

World's top IT fair embraces 'cuddle jacket'

March 6 2013



The logo of the CeBIT IT fair is pictured on February 28, 2011 in Hanover, central Germany. Everyone needs a hug now and then, but at the CeBIT, the world's top high-tech fair, even that can be created with technology as a Singapore-based firm unveiled its "cuddle jacket", hailed as a global first.

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The normal-looking fleece-like item has small [air bubbles](#) that can be inflated to simulate the feeling of a cuddle, explained James Teh,

founder of T-ware.

Controlled by smartphone, the type of "cuddle" can vary from light pressure on the shoulders to a full-blown bear hug.

But the [jacket](#) is not just a gadget. It has a practical application in helping children with learning disabilities, said Teh.

Children suffering from autism and other sensory disorders often get agitated when confronted by loud noises or new faces. Trials with the jacket have found that the soothing effect of the jacket can help to calm them down.

The jacket also measures the vital signs of the child and can alert a carer or parent to when sensory overload might be imminent.

It has already been tested with success in schools in the United States as well as in families in Britain, Australia and Singapore.

"We believe this is the first wearable technology in the world for children with sensory disorders," Teh told AFP.

Retailing for \$499 (380 euros), the jacket is hardly cheap but carers and parents have found it reduces the need to be attentive to a child with learning disorders around the clock.

Teh hopes to be able to roll out the jacket more widely and not just for children with learning difficulties but also for adults wanting the [therapeutic effect](#) of physical contact.

"Hugs benefit everyone. You get the same feeling as when you get a massage," he said, noting the popularity of massage chairs.

The [CeBIT](#), in the northern German city of Hanover, is the world's biggest high-tech fair, welcoming some 4,100 exhibitors from around 70 countries. It runs until March 9.

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Citation: World's top IT fair embraces 'cuddle jacket' (2013, March 6) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-03-world-fair-embraces-cuddle-jacket.html>

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