

# Butterfly Hug--a self-directed EMDR method for children and adults

(by [Tom Cloyd, M.S., M.A.](#) )

*"Self-Directed use of Eye Movements Sets for Stress Reduction" is an explicit topic in Francine Shapiro's [Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing \(1995\)](#)--see p. 236ff. It pioneering use with children is documented below, but this way of doing it has applications well beyond that population.*

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The Butterfly Hug is accomplished by having a child or adult wrap their arms around themselves, so that each hand touches the opposite upper arm or shoulder. Then the client is instructed to move their hands like the wings of a butterfly, i.e. to tap their arms/shoulders in an alternating rhythm. (As an alternative, the client might just tap their knees.)

The "Butterfly Hug", or "Hug of self love" is referred to and used extensively in the [Group Protocols for Work with Children Survivors of Traumatic Events](#) document, by [Ignacio Jarero, Ph.D., B.C.E.T.S.](#) (available for download from the "[protocols for treatment](#)" page of this website). Dr. Jarero attributes development of the Butterfly Hug to Lucy Artigas, M.A. (one of the founders of the [Latin American Association for Crisis Therapy](#)), while working in Acapulco with survivors of hurricane Paulina in 1997. (personal communication, 6/17/00) For photographs of her, Dr. Jarero, and other members of the Crisis Mental Health team working the child survivors of natural disasters at a variety of locations in Latin America, click [here](#).

This method of self-administered contralateral stimulation is used by Dr. Jarero in several contexts, e.g., for "safe place" installation or anchoring; for EMDR processing of disturbance associated with a picture a child has drawn of something that is very upsetting to them; and for anchoring positive affect associated with the child's imaging their own heart as a "treasure" (after an extended period of positive affect induction by other means). Dr. Jarero's crisis response team has also instructed children to use the Butterfly Hug at night, to help them get to sleep more easily.

Generally, one uses this method with a client after work on essential trauma is completed, using the Standard Protocol (see [EMDR Portal Master Internet Index](#)). But it is noteworthy that Dr. Jarero's team uses it with children, in groups, to process primary traumatic memory of recent disasters, including death of family members. (The children are under the close supervision of several professional mental health therapists when this is done.) Some clinicians have also used it with adult clients to facilitate primary processing of a fundamental traumatic memory or memories. The client's control of the bilateral stimulation may be an empowering factor that aids their retention of a sense of safety while processing traumatic memory.

Use of the Butterfly Hug in session with the therapist has been seen to be a clearly self-soothing experience for many trauma-therapy clients, again probably in part because they themselves are directly producing the bilateral stimulation. Having learned to self-sooth in

session with the therapist, the client (adult or child) can be instructed to take this method with them to use between sessions, whether to modulate any disturbing affect that arises or to reground with their Safe Place, by focusing on a mental image of the Safe Place while experiencing bilateral stimulation.

Some clinicians will also do it simultaneously with their clients, as an aid to control of secondary traumatization. And some use it as a substitute for touching clients--the client is told something like "Please give yourself a butterfly hug for me!"

This method may be used with people of all ages, and I believe it is accurate to say that most of us who have invited our clients to use this procedure in a clinical setting have found it to be very well received.

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