Butterfly Hug

Body-Based Skills: A Self-Soothing Tap for Stressful Moments

The butterfly hug is a simple way to calm yourself by crossing your arms over your chest and tapping, left and right, like the wings of a butterfly. Lucina Artigas developed it while working with survivors of Hurricane Pauline, which struck Mexico in 1997. She and Ignacio Jarero made it part of their group EMDR therapy. You can do it anywhere, at any age.

1 How to do the butterfly hug

- **Cross your arms.** Place your right hand on your upper left chest and your left hand on your upper right chest, just below your collarbones. Point your fingers up toward your neck.
- **Link your thumbs.** Hook your thumbs together so your hands look like a butterfly, with your thumbs as its body and your fingers as its wings.
- **Soften your eyes.** Close your eyes, or let them rest half closed and look down toward the tip of your nose.
- **Tap slowly.** Gently tap your hands one at a time, left, right, left, right, at a slow and steady pace, like a butterfly flapping its wings.
- **Breathe and notice.** Breathe slowly and deeply from your belly. Notice your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations without trying to change them, the way you might watch clouds pass across the sky.
- **Stop when you feel ready.** Keep going for a minute or two, or until your body tells you it is enough. Then rest your hands and take a few normal breaths.

Why does this work? *The slow, steady rhythm of the tapping gives your attention something calm to rest on, and the slow breathing can help your body settle. Tapping on alternating sides is a form of the bilateral stimulation used in EMDR therapy. Research on the butterfly hug on its own is still limited, so treat it as one calming tool among others.*

2 When could you use it?

Many people use the butterfly hug when they feel stressed, before a hard conversation, or to wind down at bedtime. It also works as a way to hold on to a calm or happy moment. Think about when it might help you.

Times I could try it:

Example: In the car before I walk into work, or when I wake up from a bad dream

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3 Pair it with a calm moment

You can also use the butterfly hug to strengthen a good feeling. Bring to mind a place or a moment when you felt safe and calm, then tap slowly a few times while you picture it in detail. Keep it short, and stop if the picture turns unpleasant.

A place or moment where I felt safe and calm:

Example: Sitting on my grandmother's porch on a summer evening

What I can see, hear, and feel there:

4 Practice log

Before and after each practice, rate how calm you feel from 0 (not calm at all) to 10 (completely calm). Over time you will see whether it helps you.

Date	Calm before	Calm after	What I noticed
Mon	*3*	*6*	*My shoulders dropped and my breathing slowed.*

5 Looking back

What did you notice after a week of practice? When did it help most?

If tapping brings up painful memories or makes you feel worse, stop and open your eyes. In EMDR therapy, a trained therapist guides any work with trauma memories, so talk with a therapist before using the butterfly hug for that. If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

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