

# Physical intimacy

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**Physical intimacy** is sensual proximity or touching.<sup>[1]</sup> It is an act or reaction, such as an expression of feelings (including close friendship, love, or sexual attraction), between people. Examples of physical intimacy include being inside someone's personal space, holding hands, hugging, kissing, caressing, and sexual activity.

It is possible to be physically intimate with someone without actually touching them; however, a certain proximity is necessary. For instance, a sustained eye contact is considered a form of physical intimacy, analogous to touching. When a person enters someone else's personal space for the purpose of being intimate, it is physical intimacy, regardless of the lack of actual physical contact.

Most people partake in physical intimacy, which is a natural part of interpersonal relationships and human sexuality, and research has shown it has health benefits. A hug or touch can result in the release of oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin, and in a reduction in stress hormones.<sup>[2]</sup>

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## Personal space

Most people value their personal space and feel discomfort, anger, or anxiety when somebody encroaches on their personal space without consent.<sup>[3]</sup> Entering somebody's personal space is normally an indication of familiarity and intimacy. However, in modern society, especially in crowded urban communities, it is at times difficult to maintain personal space, for example, in a crowded train, elevator or street. Many people find the physical proximity within crowded spaces to be psychologically disturbing and uncomfortable,<sup>[3]</sup> though it is accepted as a fact of modern life. In an impersonal crowded situation, eye contact tends to be avoided. Even in a crowded place, preserving personal space is important. Non-consensual intimate and sexual contact, such as frotteurism and groping, are unacceptable.



Women sharing physical intimacy

On the other hand, most people occasionally desire physical proximity to others, and will at times welcome a familiar and trusted person into their personal space. When a partner or friend is not available at such a time, some people satisfy this need for human contact in a crowded venue, such as a bar, disco, pop concert, street festival, etc.

## Display of affection

People who are on a familiar basis may enter into each other's personal space to make physical contact. These can be indicators of affection and trust. The manner in which people display affection is generally different in a public context to a private one. In private, people in an intimate relationship or who are familiar with each other may be at ease with physical contact and displays of affection, which may involve:

- cuddling,
- caressing (e.g. head, hands, arms, back and waist),
- tickling (e.g. back and waist),
- massage (e.g. neck, shoulders, back, thighs), or
- touching heads.

Bonding through intimate, non-sexual contact between platonic friends and family members includes, but is not limited to, holding hands, hugging, cuddling, and kissing on the cheeks.

In public, however and depending on the nature of the relationship between the people, a public display of affection is generally constrained by social norms and can range from a gesture such as a kiss or hug in greeting, to an embrace or holding hands. Maintaining eye contact can be regarded socially and psychologically as analogous to touching.

## Skinship

The term "skinship" (スキンシップ *skinshippu*) originated as a pseudo-English Japanese word (*wasei-eigo*), which was coined to describe the intimacy, or closeness, between a mother and a child.<sup>[4][5][6]</sup> Today, the word is generally used for bonding through physical contact, such as holding hands, hugging, or parents washing their child at a bath. The earliest citation of this word appears in *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* in 1971.<sup>[7]</sup>

According to Scott Clark, author of a study of Japanese bathing culture, the word is a portmanteau combining "skin" with the last syllable of "friendship".<sup>[8]</sup> The similarity with the English word 'kinship' suggests a further explanation.<sup>[6]</sup>



"The Proposal" by William-Adolphe Bouguereau.

Use of the word "skinship" in English publications seems to focus on the notion of sharing a bath naked, an idea known in Japanese as "naked association" (裸の付き合い *hadaka no tsukiai*). It is not clear why the meaning shifted to the parent–child relationship when borrowed back into English.

## See also

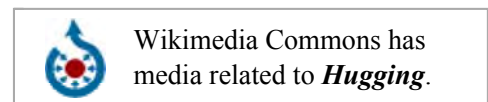
- Emotional intimacy
- Haptic communication
- Public display of affection
- Consent

## References

1. University of Florida ([http://www.counsel.ufl.edu/brochure.asp?include=brochures/physical\\_intimacy.brochure](http://www.counsel.ufl.edu/brochure.asp?include=brochures/physical_intimacy.brochure))
2. "Human touch may have some healing properties". USA Today. 2008-09-28. Retrieved 2011-01-03.
3. Hall, Edward T. (1966). *The Hidden Dimension*. Anchor Books. ISBN 0-385-08476-5.
4. Ivry, Tsipy (2009). *Embodying Culture: Pregnancy in Japan and Israel*. Rutgers University Press. p. 162. ISBN 0-8135-4636-2.
5. Harkness, Sara; Super, Charles M. (1996). *Parents' cultural belief systems: their origins, expressions, and consequences*. Guilford Press. p. 186. ISBN 1-57230-031-0.
6. Hijirida, Kyoko; Yoshikawa, Muneo (1987). *Japanese language and culture for business and travel*. University of Hawaii Press. p. 218. ISBN 0-8248-1017-1.
7. "Skinship". Word Spy. 2003-02-05. Retrieved 2007-07-03.
8. Clark, Scott. *Japan, a View from the Bath*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994, p. 73. ISBN 0-8248-1615-3, ISBN 0-8248-1657-9.

## External links

- "American guys embrace the



hug" (<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/arizonaliving/articles/0525manhug0525.html>) - article at *The Arizona Republic*

- NPR: Poet on Call, By Andrei Codrescu (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5507154>) commentary on hugs on NPR

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Categories: Human sexuality | Intimate relationships | Sexual acts | Massage

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