

THE HEALING POWER OF TOUCH

A Gallup poll asked Americans what they wanted the most. One answer dominated the list: "A happy family life." But in our high-tech and fast-paced society, we are often disconnected from those we love the most. Our lives run "pedal to the metal," often stuck in high gear. Husbands and wives are often strangers in their own homes. Divorce is on the rise. Some children turn to drugs. Others, juggling activities and homework, suffer from stress-related disorders. How do we reverse this strong current of tension and disconnect amid our fast and furious lives?

Could it be that the answer to this modern dilemma is as old as time itself? In a new book, "Home Massage: Transforming Family Life Through the Healing Power of Touch," authors Chuck Fata and Suzette Hodnett say "YES" and are bringing massage - one of the oldest healing therapies known to man - back into our daily lives.

To achieve a happy family life, experts agree that we need to communicate with each other more, not only via our speech but also with the healing vocabulary of loving touch. Touch is our first language. Whatever our age or stage in life the gift of touch can make us feel protected, appreciated and validated, letting us know that we are loved, understood and forgiven. Touch is a primal need. It is considered stronger than verbal or emotional contact. Touch is critical to our survival and to our physical health, relationships, and emotional well-being.

TOUCHY ABOUT TOUCH

Research has now proven what the ancients always know - touch heals. Ironically the high tech world that created the equipment to scientifically reveal the healing power of touch is "out of touch" with touch.

In the United States, we are usually at the forefront of new ideas. But, unfortunately, our society has become touch-phobic. America is what anthropologists call a "non-tactile society." Compared with most societies around the world, we are "touchy about touch." Our culture has now convinced us that touch is dangerous. Fears of sexual abuse and improper touch haunt innocent adults. No touch laws in schools restrict teachers from hugging their students or evening picking up preschoolers who fall on the playground. Many parents are confused about how and where to touch their children. Others wonder "How old is too old to touch?"

We have become a touch-starved nation. We hunger for touch and connection with our family and friends. Many people are unaware of the emotional and physical effects of their touch deprivation. Some adults unconsciously develop psychosomatic illnesses in hopes of receiving the gentle, nurturing touch they remember from childhood. The elderly often ask others to take their hand, not for stability, but because they crave touch. Children pretend to be sick, not necessarily to stay home from school as parents suspect, but to receive their healing touch and attention.

Sometimes we go to great lengths to show friends and family we care about them through giving or doing, but we are reluctant to embrace them.

Secretly a mother would like to express affection to her teenage son. Secretly he would enjoy it- just as he did as a child- but instead he snarls, "Leave me alone!"

A father, leaving on a trip, starts to kiss his daughter good-bye but is hurt when she turns and gives him an uncomfortable shrug instead.

We visit a relative in the hospital, bringing flowers and candy, but we may be reluctant to give them a healing hug or to hold their hand.

A grieving friend needs a compassionate hug, but we are uncomfortable and so offer only awkward words of condolence.

We all intuitively know that touch is healing, but sometimes we fear the honesty of touch. The truth is that often touch is more than appropriate - it maybe the very best way to communicate and connect with those we love.

Our high tech and fast-paced lives propel us into an increasingly impersonal world. The detached state of our society is but a reflection of our individual failure to touch. Virtual reality, chat rooms, and computer games are on the rise and scouting programs, sports leagues and community groups are on the decline. Sometimes we are more connected to the computer than to our actual loved ones. The cold metal and hard plastic of our cell phone and ipods has begun to replace the soft warm touch of those most dear to us. Living life at high speed makes it difficult to find time to connect with those closest to us. The debris left behind in the whirlwind of our manic desire to get the most done in the least amount of time is poor health and estrangement from family and friends.

A HEALING GIFT OR A DAMAGING POISON?

It is true that touch can be a healing gift or a damaging poison. Children have been wounded with lifelong scars from the devastating effects of abusive touch. Bad touch makes us feel uncomfortable scared, nervous and threatened. Healing touch makes us feel comfortable, calm, peaceful and safe.

We face the dilemma of knowing that touch is critical for our health and well-being, but that improper touch can scar our very soul. And so a great schism divides our culture - to touch or not to touch?

If we choose not to touch, we are robbing ourselves and future generations of one of our most precious birthrights - the innate healing power of touch. We have this amazing yet under-used gift at our fingertips. There is nothing more needed, more healing than loving touch. It can create a direct current to an opening of the our body, heart and soul.

BRING TOUCH THROUGH MASSAGE INTO THE HOME

The best environment to provide healing touch is in the safety our home and the "toucher" would be a husband, wife, other family member or trusted friend.

Marianna Caplan, Ph.D. To Touch Is To Live

What better place than in our own home to regain our comfort with touch? Fears and inhibitions about touch begin in our home, but they can also end there. Our first experience with touch is our mother's loving caress. Within our family we learn how, when and where to touch. Yet natural touch among family members is an often a neglected means of communication. Touch is vital to our relationships. It is critical for our growth and development. It is essential to our emotional well-being.

Bringing touch into the home through massage brings the healing power of touch into our own hands. Massage heals. Americans make 60 million visits to massage practitioners every year. Massage is now accepted by the general public and the medical community as an invaluable adjunct to effective health care. Certified massage therapists with hundreds of hours of training and years of experience provide relaxation and rehabilitation to everyone from infants to the elderly. But by limiting massage to our infrequent visits to professional massage therapists, the many healing gifts of massage are sadly under-used. The truth is that you don't have to be a massage therapist to give a soothing, healing massage. Anyone can do it. The benefits of massage -reducing stress, soothing over-worked muscles, boosting our immune system, and meeting our emotional needs for touch - can be in our own hands.

With home massage we find relief from a variety of ailments, without the financial burden of medical bills. As health insurance costs soar, our need for self responsibility and prevention becomes even more important. Home Massage is a valuable tool that can be used with almost limitless frequency. It can aid in not only the treatment but in the prevention of so many ailments of daily life -- everything from sports injuries to pain management to stress reduction. It can promote relaxation and, ultimately, our emotional well-being.

The magic of home massage comes from not only the quality of touch, but also the duration. Where else but through massage can we touch each other in a healing, comfortable and nonsexual way for one minute, five minutes, 30 minutes, or an hour? The real benefits of massage for both the giver and receiver are realized with the duration of touch. This is where the magic happens. Massage opens the door and gives us a safe and concrete way to touch our partners in a loving, nurturing way for a sufficient amount of time to make the cells in our body happy, excited, fulfilled and healthy.

When we become comfortable massaging someone - when we can give and receive nonsexual touch for ten to fifty minutes - we are transformed. Translated to our everyday lives, we are able to keep that 20 second hug going for 35 seconds., hold the hand of a sick relative for two full minutes and hug our son or daughter when it previously felt uncomfortable. Through home massage, we return to our innate ability for and comfort with touch.

what better way than through the medium of massage to express loving touch to those closest to us? When the massage table becomes as natural a piece of furniture as the living room sofa, families achieve better health, increased relaxation and a deep connection with each other. Parents have a way to relieve stress and enjoy renewed intimacy. Children fight less as they learn to nurture each other. When massage is a natural routine, families learn to express themselves easily through the language of touch, creating harmony, mutual respect and stability in the home.

Home Massage makes touch a household word. Too often parents, in an attempt to protect their children from the dangers of improper touch, are reluctant to discuss issues surrounding touch or, even worse, they discourage any kind of touch. Often they wait until their children are teenagers, unwilling to listen and thus more influenced by their peers. Adults who are raised in families where touch was awkward or discouraged often suffer from a discomfort with touch that can affect their relationships in ways both disguised and apparent.

When massage is part of our daily lives, it becomes a natural bridge for both adults and children to talk easily about issues relating to touch. Home massage reminds us that our bodies belong to us. Through exchanging massage with our loved ones, we learn to communicate what kind of pressure we want, where we want to be massaged, and when something doesn't feel good. The trust and comfort that grows on the massage table can easily be transferred to more delicate and personal matters. By experiencing loving, safe and appropriate touch, we also learn to understand the many signs our bodies offer us when touched appropriately. Furthermore, the confidence gained on the massage table will help us recognize the signs and communicate our concerns when touch is not appropriate.

Once we become comfortable with touch on the massage table, we don't need to be told how to touch, where to touch, what is bad touch, or be convinced of our need to be touched. We experience a return to our natural expression of touch. As touch becomes a household word through massage, everyone learns to honor and respect themselves and each other in all matters of touch.

Chuck Fata was a nationally certified massage therapist and co-founder of Touch Communications Home Massage, Inc. He taught professionally at the Shiatsu Massage School of California and the California College of Physical Arts as well as massage workshops and retreats for non-professionals.

Suzette Hodnett, co-founder of Touch Communications Home Massage, has a background as a licensed psychotherapist, professional artist and Tai Chi Sandan instructor. She currently works as Life Coach, blending her experience to bring emotional and physical health to youth and adults. With Jackie Sloan, CMT, she offers retreats, lectures and workshops nationwide to promote relaxation, connection and the healing power of touch.

There new book, "HOME MASSAGE: Transforming Family Life Through the Healing Power of Touch" was ranked a #1 Amazon Best seller. It is available through Findhornpress.com, the author's web site (tchomemassage.com) or Amazon.com.