



Hug school

Volunteer training · I Need A Hug Project

You ask. They give. Everyone grows.

Why we exist

Loneliness is a health crisis. Connection is the treatment. But most people can't bring themselves to ask for it — so we ask first, out loud, wearing it on a button.

Our mission in one line:

***“Everyone needs connection.
We’re making it okay to ask.”***



The twist

We don't hand out hugs.
We ask for them — and teach
people how to give a great one.

How it works: you ask, they give



1. Wear the ask

Your “I need a hug” button and open posture are the invitation. A smile does the asking — not a pitch.



2. Point to the panel

The panel teaches H.U.G. and the tap-out. You gesture, they read, they decide. The giving stays in their hands.



3. Certify the giver

After their hug — held until the settling — award the “Certified hug giver” button with a nod. They leave as ambassadors.

Why the flip matters: givers arrive with a giving mindset — and that’s when the oxytocin response works best, for both people.

The science of a good hug

**Don't
count.**

Relaxation is the endpoint,
not the clock

Oxytocin — and its shadow

The “bonding hormone” is powerful for good and bad. It can cascade into dopamine — pleasure — and pleasure wants repetition. A hug with a hook in it breeds attachment and jealousy, not connection.

How long?

Research often cites ~20 seconds — but it's only a guideline. A receptive giver may settle in 10; fear takes longer to vanish. Counting sabotages the settling. Relaxation is the gateway, not the endpoint.

The hug must be complete in itself — freely given, freely released. The letting-go is part of the gift.

The hook check

A hug with a hook in it isn't a gift. Before every ask, one silent question:

“Am I giving this — or trying to get something?”

Either answer is fine — but only one of them hugs.

Attachment is a state, not a character flaw. Walls are built by “unwitting jealousy or guilt” — unwitting is the mercy word. Notice the hook, set it down, then ask. If you can't set it down today, offer high fives today. That is also the practice.

*Signs of a hook: hoping a particular person returns · chasing the feeling of the last hug · wanting to be thanked
· wanting to be seen hugging.*

The H.U.G. method

This is what you teach. Three lines, easy to remember, printed on the booth panel.



H

Hold on tight

A real hug, not a pat. Full contact, like you mean it.



U

Until you relax

Breathe. Shoulders drop. Don't rush — the settling is the point.



G

Grow your bond

Stay until the settling happens — don't count, feel. That's when the good stuff flows.

Mostly silent, fully present

This is a non-verbal practice. The button asks, the panel teaches, the hug talks. We are not therapists — and staying quiet is what keeps every encounter safe, simple, and conflict-free.

The approved script

“Would you give me a hug?”

“Thank you.”

That’s the whole script. Gestures, nods, and smiles carry everything else.

What we never do

- Invite people to share feelings or stories
- Discuss or debrief the hug afterward
- Give advice, opinions, or comfort talk
- Fill silence — silence is the practice

If a participant wants to talk: smile, hand them a resource card, and gesture to your event lead.

Consent, every single time



They choose

You ask once; they decide. A hug happens only on a clear yes or open arms.



Hesitation is a no

A pause, a step back, an unsure look — honor it with a warm nod, no comment.



The tap-out

Double tap anywhere = release immediately. No questions, no discussion. Either person, any moment.



Open and visible

Hugs happen in open areas only. Never enclosed or private spaces.

Read the cues: stiffening, patting, pulling away, held breath — all mean release now, close with a nod.

The alternatives menu

Not everyone wants a hug — and every option below is a win. All offered by gesture, received with equal enthusiasm.



Side hug



High five



Fist bump



Wave + smile



Hand on heart

A high five is never a “lesser” gift. The goal is a positive moment of connection — the format is theirs to pick.

Children: the strictest rules we have



Three yeses, always

Parent or guardian present + parent gives permission + child agrees. All three, every time. A child's "no" outranks everyone's "yes."

High fives are the default for kids

Fun, safe, and zero ambiguity. Hugs with minors happen only at the family's initiative, with all three yeses.

Never alone

Volunteers always work in pairs or groups, visible to each other at all times — this protects the kids and it protects you.

When someone needs more than a hug

Sometimes the person at your booth is having the hardest day of their year. Your job is presence and hand-off — never counseling, never conversation about their experience.

Stay present

Warm, calm, unhurried. Your presence is the support — no words needed.

Signal your lead

A quiet gesture brings your event lead over. You are never alone in a hard moment.

Hand the card

The resource card says what you don't: call or text 988 — free, 24/7 support.



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — call or text 988. Keep resource cards in your pocket at every event.

Boundaries that protect everyone



Screened + trained

Background check and this training before your first event. Both always free to you.



Wear your ID

Official button and name tag at every event. The uniform is the trust.



No personal contact info

All follow-up goes through official channels — never personal numbers or socials.



Feeling sick? Stay home

No exceptions, no guilt. And report any concern to your event lead same-day.

You may decline any interaction, for any reason, at any time. Consent protects volunteers too.

Now we practice

Round 1

The silent ask: button, posture, smile, panel. Two lines max —
“Would you give me a hug?”
and “Thank you.”

Round 2

Cues and the tap-out: partner
sends a signal — pat, stiffen,
tap — you release instantly and
close with a nod.

Round 3

Full silent run: ask, point to the
panel, hug until the settling,
award the giver button. No
debrief — just the nod.



Complete all three rounds and you're certified — button, name tag, and your first event assignment.

*“The heart that truly will be free
will learn to freely give.”*

— from “Is Free”

Now go ask for a hug.