. Parveen Chopra, a native of India who has resided in the United States for the last 40 years, and has held regional and national positions of leadership in American public life. "Any health problem makes the sufferer feel vulnerable, frightened, angry, frustrated and helpless. The patient usually needs to educate himself to make certain life changes. Hugging can give him or her the positive emotional state necessary to make those changes," he said.

The miraculous way in which hugging works is described in a touching story entitled "The Hugging Judge" in *Chicken Soup for the Soul* by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen. It is about Lee Shapiro, a retired judge, who realized that love is the greatest power there is and began offering everybody a hug.



Some years ago, he created the Hugger Kit. It contains 30 little red embroidered hearts. Shapiro would take out his kit, go around to people and offer them a little red heart in exchange for a hug. Soon, he became a minor celebrity for spreading his message of unconditional love.

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Once, accepting a challenge from a local television station in San Francisco, he offered a hug to a 6-foot-2 bus driver weighing 230 pounds from a community known to be the toughest, crabbiest and meanest in the entire town. Even as the TV cameras whirred, the bus driver stepped down and said, "Why not?"



But Shapiro was queasy when invited to a home for the terminally ill, severely retarded and quadriplegic. Accompanied by a team of doctors and nurses, he went about his routine of hugging and handing out little red hearts until they reached a ward with the worst cases. The last person, named Leonard, whom Shapiro had to hug, was drooling on his big white bib. "There's no way we can get across to this person," Shapiro admitted to thinking.

But finally, he leaned down and gave Leonard a hug. This is what followed: All of a sudden, Leonard began to squeal, "Eeeeehh! Eeeeehh!"

Some of the other patients in the room began to clang things together. Shapiro turned to the staff for some sort of explanation, only to find that every doctor, nurse and orderly was crying.

Shapiro asked the head nurse: "What's going on?"

Shapiro will never forget what she said: "This is the first time in 23 years we've ever seen Leonard smile."

It only takes a hug, a heartfelt and warm embrace, to change the lives of others.

Try it today, and see how it works.



– Beecher Hunter