

# Clowning with a Loving Touch . . .

Richard Snowberg, one of the pioneer Caring Clowns is Director of Clown Camp in LaCross Wisconsin. He gave these instructions on physical touch at a recent Clown Camp on the Road in Sacramento, California. Richard's book *The Caring Clown* is one of the cornerstones of our field.

## *When and How to Use Physical Touch*

*By Richard Snowberg*

"It is important to know when and how to use physical touch. Often you can touch your audience without laying your hands upon them. We can say or do something that is very touching. These are often quite significant occurrences. However, this key to caring clowning also addresses the likelihood that physical contact may be important to a patient or resident. It is your responsibility to determine not only if this is permissible, but also whether it is desirable in each given situation.

"As clown entertainers, we are in a situation of power, especially with kids. We are viewed with awe by many, and it is sometimes assumed that we can do no wrong -- if we think a hug or kiss is good medicine, then let's share the physical acts with everyone we meet. Well, this just isn't proper, legal, or ethically correct. With the power that we gain as entertainers, goes a certain amount of responsibility. We must act responsible in all that we do in order to maintain a positive health care environment and the integrity of clowning.

"Some folks don't want any physical touch, or perhaps don't want it from you. Some caring clown audiences might suffer from physical problems which might be aggravated by improper touch. Some might be surprised by your boldness and resist your advances. Granted all of these are minor occurrences, but they are still scenarios which may occur. So how do you know if you can or should encourage physical contact between yourself and a patient/resident?



"The easiest strategy is to offer an invitation for touch. Some performers wear badges which proclaim "I give hugs" or "Have you had your hug today?" These are unspoken invitations for folks to inquire about or request their complimentary hug. Because it doesn't say for patients/ residents only, you'll get visitors, nurses and doctors as well who will want to get an embrace. You are not out bartering hugs or overtly asking everyone if they would like a hug. You just carry the message that you give hugs.

"The first opportunity for physical contact comes via an outstretched hand -- a handshake. Most people are able to extend their hand, and meet yours. It isn't a vigorous shake that is in order. It is a meeting of skin-to-skin. It is a personal moment, which may be extended by the recipient if they choose not to let go. I always let the patient release the hand first. In this way I'm saying that I'm comfortable with you and your physical self. I put them in control.

"When I extend my hand, it is parallel to the floor, palm up. It is much like a flat table on which the other person can place their hand for support. You will not usually be aware of the amount or lack of strength individuals have. If they wrap their fingers and thumb around my hand, I do the same. If they squeeze, I also squeeze. I never exert improper pressure, so care needs to be exercised in this area. If you feel that you aren't conveying your closeness with a person, then take your other hand and place it on top of your clasped hands.

"It is remarkable how much this simple act of clasping someone's hand means to many folks. We are often not aware that compassionate touch, such as this, is often missing in their lives. Health care professionals may appear to take blood pressure, check temperatures, or change beds thereby touching the patient. However, these are physical contacts brought about by job necessity, not companionship for the bedridden individual. Your contact is intentional and purposeful in conveying a meaning of care and love.

"Never overlook the opportunity to hold a hand. Holding someone's hand can be very effective and may be the most significant thing you can do. For example, our local clown club went to a nursing home and it was agreed that part of us would go into the different wards and part of us would entertain in the community room and do a little show. One of our new clowns sat down next to this lady and offered her hand. During the show we saw this young clown giving all her attention to this one lady. After we were finished with the show and about ready to leave, this young clown came up me. "I'm really sorry. I didn't even visit with anyone else. I ended up spending all my time with this one woman. She wouldn't let go of my hand." I told her that she probably had the most successful clown encounter at the event. When we clown with a personal touch, we don't clown in terms of quantity, we clown in terms of quality. The quality may be just that physical touch.

# . . . and Tender Loving Care

## *Use Discretion When Hugging Children*

Don't place yourself in a position where physical or sexual abuse could be charged. Is it appropriate to hug a youngster? Let the child initiate and ask for the hug, don't ask the child if they would like a kiss or hug. There was a case where a clown was charged with physical abuse with a youngster. According to this individual and others, the charges were not true, but the impression it left with the community was so damaging that the clown had to leave the community.

I implore you, make sure that a consenting adult approves of an action and secondly that a consenting adult be present when it takes place. How do you do that in a hospital situation -- the mom or the dad is not necessarily always around? In my experience in most cases there is either a health care provider with me or very close at hand. Whenever there is a doubt about something, I always ask to find out what is permissible.

Another way to give that touch is face painting. There is that tactile touch. With seniors you'll have more fun if you do the designs on the back of hand or lower arms. In this way the art work can be seen by the recipient and the hand is held -- once again the touch. You might get permission to apply clown faces on some residents or patients. What joy these folks achieve when others react to their funny faces. The longer it takes to put on the face, the more physical contact between you and the person receiving the face.

-- Richard Snowberg

## **Heart-to-Heart Hugs**

*By Shobi Dobi*

Because of Richard Snowberg's workshop, I was reminded to make buttons like the ones here (Male and Female) for you to copy. Make some and give them out. Caregivers are often too busy to remember what they need is a little TLC and a hug!

Caring Clowns often tread where others cannot. It's simply easier and more permissible to hug a clown than a fellow staff member or health care provider. A clown's hug is nondenominational, non-sexual, non-threatening and unconditional. It is in the spirit of fun, but it packs the same punch. However, discretion must be exercised at all times. I am an "older" woman with a little girl clown character, so I am not as likely to have the problems that a younger or "gorgeous" clown might have.

A Child Life Worker at our hospital had this comment about giving hugs to stressed parents. "Sometimes you can move in a little close. The parent may put their arm around you, or you may feel it is permissible to put your arm around their waist. This may precipitate a warm hug." By entering their physical space very thoughtfully, it may not be considered an intrusion. Be careful and be ready to back off.



Do you give a good hug? Think about it. Do you smell good? Would you want to hug you? The next time someone gives you a hug and it feels really good, observe how it is done. Usually, it's not one of those hugs that strangle you around the neck -- it's a heart-to-heart hug.

My clown character, Shobi, is usually full of buttons and things that make noise (for my musical stethoscope). When I'm hugged, very often "I go off." This might be funny, but it does not result in a very comfortable hug. So I am careful in arranging my paraphernalia!

## **Tender Loving Touch.**

Unconditional physical contact between living beings is so soothing and stress relieving. It is too bad there is so much sexual abuse and harassment in our world at this time. It makes everyone so cautious and even paranoid.

Back in the 70's when I was an art therapist at a youth facility in New York City, my training included Tender Loving Touch. With stressed or traumatized adults and teenagers, we would stroke their backs while talking to them. Repeatedly run your hand over the upper back from below the neck down the middle of the back. Do not rub hard or up and down, as this causes the opposite effect. This is not a big noticeable motion, but a tender touch. It is done unnoticeably as you are talking to someone. Today the message therapist will do this "calming stroke" after a message to smooth down your "energy." [Using a feather duster in the same way and becomes "safe touch".] Ask someone you know to do it to you.

Another area for soothing touch is the upper arm. Gently rubbing the upper arm is very calming. With children, stroking the cheeks is soothing. Nurses tell me patients with dementia will start to suck as a baby when their cheeks are rubbed. Check it out. Get a friend and test your tender loving touch!

--Shobi Dobi