

# **THE COMPASSIONATE TOUCH PROGRAM**

## **Defusing Violence by Enhancing Self-Esteem, Self-Worth and Self-Image in Children**

“We are living in a time where children are coming to school with guns and committing tragic acts of violence. It is a nationwide epidemic,” says Dr. John E. Upledger, president of The Upledger Foundation. “We believe that the Compassionate Touch program may be a significant step in reversing this disturbing trend.”

There indeed has been a frightening increase in violence in our nation — especially among schoolchildren. Individuals who commit violent or aggressive acts against others or themselves frequently feel inadequate social or interpersonal connections to others. Feelings of social isolation and the absence of meaningful relationships may lead to a devaluing of life and to hostile or aggressive responses to interpersonal frustrations.

If violence and aggressiveness are considered inversely proportionate to the presence of compassion and empathy, then it stands to reason that a person who feels compassion for another’s pain or distress, or is the recipient of another’s compassion when experiencing pain or distress, may be less inclined to violent and aggressive expressions. Further, when children and adults feel effective in helping others, they feel empowered, which contributes to a positive sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

The Compassionate Touch Program, developed by the charitable, nonprofit Upledger Foundation, which was founded in 1987 by CranioSacral Therapy developer John E. Upledger, D.O., O.M.M., the Foundation was established on and is guided by the belief that goodness must be the driving intention behind doing good work in the world.

A program conducted recently in a school district in the Midwest demonstrated the efficacy of the approach. Instructed in the appropriate and helpful use of touch, the children involved experienced a greater sense of belonging and connection with others by the study's conclusion. Teachers also observed more than twice as many acts of compassion and empathy and only half the acts of aggression or behavioral problems they reported at the study's onset.

### **The “Helping Hands” of Compassionate Touch**

Children in the Compassionate Touch program are taught a simple practice termed *helping hands* that can be used if another child has been hurt or is feeling discomfort. It is based on the Direction of Energy technique by John E. Upledger, D.O., O.M.M., developer of CranioSacral Therapy.

Direction of Energy is a simple and extremely light-touch process that uses the hands as a channel for directing positive energy through a physical injury. To perform the technique, hands are placed on opposite sides of a painful area and then a line is imagined connecting them. This position is held until a palpable softening is felt in the tissue at the site of the injury. This is often accompanied by a pulsation and localized rise in body temperature, which dissipate as the process comes to completion.

Because the Compassionate Touch program involves young children, the term *helping hands* is used to help them conceptualize the touch as light, positive and caring. A child places his or her hands on either side of an “owie” and then directs “happy thoughts” about the person being helped. (Some of the happy thoughts identified by children in previous programs include birthday presents, rainbows, along with cake and ice cream.) If the pain is an emotional one, the administering child places his or her hands on either side of the other child's torso at the heart.

## **Working Together...For Our Children...For Our Future**

Implementation of the Compassionate Touch program is a cooperative endeavor between The Upledger Foundation and the local school system that requires minimal resources and financial commitment. Professional clinicians from The Upledger Institute HealthPlex Clinical Services oversee and facilitate the introduction of the program into each school. Key milestones of the implementation process include:

- An evening meeting with parents and community members to educate and explain the theories and methods of compassionate touch and to answer questions.
- A one-day in-service program for teachers and school administrators on the theory and utilization of Compassionate Touch.
- Two days working with the children in the classroom. The program is then incorporated into the regular school day and is directed by the teaching staff.

Clearly, our world is in need of more compassion. The resources and expenses required to implement the Compassionate Touch program with young children are extraordinarily minimal. Yet the potential benefits to the children involved and our communities at large are perhaps beyond measure.

Today The Upledger Foundation remains committed to the development of new therapeutic applications and community-outreach programs designed to enhance health and well-being. It is also dedicated to the financial assistance of qualified patients in need. To develop and explore new avenues of health and well-being.

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