



Always Time For a Hug

By M.J. Clark, M.A., APR

In the 1980s, someone introduced me to the book *Love* by Dr. Leo Buscaglia. I then read *Loving Each Other* and *Personhood*, and in the process became a big fan. Buscaglia is most known for his hugging. In fact, after his lectures he would stick around and sign books and hug people. This came about after someone gave him a congratulatory hug following one of his speeches. A line formed, and others stepped up to offer a hug to Dr. Buscaglia. So it became a tradition. And he almost never left until he met everyone who was standing in line. He wanted to be able to experience each person.

I, too, love to experience people, and I love to hug. I sincerely believe hugs have health benefits in addition to just helping people feel loved and appreciated.

In 2005, a research team from the University of North Carolina studied 38 couples to document the effects of hugging on both partners. They found that hugs increased levels of oxytocin, a "bonding" hormone, in both men and women and lowered blood pressure, which reduces the risk of heart disease. They also found women had greater reductions in blood pressure than men after their hugs, and participants who were in loving relationships at the time of the study had higher levels of oxytocin than other participants.

To me, hugs are a necessary part of each morning, and I recently had a mini hug crisis that I'd like to share with you.

My family life is usually very busy. Several months back, the morning routine became a blur, and there were days when my husband would be heading for the door, I would shout "I need a hug!" and he would answer, "No time for a hug!" just before the door closed behind him.

After a couple of days of this, I started to pursue him anyway, saying "There's always time for a hug!" loud enough so my two sons could hear. Not only was it hard to start the day without a decent hug from him, but when I analyzed the situation further, a pretty good hug only took about 20 seconds. So there was really no excuse not to take this small amount of time for something so very important. When I explained this to him, he agreed.

Our morning routine is back to a more manageable pace these days, but whenever we have an unusually busy morning, you can hear members of my family saying, "There's always time for a hug!" It's our new favorite saying.

This motto has helped remind us that loving each other is very important, easy to do, costs nothing, and takes very little time. When we feel rushed, it seems we often forego the little things that give us and others the most joy.

It's the same story in the workplace. When we are overly stressed, we don't take the time to tell John what we liked most about his presentation, to compliment Susan on her handling of a crisis, or to tell our boss he or she is an excellent mentor. But these are the very things that bring us and others joy. It's very important, easy to do, costs nothing and takes very little time. I encourage you to focus on the little things that bring us joy, even for just a week, and see what happens. There is always time to help others feel loved and appreciated, if you make it a priority.