YOUR LIFE CAN BE ANYTHING... WHERE WILL YOU TAKE IT?

WHY YOU NEED A PEER MENTOR

Cara Delevingne + Elizabeth Olsen on Creativity

STARTUP SPECIAL
(AND WHAT IT’LL REALLY COST YOU)
I’ve ever been to a party and youkol, you’ll know the feeling of standing on the doorstep, waiting for the door to open and wondering if anyone will talk to you. Now throw in the fact that you’re attending a cuddle party, where you’ll be in a room full of strangers who will spend several hours hugging, stroking and holding each other quite unconsciously. It can be very hurtful, because you touch your partner like a piece of furniture. Becoming aware of what you’re actually doing when you’re touching your partner is important.

For Stella and those who attend her gatherings, cuddle parties are about asserting and respecting boundaries about requesting permission to touch someone else and understanding that, rejection when it comes to touch at least, shouldn’t be taken personally. But cuddling also has myriad side benefits.

When we hug another human for more than 20 seconds, oxytocin courses through our body. This hormone can strengthen the immune system and lower blood pressure. Known as the ‘love molecule’, it can also improve self-esteem. High levels of oxytocin can ease pain and help reduce stress. If those are the benefits of merely hugging someone – even if it’s someone you’ve never seen before – imagine the potential in a large sunny room on the top level of Stella’s home, the group participating in today’s party sits on mattresses and pillows on the floor. An eclectic bunch, most seem to have stayed here before – several of them appear to be friends. I’m definitely the youngest attendee; there are two other women and four men. At first, everyone seems shy; a couple of people make small talk as we wait for the party to start. There are nibles and tea set up – Stella has previously told me that people often sit up and observe the cuddling while nursing a cuppa.

It’s quite pleasant in the room, and an unreasonably warm spring day in London. Once everyone has arrived, Stella joins us. The party begins with a ‘response’ yes when someone asks out the 11 rules of the cuddle party. These include no sexual touch, that you must respect others’ boundaries, and – Stella’s favourite rule – you are always allowed to change your mind.

“You are encouraged to change your mind, to be authentic in every moment,” says Stella. “That is still something in daily life we can’t do, because we need to take other people into account. Changing our minds all the time can seem flaky. But in this safe space of [the] cuddle party, we are encouraged to try this out. It’s quite profound.”

During the welcome circle we do a few exercises. First, we give setting boundaries a whirl. In groups of three, we ask each other increasingly absurd questions and touch. “Can I stroke your arm?”, “Can I cut your hair?”, “Can I tickle your feet?”. To each question – no matter how much we actually want it to happen – we must answer ‘no’. Easy enough. The next exercise is to happen – we must answer ‘no’. Easy enough.

The afterglow of a good yoga class in summer – but it’s a wholesome experience with surprising benefits.

As I stroke the man’s back and then the woman’s, I experience afterwards that it made us feel good. And, really, isn’t that all any of us want?

I?’s time to get to the actual cuddling. First we have to see how many hugs we can give and receive in 60 seconds. As I’m still not sure how I feel about strangers hugging me, and I associate spooning with a ‘welcome circle’, where Stella reads out the 11 rules of the cuddle party. As I stroke the man’s back and then the woman’s, I experience afterwards that it made us feel good. And, really, isn’t that all any of us want?

At a cuddle party, you can expect more skin contact than at a salsa class in summer – but it’s a wholesome experience with surprising benefits.

Words Che-Marie Trigg

A lot of people live very much in their brains and in their heads, and a lot of people are very touch-deprived. As I stroke the man’s back and then the woman’s, I experience afterwards that it made us feel good. And, really, isn’t that all any of us want?

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