



The Butterfly Hug

Lucina Artigas and Ignacio Jarero

The Butterfly Hug was originated and developed by Lucina Artigas during her work performed with the survivors of Hurricane Pauline in Acapulco, Mexico, 1997 (Artigas, Jarero, Mauer, López Cano, & Alcalá, 2000; Jarero, Artigas, & Montero, 2008).

For the origination and development of this method, Lucina Artigas was honored in 2000 with the Creative Innovation Award by the EMDR International Association. In Francine Shapiro's 2001 EMDR text, she wrote that "The Butterfly Hug has been successfully used to treat groups of traumatized children in Mexico, Nicaragua and Kosovar refugee camps" (Shapiro, 2001, p. 284). By 2009, The Butterfly Hug had become standard practice for clinicians in the field while working with survivors of man-made and natural catastrophes.

The Butterfly Hug Script

The “Butterfly Hug” provides a way to self-administer dual attention stimulation (DAS) for an individual or for group work.

Say, *“Would you like to learn an exercise that will help you to feel better?”*

Say, *“Please watch me and do what I am doing. Cross your arms over your chest, so that with the tip of your fingers from each hand, you can touch the area that is located under the connection between the clavicle and the shoulder. Your eyes can be closed or partially closed looking toward the tip of your nose. Next, you alternate the movement of your hands, like the flapping wings of a butterfly. You breathe slowly and deeply (abdominal breathing), while you observe what is going through your mind and body such as thoughts, images, sounds, odors, feelings, and physical sensation without changing, pushing your thoughts away, or judging. You can pretend as though what you are observing are like clouds passing by.”*

This exercise can be done for as long as the person(s) wishes to continue. Watch to make sure that the children are following along with you. If not, check to find out what is going on and then return to teaching The Butterfly Hug.

Uses for This Method

To install the Safe Place:

Say, *“Now, please close your eyes and use your imagination to go to a place where you feel safe or calm. What images, colors, sounds, and so forth do you see in your safe place?”*

When in groups, the Emotional Protection Team moves among the children listening to them as they answer out loud.

The goal here is to make sure that each child has found a Safe/Calm Place they imagined.

The following is optional:

Say, *“Now, please take out your paper and draw the Safe/Calm Place that you imagined. When you are finished, please do the Butterfly Hug while looking at your drawing.”*

Say, *“You are welcome to take your picture home and you can use it with the Butterfly Hug whenever you need to feel better.”*

Make sure to notice the children’s responses. There is no talking during this time so that the children are not taken out of their process.

Once the patients or clients (children or adults) have learned the Butterfly Hug, they can be instructed to take this method with them to use between sessions,

whether to modulate any disturbing effect that arises, to reground with their Safe Place or simply to help them get to sleep more easily.

Say, “Now that you have learned the Butterfly Hug you can use it anytime that you are having disturbing feelings, or you want to go back to your Safe Place. You can also use it to get to sleep more easily. Do you have any questions before we stop for today?”

There are many uses for the Butterfly Hug such as the following:

- To anchor positive affect, cognitions, and physical sensations associated with images produced by the technique of “guided imagination.”
- During the EMDR Standard Protocol, some clinicians have also used it with adults and children to facilitate primary processing of a fundamental traumatic memory or memories. Instead of the clinicians being in charge of the bilateral stimulation, the client is asked to do the Butterfly Hug during the Phases 4, 5, and 6. It is thought that the control obtained by the client over their contralateral stimulation may be an empowering factor that aids their retention of sense of safety while processing traumatic memories.
- During in vivo exposure to process the experience. For example, in the Quiche’s region of Guatemala the persons that are witnessing the burial of their relatives use the Butterfly Hug to be self-comforted and to cope with the experience.
- In the EMDR Integrative Group Treatment Protocol (EMDR-IGTP) used to work with children and adults who have survived traumatic events, to process primary traumatic memory or memories including the death of family members. During this process, the children and adults are under the close supervision of mental health professionals who form the Emotional Protection Team. (Jarero et al., 2008).
- Use of the Butterfly Hug in session with the therapist can be a self-soothing experience for many trauma-therapy clients. For instance, the therapist might say, “*Would you like to use the Butterfly Hug while you are telling me what happened?*”
- Some professionals use the Butterfly Hug simultaneously with their client as an aid to prevent secondary traumatization.
- Other professionals have used this method as a substitute for touching clients and they might say, “*Please give yourself a Butterfly Hug for me.*”
- Professionals report that they have used the Butterfly Hug with clients with debilitated egos because it produces less abreaction than other bilateral stimulation techniques.
- Teachers in a Guatemalan school for child victims of parental violence tell the children that they can feel Father God’s love through the Butterfly Hug.
- During the Pasta de Conchos mine tragedy in Mexico in 2006, a paramedic stabilized and saved the life of a mine engineer who was having a heart attack using the Butterfly Hug.