



## ***What is Peaceful Touch?***

It is a rare parent or teacher who would deny the value of touch that assures a child of caring and security. A hand on the shoulder, a pat on the back, a hug, these are part and parcel of healthy child development. Many are also aware that a growing body of scientific research confirms how and why healthy touch is key to human development and well being.

In short trainings for parents and teachers, Peaceful Touch brings together intuitive knowledge of the value of touch, scientific research, and some simple techniques of Swedish massage. From these we create a simple, enjoyable and effective method of integrating touch (both kids with kids and adults with kids) into early childhood education as well as parenting. The trainings are hands-on, and participants will learn:

*Touch techniques for use in many contexts including games and storytelling*  
*A basic knowledge of the physiology of touch*  
*A simple permission process that helps to define the boundaries of healthy touch for both children and adults*

For more than fifteen years Peaceful Touch has been a staple of Swedish early childhood education. Both parents and teachers report a wide set of results including decrease in aggression, improved concentration, and greater empathy for peers. A three-year clinical study published in 2008 concluded:

*Five to ten minutes of massage (Peaceful Touch) per day significantly decreases aggressive tendencies in children 4 and 5 years old.*

We are excited to present Peaceful Touch for PTAC participants, and want to inform you that Joyce Trigger, Director of Shady Oak Christian School in Richmond (your first local Peaceful Touch school), will be a guest speaker at the Thursday workshops for Directors.

The following pages give a glimpse into the training. Please bring your open hands and your open hearts.

Warm regards,

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## The Weather Game

*NOTE: Some general directions are included in italics for the teacher or demonstrator. It is very important not to read them aloud to children. This, like most Peaceful Touch practices, is an exercise in visual and kinesthetic learning, not so much in following verbal directions.* ALWAYS ASK PERMISSION: May I play the Weather Game on your back?

"There was once a land where the sun shone bright and warm. Sunbeams warmed up the flowers, the water, the animals, the trees and all the people."

*Open and full hands move slowly back and forth across the partner's back.*

"One day a cloud came along and covered the sun. Then the wind started to blow, first a little, then more and more."

*Hands move more quickly across the back, like the wind, faster and faster.*

"The clouds grew darker and darker ... and darker, and then it began to rain. The rain came down heavier and heavier."

*Fingers tap lightly all over the back, then harder.*

"In the distance, you could hear thunder approaching and soon the storm had settled over the entire country. Lightning flew through the air! WOW! What amazing weather!

*Full hands zig-zag across the back for lightning.*

"Then it turned colder ... and the rain began to change to snow, first one flake, and then another ... Until the sky was filled with swirling snow flakes. Soon everything was covered under a soft, white blanket of snow."

"Finally the snowstorm stopped, and it was very, very quiet across the land. Everything was very still ... and then ... a small cat began to climb a tree ... and another ... and another."

*Fingers climb up the back along the spine, three times.*

"At last, the sun began to shine again, and warm the earth. Flowers popped up through the melting snow and bloomed. And soon, the birds were singing, and the children laughing again all across the land."

*Gentle hands move back and forth across the back. Hands improvise for birds singing and children laughing.*

**"The End."**



## **Oxytocin: a key hormone in human development**

### *Calm and Connection System*

### *Fight or Flight System*

*Oxytocin is the trigger (via touch)*

*Adrenalin and cortisol are the triggers*

Both these systems are essential to life. A balance of the two systems is key to a healthy and functioning individual and, perhaps, to a peaceful society.

The production of oxytocin results from complex factors, but the most simple and evident stimulation for oxytocin is basic human touch, touch that is intentionally kind and loving. Both individuals involved in the touch exchange, the giver and the receiver, will show increased levels of oxytocin.

Oxytocin is a hormone, and also a neuro-transmitter. Its presence in the brain and the bloodstream can trigger a cascade of hormones and other substances that signal a state of calm and contentment and often heightened creativity.

Like most hormones, oxytocin does not act alone. It influences and is influenced by other neuro-transmitters such as serotonin, dopamine and noradrenaline.

Repeated use of either the Calm and Connection System and the Fight or Flight System can result in cumulative effects in an individual. Thus we hear of adrenalin junkies and cortisol addiction. We hear less of the cumulative effects of oxytocin, but those effects are still very real. Published research on Peaceful Touch suggests that as little as 5 or 10 minutes on a regular basis can have long-lasting positive effects. Like the Fight/Flight System, the Calm and Connective System has significant cumulative impacts on individuals, families, groups and societies.

*The Oxytocin Factor, by Kerstin Ulvas Moberg, is one of the best resources for learning about oxytocin and related research. De Capo Press, 2003.*

*The three year clinical study published in 2008 in Acta Paediatrica can be downloaded from [www.peacefultouch.net](http://www.peacefultouch.net)*

# The Four Principles of Peaceful Touch Practices

1. *Permission:* Asking children for permission to touch and honoring the response is key to the practice of Peaceful Touch. Asking for feedback is also important.
2. *Presence:* Calm and focused attention, mindful awareness, being in the moment; (there are many ways to describe the giver who is fully engaged).
3. *Pressure:* Touch should be appropriate in pressure, steady, and responsive.
4. *Practice:* Regular practice helps children develop healthy body awareness and get the full benefits of oxytocin.

## Asking Permission

As children grow in body awareness, the practice of asking permission (which includes asking as well as granting or refusing) can add to healthy development. Preschoolers are learning new concepts and vocabulary, so the asking of permission becomes a tool for comprehension. For kindergarten and early elementary children, the permission process is an important affirmative practice for body awareness and ownership.

Both “sides” of the process are equally important. Asking permission fosters a respect for other children, while responding affirms the child’s own body awareness and ability to set physical boundaries.

Please note that asking permission should occur before every one of the games or stories. It is the essential introduction between each giver and receiver. To avoid a meaningless repetition of formula, model the question by using words that really describe what is about to happen, for example: May I give you a back rub? May I play the Weather Game on your back? Don’t forget to practice “No thanks” and always honor the child who declines.

## Appropriate Touch and Vulnerability

Where do we touch and not touch? It is very simple. Confine touch to the back and shoulders, and always above the waist. These are the least psychologically and physically vulnerable (read SAFE) parts of the body. At the same time, touch on the back, arms, and shoulders will produce the desired oxytocin response and the general results we look for in Peaceful Touch: the world of calm and connectedness in which learning and bonding can proceed to the fullest.

## Story Telling and Peaceful Touch

There is a wealth of resources for bringing touch story-telling to children. Make sure the stories are age-appropriate, have a fairly simple story line, and end happily. Limit the story telling touch to the back of the receiver; it may be appropriate to add the scalp and shoulders. Consider that the combination of touch and story telling should be fun as well as relaxing, so avoid scary stories, and stay in the world of language and plots that feels nourishing and non-threatening. The story and the touch should work together.

As you observe children doing the touch story-telling, the qualities of the best stories will become very clear. Children provide the best examples for learning what stories work.

As children gain reading proficiency, the Swedish classroom example may be useful: During silent reading time, one child reads silently while the partner does slow, relaxing strokes on the back of the reader. Then they switch places.

A few stories successfully cross through the age groupings. The Weather Game seems to have a long life for children of all ages. One California second-grade teacher did an adaptation for Earth Week renaming the story The Weather Cycle and including all the language of a science lesson. Children learned about evaporation, condensation, cloud formation, etc., just through the touch story that was read to them.

The “classics” hold up very well:

*The Hungry Caterpillar*, Eric Carle

*The Runaway Bunny* and *Goodnight Moon*, Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd

*The Story of Ferdinand*, Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson

*Jump Frog Jump*, Robert Kalan and Byron Barton (This book and others by Robert Kalan are available in Spanish.)

If you find stories that work particularly well, please let us know and we will add them to our list on the website for all to benefit.

Hands on practice is probably the most important segment of the Peaceful Touch training. For the heads that will decide whether or not to attend this training, the following pages of hands on descriptions are provided:

## **HANDS ON! Qualities of Touch**

Giving and receiving, you can experience and distinguish various qualities of touch. These short practices easily convert to children's games, and done in sequence just happen to comprise a complete sitting massage! One way or another, the simple Peaceful Touch practices described here comprise a "starter kit" to shape many months and years of Peaceful Touch for young children with caring and creative teachers and parents.

Choose a partner. Receiver sits on stool or chair with full back available. Giver sits, stands, or kneels behind. Ask permission.

Trainer demonstrates and students imitate.

### ***Kneading pizza dough***

Feel the trapezius muscle. Distinguish from bone.

Using one hand on each side, squeeze and release the trapezius muscle. Repeat. Like kneading pizza dough.

### ***Gliding***

With heels of hands, glide in parallel strokes across, up and down, the back. Remember not to break off the touch, but keep one hand on the back at all times.

### ***Horse hooves***

With full hand, press across and up and down back and shoulder areas. Increase pressure, decrease pressure. Ask what does your partner prefer?

### ***Whirlpools***

With thumbs, make swirling circles on the partner's back. Other parts of the hand can continue to touch the back.

Ask what kind of touch the partner prefers. Give a short session of that preferred touch.

### ***Cross Country Skiing***

This is a friction stroke. Placing a hand on either side of the spinal column, along the muscles that parallel the spinal column, move your hands up and down as if you were cross country skiing. Start at the lower back and move upwards. Keep the hands on the back at all times, and move slowly in short ski strokes up and down the back.

Add a criss-cross: right hand crosses over to left shoulder and crosses back down. Left hand crosses over to right shoulder and crosses back down. For left brain and right brain exercise.

### ***Hand Massage***

Using both hands, the Giver holds one hand of the Receiver, thumbs on the palm, and fingers on the back of the hand. Giver, “walk” or press your thumbs around on the entire surface of the receiving palm. Then “hug” each finger separately, and/or give a gentle “pull-off” to each finger using your fingers. Move to the other hand and repeat.

### ***Climb the Rope***

Start at top of the arm, just below the armpit, one hand at a time. Grasp the arm with a full hand and compress. Then just below, with your other hand, grasp and compress. Alternate your hands down the arm, avoiding the elbow. Just before you get to the hand, start back up the arm. Repeat, and switch to the other arm.

### ***Comments from Teachers***

*“In the first week since the training, I have made a conscious effort to touch every child in my class every day. This small step is already having a calming effect on the whole class.”*

*“...this year my classroom has been a lot more relaxed, easier to get their attention focused again, so it really helps maintenance of the classroom.”*

*We’ve noticed a lot more touching in a positive way, more than we typically do....the children are showing empathy in way that we’ve not seen before.”*