EXTENSION PROGRAM FOR HEALTHY COMPASSIONATE TOUCH

Worksheet for the video: Introduction to Compassionate Touch for Schools

I would like thank you for your interest in this topic that is so dear to my heart.

The Healthy Compassionate Touch program has been created to help you explore these questions:
- “Are there ways in which you can use touch in your classroom to enhance the physical and emotional well-being of each child?”
- “How can we support children to stay connected to their natural awareness of nurturing touch?”

This program explores ways of teaching children how to recognize touch that is nurturing and helpful, and how to avoid touch that isn’t. Information and guidelines are presented in the form of a series of videos and worksheets.

There are easy ways to talk about touch and to bring Compassionate Touch safely into the schools. One of the basic ground rules around touch in schools is that permission is always given for touch from both people, either verbally or by a simple gesture like putting out your hand for a shake, or bending down and opening your arms to invite a hug.

Healthy Compassionate Touch is defined here as:

There is always permission given for touch from both people, either verbally or by a simple gesture. The touch creates either an emotional calming effect or provides a physical cue for the student.
There are many differing views and guidelines created about how a child can be touched in education, sports and other organized programs. They are created to protect the child from harmful touch. Some strike a nice middle ground and others are more restrictive creating a lot of fear about touching a child at all. Some guidelines will go as far as stating that there should be no touch. Touch is vital to our survival. It is essential when we are born and influences our health and well-being throughout life.

At end of the document there is a list of resources that explain why touch is so important. Children require guidance during their childhood on what is appropriate touch in given situations.

Touch when done inappropriately and with ill intent can be the cause of great harm and trauma. And it’s important to note that the opposite is also true: touch can be a source of profound healing.

Our skin is the largest organ of our body and our nervous system responds and interprets stimulation applied to the skin. We have five different receptors that interpret touch in different ways and there are many centers in the brain connected to each other to interpret that information.

When we are born we rely on nurturing compassionate touch to thrive. Research has shown that babies do significantly better in all aspects of their development when they receive nurturing touch. Babies learn a lot about their environment through touch and that information stays with us. A study done by Hertenstein (see resources) found that we can accurately interpret eight different emotions through touch alone.

Can you think of a time when you became so upset there were no words? Or, you had a distressed child in your classroom who could no longer respond to your words? In these situations, a gentle supportive touch can help the child settle and be able to hear and respond to your words.

Some children in your classroom may have experienced touch that was harsh, inappropriate and overwhelming to them. Experiencing Healthy Compassionate Touch in school can help children know the difference between different types of touch. This creates the potential for the child to have a healthier relationship with touch, which in turn promotes pro-social behavior in the classroom.
SIX WAYS HEALTHY COMPASSIONATE TOUCH CAN HELP CHILDREN:

1. helps children thrive  
2. creates healthy boundaries  
3. empowers them to give an appropriate “yes” or “no” to touch and ask for a refinement of touch if needed.  
4. helps children feel the calming effect of touch  
5. boosts their emotional well-being  
6. stimulates their brain and enhances brain development.

SOME BASIC GROUND RULES:

• We should always ask, “May I touch you” or extend a hand or open arms  
• We always respect the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer  
• We honor a child’s request for touch  
• We ask “is this touch ok?”
Resources

Videos
1. Introduction to Compassionate Touch for Schools
2. Compassionate Touch: Examples for Elementary School
3. Compassionate Touch: Examples for Middle School
4. Compassionate Touch: Perspective from a School Nurse
5. Compassionate Touch: Helping a Child who is Overwhelmed

Articles

Touch as Nutrition Huffington Post Blog 23rd February 2015

Compassionate Touch – I can Show You I Care by Susan Cotta

The Power of Touch Psychology today 11th March 2013


“Refusing to touch pupils is a form of child abuse, psychologists say” Blog on TES.com 17th February 2017

How Hugs Heal Dr Mercola blog 20th May 2017

How Lack of Touch is Destroying Men Blog on Uplift January 2017

Touch Communicates Distinct Emotions Hertenstein, M Emotion 2006, Vol. 6, No. 3, 528-533