



Vignette Illustrating a HUGS

Conversation with a Caregiver

Following, is an example of how a practitioner might help a caregiver use the **H-U-G-S Interaction Style** during the family's typical activities.

Practitioner: *"Before we jump into anything new, how have things been going with bath time lately? I know you mentioned last week that the transition out of the tub was tough."*

Parent: *"Yeah, it's still really rough. She loves the bath. She's happy the whole time. But as soon as I try to get her out, she gets upset--kicking, screaming, holding onto the tub. It feels like we end the night in a total meltdown."*

Practitioner: *"That sounds really draining for both of you. I'm glad you brought it up again. I'd like to share some information with you about a strategy called **H-U-G-S**. It stands for **Hear, Understand, Give** and it leads to **Social-emotional learning**, which is something that will help shape how your child reacts to her emotions. It's something we can walk through together in the moment and it might help make those transitions a little smoother."*

Parent: *"Okay. What's it about?"*

Practitioner: *"It's all about helping your child feel seen and supported when emotions get big. First, you **HEAR**—that means tuning in to what she's feeling or trying to tell you, even if she's not using words. Then you **Understand**—you reflect back what you think she's trying to say in simple words and label her feelings for her. And then you **Give**—you offer a calm response that helps her feel heard and shows her a better way to express herself. It could be giving a choice, offering help, or offering an alternative."*

Parent: *"So instead of just telling her 'it's time to get out,' I'd be helping her understand what she's feeling, labeling her emotions and giving her something like a choice?"*

Practitioner: *"Exactly. And when you use it consistently—even in small moments—she gets to practice how to manage her emotions and communicate her needs more clearly. What are your thoughts about trying it together during bath time tonight?"*

Parent: *"Yes, let's do it."*

Transition to Bath Time

The child is now in the tub, happily playing with bubbles and toys. The practitioner sits nearby while the parent supervises.

Parent (after a few minutes, reaching for the towel): *"Okay sweetie, time to get out and get ready for bed."*

Child (frowns, splashes harder, and grabs the side of the tub): *"Nooo!"*

Parent: "Here we go..."

Practitioner: "Let's start with **Hear**. What do you think she's trying to tell you with her face and body right now?"

Parent: "She's holding on and yelling. She doesn't want to stop playing—she's not ready to be done."

Practitioner: "Right. That's her message. Now move to **Understand**—try putting what she's feeling into words for her."

Parent: "You're having fun and don't want the bath to end. You're mad it's time to stop."

Child (pauses and looks at her mom, still holding onto the tub but quiets a little): "No out."

Practitioner: "She's listening. You connected with her. Now let's try **Give**—can you offer a choice or a next step that helps her feel heard and gives her a role in the transition?"

Parent: "Okay... You want more bath time. It's hard to stop. Do you want to bring your ducky out, or wrap in your pink towel first?"

Child (points): "Pink towel."

Parent: "Alright, pink towel it is."

Practitioner: "That was such a great shift. You stayed calm, named her feeling, gave her a choice—and she followed through without a fight. These small changes help her learn how to express what she's feeling instead of getting overwhelmed by it."

Parent: "That felt so much better than usual. She still didn't want to get out, but it didn't turn into a meltdown. And I didn't feel like I had to force her."

Practitioner: "Exactly. The goal isn't to eliminate every tough moment—it's to help her feel understood and learn to handle those feelings with your support. And using this throughout the day—during play, meals, getting dressed—helps build those social-emotional skills in real life."

Parent: "I'm going to try this more tomorrow too. I like that it gives me something to do instead of just reacting."

Practitioner: "You did a wonderful job tonight. When are you going to plan to use the **H-U-G** strategies again during bathtime this week?"

Parent: "Probably tomorrow night. I think I'll try the same thing—narrating what's happening, giving her a heads-up before it's time to get out, and helping her feel heard when she gets upset."

Practitioner: "That sounds like a solid plan. What do you plan to do if it doesn't go as well as it did tonight?"

Parent: "Hmm... maybe take a breath first before responding. I could still try to name her feelings, even if she's really upset. And remind myself it won't always be perfect."

Practitioner: "Exactly. Sometimes just staying calm and showing her you're still there for her is a win. Each moment like that teaches her something."

Parent: "Thanks—I feel ready to try again, even if it's messy."

*Practitioner: It sounds like you are going to continue practicing the **H-U-G-S** during bathtime this week. You have strategies for staying calm, reading her cues, naming her feelings and offering her choices. What activity would you like to look at during our next visit?*

Parent: Let's take another look at bath time and see how I am doing with it.

Practitioner: When would you like me to come back for another visit?

Parent: Let's go with next week, could you do Thursday night at 6?