

Warmth



By Wendy Gorman

Spending the past four years in Minnesota has taught me things about cold that I truly did not believe were possible. That ten degrees is appropriate weather to walk to the bank in, but 0 degrees is not. That yes, cancelling school because of cold is sometimes a necessity. That scarves are not merely a fashion statement. I also learned about other, more intangible forms of coldness, like the cold, emptiness of loneliness, the sharp, icy feel of frustration, the chilling feeling of inadequacy. But what I learned most of all is how to appreciate warmth. Hot showers, hot drinks, quiet evenings spent with friends, and someone else's warm neck to bury your nose into. I wanted to be able to explore warmth further, as it relates to the physical,

mental, spiritual, and emotional, and for me, nothing says warmth like sitting down with friends, hot drinks, and a big, lovely pile of yarn.

Sit down with a group of 2-4 people you want to spend about 2 hours with. Someone, possibly you, needs to be willing to facilitate this gathering. Several objects are necessary for this meeting. Everyone should have yarn, of whatever quality, color, and texture they prefer. My preference is for fluffy, unusual looking yarns, since my fashion tastes run a little towards the dramatic, and I love the feelings of soft yarn sliding over my fingers as I shape that yarn into a scarf. You will also all need a desire to connect with other humans, and knitting needles (or crochet hooks, if you really must). While you may do this at any time, I am usually moved to knit in the colder months, and find that fall and winter are the best times for cozy knitting parties.

Make sure the people you are sitting down with are in an appropriate mental space to enjoy an



open, intimate discussion about warmth. If someone feels they are not up to the task, let them go. This can only work with everyone on board. Do not try to convince anyone to do this if they do not feel up to it. For example, if I had a big project at work due the next day, and I needed time to prepare for it, that would not be a good time for me to participate, since I would be distracted the whole time.

The space you host this gathering in should be warm and cozy, for whatever definition of cozy you desire. If it were me, I'd make sure there were lots of warm, snuggly blankets that people could wrap around their legs, plenty of hot tea and hot chocolate, and maybe some homemade cinnamon rolls, perhaps with my Wailin' Jenny's Pandora station on in the background, and hopefully a cat or two to sit on people's laps and get tangled up in the yarn.

Someone in your group needs to know how to knit (or crochet) prior to starting this gathering. If not

everyone knows how to knit, then the ones that do, teach the ones who don't. Hopefully this won't take too long, but if the time gets eaten up by knitting technicalities, then at least everyone has learned a new skill and enjoyed the company of people they want to spend time with. If no one knows how to knit, [here](#) is a handy YouTube video that will hopefully convey the basics. Also, [here](#) are some step-by-step instructions. Barring that, ask around your friend group, and see if you have someone who can teach you to knit prior to organizing one of these gatherings. I would suggest that anyone new to knitting start with making a scarf, since they are simple, require no fancy turns, and are beautifully useful in cold weather. In the spirit of the honest, intimate space I hope this will be, I will admit that I have never knitted anything other than a scarf, because despite having knitted for years, I still only know how to knit straight rows with the knit stitch. Nothing more.



Once everyone is happily knitting (or crocheting), and is settled with their tea or cinnamon roll or hot cider, whoever is facilitating this event should begin the discussion of warmth. A complete list of warmth-related discussion prompts is at the end of these instructions. The facilitator must begin by sharing what they turn to in times of physical coldness. If I were the first facilitator of this activity, I would share that I love nothing more than my soft purple cat blanket, and drinking hot cider with cinnamon whiskey in it, perhaps while reading a nice fanfiction.

The facilitator will then pass the sheet of warmth related discussion topics to the person sitting next them. This person will read the next question/topic aloud, and then pass it along to the next person, if there is one, and so on and so forth, passing the sheet around in a roughly circular manner. If someone is unable to put down their knitting for fear of losing a stitch, a more confident knitter can hold the sheet in front of them, so that

they may read without disturbing their stitches. If someone merely needs a few seconds to finish a row, be gracious. Allow them to finish before starting the next question.

The topics covered on the sheet will be of varying levels of intensity. Some of them will be easy to answer, and some of them may require more thought and introspection to answer. There may be times when you must be vulnerable with the people sitting near you. Therefore, the people gathered together should be playing as their kindest, most understanding selves that day- meaning that whatever kindnesses you can extend to those in your gathering, you should. Put forward your most compassionate self, listen with respect and caring to the people around you, and try to be honest, with others and yourself, about where you find and seek warmth. When someone else shares personal information with you, treat that information with care and respect.




In addition to being kind to your gathering, remember to be kind to yourself during this meeting. If your stitches are looking a little lopsided, or you feel that your conversation isn't as sparkling as it could be, try not to stress. Be kind to yourself. Treat yourself as you would a dearly beloved friend, and support yourself as you engage in open, perhaps vulnerable, conversation with a group of people.










Depending on how chatty your group is, and how many of you there are, you may not get to all the questions. That's fine. You may breeze through the questions in under two hours. That's fine also. When your group is approaching the two hour marker, stop, and thank each other for sharing in the experience. Clear up any lingering questions or comments, finish off your beverage, swipe the last crumbs off of the cookie tray. If you didn't know each other previously, this is an excellent time to exchange phone numbers, email addresses, twitter handles, etc.

Probably, by the end of the group, no one will have a finished project, if they are just starting out. If by some miracle you do have a finished scarf or hat or baby blanket or what have you, that is wonderful! If you need more than two hours to complete something (as I most certainly would) feel free to continue knitting, or to just let the unfinished product remind you of your warmest self. If you do manage to finish something, within the time constraint or not, consider using your finished item as a way to spread warmth on to someone else. Perhaps give it as a gift. Perhaps donate it to a homeless shelter. Perhaps just simply tie it to a tree with a note saying "Use me if you're cold!"



Warmth Discussion

 What do you do to try and make others feel warmer?

-  How do you seek warmth when you are physically cold?
-  Describe a time in your past when you felt emotionally warm.
-  What does warmth mean to you?
-  In what ways would you like to be warmer?
-  What activity (or activities) causes you to feel intellectual warmth?
-  Is spiritual warmth important to you? If yes, how so?
-  Describe your perfect comfort food.
-  What causes you to seek out emotional warmth?
-  Describe a person who makes you feel warmth, of any kind, on a regular basis.

