

I Need a Huggle

By Tara Spinelli for Jersey Moms Blog

Hugging or kissing as a greeting is like tipping: if, when, and how much aren't always entirely clear.

As a kid, I hated walking into a big family party because it meant hugging and kissing a lot of people I didn't see very often or possibly even know at all. Beyond the aunts and uncles and cousins, there would inevitably be someone's friends or neighbors there, and if I wasn't sure I knew them, I'd hug and kiss them, too, just to play it safe. I'm not sure where I got the idea that this was required, but I always felt like it was my responsibility to anticipate and deliver the right greeting.

A couple of years ago, my college-age cousin and her roommate from Florida stayed with us for the weekend. Toward the end of their visit, my cousin's roommate remarked that I had hugged and kissed her when we first met, the kiss part of which she wasn't used to, but liked and thought was cute. The scary thing is, I didn't even remember the kiss part. It's like I go into some kind of fugue state when it comes to hellos, and dive straight in with arms wide and lips pursed. Same for goodbyes, but there I've figured out that the later you leave, the fewer people you have to decide whether or not to hug and kiss. It's a lot easier to hug and kiss a couple of people as they leave than to face a room full of people and have to make the rounds.

Then there are situations in which a handshake would seem like the obvious choice but may fall short. As a freelancer, I often work with former colleagues, but a lot of time can pass between in-person meet-ups or meetings. I've both hugged and not hugged under these circumstances. I usually try to decide beforehand which way it's going to go, but stay open to the possibility that I could be hugged or decide in the moment to hug.

Seems like whether or not you hug and/or kiss as a greeting, whom, and how often aren't so much cultural norms as personal ones, sometimes with a family or group influence. I can think of a huge variety among just the people I know. For example, I have a sister-in-law who kisses on the lips, if but the quickest peck. I have a friend who kisses you every time you see her no matter how often. And another whose hugs are as rare as double-rainbows (her advice on hugging ex-colleagues: "hell, no!"). My mother may or may not hug and kiss you immediately after months apart, but always makes kissy noises at the end of a phone call even if you just saw her.

And how about those Olympic men's volleyball players? What a bunch of huggers! Or really, huggers, because they do this huddle hug—the huggle—where they stand in a quick circle and sort of shoulder hug. I've seen the women beach volleyball players hug and thought it was a girl/beach thing, but now I think it must be a really good volleyball player thing.

Speaking of man hugs, I envy the one where you clasp hands and bump shoulders (a huggle variation, I'd say, but when there are only two of you). I wish I knew about that when I was growing up, and then it might be natural to use it now, too. As it stands, I'm stuck with my standard repertoire of hug-with-cheek-kiss or hug-with-cheek-brush, and still haven't completely cracked the code on if, when, and how much.

Given my own greeting issues, I rarely insist my kids hug or kiss anyone. I'm hoping this will help them avoid getting hung up on figuring out the appropriate hello or goodbye and just go with it. Since it's probably too late for me, I'd be relieved if the huggle (two-person and group) became the official international greeting of choice, good for so many occasions. Yes, I definitely need a huggle.