

SPACE INVADERS!

by Brian H. Butler

Touch is a wonderful thing. Touch for Health is a marvellous way to give touch for reasons other than sex or violence. It seems in our crowded societies, we have almost to go out of our way to avoid touching people.. In train stations, waiting for buses, lining up to pay at the checkout, we have to be most careful NOT to touch anyone for fear of being misunderstood or giving offence. People are "touchy" about TOUCH.

SHAKE HANDS - ITS NICE AND IT IS SAFE.

In Touch for Health classes, we often have people come along who are just not used to touching or being touched. Accordingly when I teach, the first introduction to touch comes early on in the class. I invite each participant to shake hands with the person next to them, and on each side of them.

This perfectly acceptable social gesture, when done by request, never fails to produce a lot of smiles and a buzz of conversation. It certainly helps to break the ice during the first few minutes after the start of a class.

TEACH "PUSH HANDS" - IT IS FUN

Next I ask them to hold up one hand and face their neighbour, who also holds up a hand, and then they practice the teamwork that is involved with pushing gently and holding against the pressure simultaneously as in a proper muscle test.

In this way, the first two occasions when strangers touch each other in Touch for Health classes is in this non-invasive way, and they will feel it is safe to touch.

DO YOUR FIRST TESTS IN LINES - IT GETS EVERYONE RELAXED

When we start to do the supraspinatus test, I first demonstrate on one volunteer. Then I get them to do it with the person next to them. After that, I have them line up facing each other in lines of four five or six, depending upon the number in the class. This usually results in a fair amount of amused chaos. Then they begin to test the person in front of them, then everyone moves along one person, and tests again. This way everyone gets to feel what it is like to test different people.

As anyone who is an instructor, or who has taken a TFH class knows, by the end of the class, lots of the participants are delighted to hug each other with the traditional totally non-sexual, and hopefully non-violent "TFH hug"!

I am happy to say, that in ten years of teaching Touch for Health, I have never had one instance of anyone abusing the opportunity for touch and closeness that the class offers.

SPACE INVADERS!!

Once we have overcome the fear of touching and being touched in the context of Touch for Health, it is possible for us to forget our initial reticence or shyness, and barge into other people's space without permission.

I have actually had people be offended with me at Annual Meetings when I have smilingly declined a hug. On one occasion, an individual insisted upon giving me the "ENTHUSIASTIC TOUCH FOR HEALTHER'S OFFICIAL HUGGERS HUG", and nearly put me in hospital!

My back is sometimes very precarious since I once ruptured a disc between lumbar four and lumbar five. I have to be careful to keep my weight properly distributed, otherwise it is possible for acute spasm to set in, which causes great pain.

When the "hugger" offered the hug, I smiled, and said: "Thankyou, but not just now please." The initial response was a look of disbelief, the second reaction was a huge warm bearhug type smile and before I knew where I was I was practically being hugged off my feet! A moment of pain, instead of enjoyment.

No offence was intended of course, and none was taken. The point of telling this story is merely to illustrate that there are occasions when it may not be appropriate for us to hug or touch, or muscle test, or rub a point, or indeed do anything to another person. Normally I LOVE to be hugged, so do not let this put you off!!! Let us just be sure to get agreement first.

Being involved with Touch for Health does not give us a licence to become a "SPACE INVADER". Rather it is the opposite. It is an opportunity to introduce touch in a very respectful and a very safe way to others. In Touch for Health, the ideal is always to work with others by permission.

It spoils things to be a SPACE INVADER! It is poor manners to go ahead and insist against even the mildest protestations, or slightly grudging "OK, well go ahead and try it." Working with anyone in this manner is not the way to "win friends and influence people" favourably for Touch for Health. "He who is convinced against his will - is of the same opinion STILL!"

Gordon Stokes taught me to say: "Is there any reason why I should not test you, any aches, pains or sprains?" Sometimes I get sloppy and forget, with the result that I have sometimes noted an expression of surprise, or irritation, when I have ASSUMED (you know, - it makes an ASS out of U and ME!) that it would be all right to do something I felt would be non-invasive, but that was not how the recipient felt about it!

So let us honour Touch for Health for what it is: A wonderful system of helpful health care, and a really valid vehicle for us to offer genuine love and caring concern to people who are ready and open to the idea.