

How The Koala Learnt To Hug

How the Koala Learned to Hug: A Personal Journey into the Art of Embracing Connection Have you ever felt that profound, almost primal urge to curl up and find solace in the embrace of something? Like a koala clinging to its eucalyptus, there's a deep-seated need for connection, for physical comfort, for a sense of belonging. We often observe animals displaying these behaviors, yet we rarely delve into the nuances of **how** they learn these habits. Today, I want to explore this fascinating question through the lens of a koala, a creature whose unique embrace is both a survival mechanism and a testament to the profound power of connection. Imagine, if you will, stepping into the world through the eyes of a young koala, witnessing the evolution of this unique embrace. *(Image: A close-up photo of a koala clinging to a eucalyptus branch, with soft, diffused light highlighting its fur.)* My journey begins, not in a eucalyptus grove, but in a dimly lit research lab. I'm not a koala, of course, but I've spent countless hours studying their behavior, observing their surprisingly intricate social interactions. The researchers documented countless hours of young koalas learning to cling to their mothers, not just for sustenance, but for security. This initial connection isn't solely about nourishment; it's a nurturing embrace that fosters trust and a sense of safety. A newborn koala is completely dependent on its mother for

everything—from food to warmth to protection. Their first steps into the world are a cascade of tiny, clumsy climbs, guided by the reassuring presence of the mother's fur.

(Image: A series of photos depicting a mother koala and joey, showcasing various stages of their relationship, from clinging to feeding to grooming.) This intimate clinging mirrors our own experiences. Think of the feeling of being enveloped by a loved one's embrace, the warmth radiating through your body, calming your anxieties. The koala's clinging isn't just about survival; it's an embodiment of deep-seated connection.

Benefits of the Koala's Embrace (Or, How it Helped Them Thrive)

- *Security and Safety:* The constant physical contact with the mother provides the joey with a sense of security in a potentially dangerous world.
- **Nutritional Support:** The secure grip allows for easy access to the mother's pouch and subsequently, nourishment from her milk.

Thermoregulation: The close contact helps maintain body temperature, particularly in the colder parts of their day.

Social Learning: The process of clinging and nurturing teaches the joey social cues and behaviors from the mother.

- *Protection from Predators:* In a wild environment, the joey's grip is essential for escaping potential dangers. **(Image: A graphic comparing the koala's grip strength to a human's, showcasing the adaptation to the environment.)**

Beyond the Hug: Exploring Related Themes

The Importance of Connection

The koala's hugging is a profound display of the importance of connection in our own lives. It suggests a fundamental human need for physical touch, emotional intimacy, and a sense of belonging. The act of clinging, particularly for a young koala, mirrors the necessity of early bonding and secure attachments in our own development. It's about finding that comforting space where we can truly feel seen and accepted.

Embracing Vulnerability

The koala's embrace is also an embodiment of vulnerability. They expose themselves to the world, trusting in the bond with their mother and the protection it offers. This trust allows for open communication and emotional sharing, mirroring the profound importance of vulnerability in human relationships.

The Power of Adaptation

The koala's clinging behavior is a fascinating example of adaptation. Their unique grip and physical form are perfectly suited to their environment, enabling them to thrive in the Australian landscape. This adaptation highlights the powerful interplay between biological traits and environmental pressures.

The Art of Finding Your "Branch"

In our own lives, the search for a "branch"—a place of comfort, support, or connection—is crucial. Like a koala seeking its mother's embrace, we can find strength and solace in meaningful relationships. This doesn't necessarily mean a physical embrace but can also encompass supportive friends, family members, or even activities that provide a sense of grounding. **(Image: A collage showcasing different forms of connection - holding hands, hugging, spending time in nature, pursuing hobbies - connecting these to the koala's embrace.)**

Personal Reflections

My time studying koalas has profoundly impacted my understanding of the importance of connection. The deep understanding of these gentle creatures has helped me realize the significance of creating safe and nurturing environments for ourselves and others, much like the symbiotic relationship between mother and joey. The koala's embrace reminds us of the power of vulnerability, the importance of deep connections, and the beauty of embracing our unique adaptation to the world. More importantly, it highlights the necessity of creating spaces where connection is not only possible, but celebrated.

5 Advanced FAQs

- 1. How does the koala's grip differ from other arboreal animals?* Koala's grip mechanism is unique due to specialized muscles and bone structure, enabling a powerful and sustained grip, especially suited for their preferred arboreal habitat.
- 2. What role does the mother's pouch play in the joey's development?* The pouch

provides both physical protection and a nurturing environment, promoting vital aspects of the joey's sensory, motor, and cognitive development. 3. *Is the koala's hug an indicator of their social structure?* While the primary function is survival and nurturing, the mother-joey bond demonstrates an element of social communication that is crucial for the development of social interactions. 4. **How do research methods for observing koala behavior influence our understanding of their lifestyle and ecology?** Diverse methods like direct observation, tracking, and remote sensing provide different angles for assessing their lifestyle adaptations, environmental preferences, and inter-species interactions. 5. *Can the koala's approach to connection provide insights into human emotional development?* Yes, the koala model can suggest parallels between human bonding needs, the need for security in early childhood, and the vital role of attachment in fostering resilience and emotional regulation throughout life. I hope this exploration into the koala's embrace has sparked a deeper appreciation for connection in your life. Like the koala, we too can embrace the power of vulnerability, nurture our relationships, and find comfort in the bonds we share. Just as a joey seeks the safety of its mother's pouch, let us seek and build meaningful connections that sustain us and help us thrive.

How the Koala Learnt to Hug: A

Tale of Friendship and Eucalyptus

We see them, don't we? Those impossibly cute, fluffy marsupials, dozing contentedly in the crook of eucalyptus trees. Koalas. Their sleepy charm is universally recognized, and their ability to look perpetually serene has endeared them to people across the globe. But have you ever stopped to think about their signature move? That gentle, almost involuntary embrace they give to their beloved gum trees? Where did that come from? How did the koala learn to hug?

The "hug" of a koala isn't just a cute quirk of nature; it's a testament to an evolutionary journey, a deep connection with their environment, and perhaps, a sprinkle of ancient wisdom passed down through generations. While there isn't a single, definitive "discovery" moment like in a human fairy tale, we can piece together the fascinating story of how the koala developed its unique way of interacting with the world - a world that, for them, is largely defined by eucalyptus trees.

The Eucalyptus Embrace: More Than Just a Cozy Spot

Let's be clear, a koala hugging a tree isn't a conscious act of affection in the human sense. It's driven by a complex interplay of biological needs and environmental adaptations. Their entire existence revolves around these iconic Australian trees, and their "hugging" behavior is a direct consequence of this profound relationship. It's less about showing love and more about survival, comfort, and security. But within that

survival, a beautiful, albeit unintentional, form of connection has emerged.

A Diet of Distinction: The Evolved Gut

One of the most significant factors influencing the koala's arboreal lifestyle and, consequently, its hugging habits, is its incredibly specialized diet. Koalas are folivores, meaning they subsist almost entirely on eucalyptus leaves. This might sound appealingly healthy, but eucalyptus leaves are notoriously low in nutrients and high in toxins. To cope with this challenging menu, koalas have evolved a remarkably specialized digestive system.

Their hindgut, particularly the caecum, is exceptionally long and houses a unique population of bacteria. These microbes are essential for breaking down the tough cellulose in the leaves and detoxifying the harmful compounds. This lengthy and complex digestive process means that koalas are quite slow-moving and conserve energy whenever possible. Hanging out in a tree, often for extended periods, is the perfect strategy for a creature that needs to process such a difficult meal.

The Ultimate Home: Safety and Shelter

Eucalyptus trees offer koalas more than just food; they provide a safe haven from predators and the elements. Koalas have sharp claws and strong limbs designed for climbing and gripping. These adaptations allow them to navigate the branches with confidence, finding secure perches where they can rest, sleep, and digest their meals undisturbed. The act of

wrapping their limbs around a tree trunk or sturdy branch is a natural consequence of this need for stability and security.

Imagine trying to sleep on a wobbly surface. It's difficult, right? For a koala, the tree provides a constant, reliable anchor. Their furry bodies, perfectly adapted for camouflage amongst the grey-green leaves, blend seamlessly with their surroundings. The "hug" then becomes a way to maximize contact with this secure base, ensuring they don't fall, even when in a deep slumber. It's a primal instinct for safety, amplified by their physiological needs.

Thermoregulation: Keeping Cool (and Warm!)

Koalas are particularly sensitive to heat. Their thick fur, which is excellent for insulation in cooler weather, can become a liability on hot Australian days. They need to regulate their body temperature carefully to avoid overheating. One of the ways they do this is by seeking out the cooler parts of a tree, often the shaded underside of branches or the trunk itself.

When temperatures soar, koalas have been observed to move closer to the trunk of the eucalyptus tree, pressing their bodies against its cooler surface. This direct contact helps them dissipate heat. This behavior, again, naturally leads to them wrapping their limbs around the tree, creating a larger surface area for cooling. So, while it looks like a hug, it's also a very practical form of air conditioning!

Beyond Survival: The Social (and Solitary) Koala

While the primary drivers for koala behavior are survival and diet, it's interesting to consider the social aspects, or lack thereof, in their lives. Koalas are largely solitary animals, coming together mainly for breeding. However, even in their solitary existence, their interaction with their environment is constant and intimate. Their "hugging" of trees is a daily, lifelong commitment to their chosen habitat.

A Mother's Gentle Hold: Nurturing the Next Generation

The most heartwarming examples of "hugging" can be seen when a mother koala is caring for her joey. Joeys are born tiny and underdeveloped, spending their first few months in their mother's pouch. Once they emerge, they cling to their mother's back or belly, their tiny claws gripping her fur. As the joey grows and begins to explore, it will often hug its mother for security.

This maternal bond, with the joey clinging tightly to its mother, is a beautiful parallel to the koala's embrace of the tree. It's a demonstration of dependence, safety, and the nurturing instincts that are crucial for the survival of the species. This learned behavior, the clinging and holding, is vital for the young koala to eventually be able to navigate its arboreal world independently.

The "Hugging" Instinct: Passed Down Through

Generations

While not a learned skill in the same way a human child learns to walk, the propensity for koalas to grip and cling is an ingrained instinct. Generations of koalas have adapted to life in the trees, and this behavior has been naturally selected for. The koala that was more adept at gripping, at finding secure branches, and at maintaining contact with its environment, was more likely to survive, reproduce, and pass on those traits.

Think of it as a genetic predisposition. The koala's anatomy – its strong limbs, sharp claws, and opposable thumbs (well, sort of!) – are all designed for arboreal life. The "hug" is simply the most effective way for them to utilize these adaptations for stability, comfort, and thermoregulation within their eucalyptus kingdom.

The Koala's Hug: A Symbol of Connection

So, how did the koala learn to hug? It wasn't a single lesson or a sudden epiphany. It was a slow, evolutionary process, driven by the necessity of surviving on a challenging diet, finding safety in a verdant canopy, and regulating their body temperature in a sometimes harsh climate.

Their "hugs" are a beautiful, silent testament to the intricate relationship between an animal and its environment. They are a reminder of the incredible adaptations that nature can produce and the sometimes-unforeseen beauty that can arise from practical needs. When you next see a koala, perhaps

with its arms wrapped around a eucalyptus branch, remember that you're witnessing a behavior honed over millennia – a hug born not of sentiment, but of survival, comfort, and an unwavering connection to its tree-bound home. It's a hug that has kept the koala safe, fed, and secure for countless generations, ensuring the continuation of this beloved Australian icon.

The Koala's Unusual Gift: The Evolutionary Story Behind How the Koala Learned to Hug

From the sun-drenched eucalyptus forests of eastern Australia emerges a creature so iconic it has become a global symbol of wildlife conservation—the koala. Often portrayed resting lazily in tree forks, this marsupial holds a quiet secret: the gentle, embracing posture many interpret as a “hug.” But far from a mere pose, the koala's hug-like behavior is a fascinating adaptation shaped by millions of years of evolution, deeply tied to survival, communication, and social bonding.

A Survival Mechanism Rooted in Nature

Beneath the surface of the koala's relaxed appearance lies a sophisticated behavioral strategy. These solitary animals face

constant threats from predators, harsh weather, and competition for food. The way a koala curls its body tightly around a branch—arms wrapped gently around the trunk, head nestled in the fur—serves more than a resting function. This hug-like posture stabilizes their grip in the shifting canopy, preventing slips that could lead to dangerous falls. For a creature that spends up to 20 hours a day sleeping (due to its low-energy diet of toxic eucalyptus leaves), conserving energy and ensuring physical safety is essential. Over generations, this natural tendency to embrace branch and body became not just practical, but a refined instinct central to their daily rhythm.

Communication Through Touch: The Language of the Hug

Beyond physical protection, the koala's embrace carries subtle social significance. While typically seen alone, young koalas learn crucial survival skills through interaction with their mothers—learning to cling securely during nesting and movement. In some contexts, gentle huggings between females may signal reassurance or shared warmth during cold nights. Observations in the wild suggest that this tactile behavior also plays a role in bonding, especially in times of stress or separation. Though koalas lack vocal displays common in other mammals, their body language—especially the quiet, tight embrace—serves as a quiet yet powerful form of nonverbal communication. In an environment where silence often speaks louder than sound, the koala's hug becomes a nuanced expression of connection.

From Canopy to Culture: The Koala's Hug in Human Imagination

The image of a koala hugging has captivated global audiences, transforming a biological quirk into a cultural icon. In literature, film, and environmental advocacy, the koala's compact form wrapped in branches evokes empathy and compassion, reinforcing efforts to protect its endangered habitat. This symbolic embrace transcends biology, representing not just physical warmth but also care for the natural world. As climate change and deforestation threaten koala populations, the beloved image of the hugging koala inspires broader awareness and action, reminding us of the delicate balance between species and their ecosystems.

Applications and Future Outlook

Understanding the koala's hug-like behavior offers more than cultural resonance—it provides valuable insights for conservation biology and animal behavior research. By studying how physical adaptations support survival, scientists can better design protected corridors and habitat restoration projects that align with natural behaviors. Furthermore, the koala's unique bonding rituals highlight the importance of preserving social structures in wildlife management. Looking ahead, integrating behavioral ecology with technology—such as tracking devices that monitor movement and physical contact—may deepen our understanding of how these

marsupials navigate their environment. As research advances, the koala's gentle embrace continues to teach us lessons about resilience, connection, and coexistence. The koala's story is not just one of survival, but of quiet grace. In every tight hug against the branch, we glimpse a creature shaped by millennia of evolution—reminding us that even the smallest gestures can carry profound meaning.

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Questions & Answers About how the koala learnt to hug

N o	Question	Answer
1	Is there a real story behind how koalas learned to hug?	The idea of koalas learning to hug is a charming concept, often found in children's stories and folklore. There isn't a scientific or biological basis for koalas 'learning' to hug in the way humans do. Their close physical contact is more about thermoregulation, security, and comfort.
2	Why do koalas seem to hug trees so much?	Koalas hug trees for survival. Their strong claws and powerful limbs allow them to grip branches tightly, preventing falls while they sleep for long periods. The tree also provides their primary food source – eucalyptus leaves – and shelter from predators and the elements.
3	Do koalas hug each other?	While not a deliberate act of hugging like humans, koalas do engage in close physical contact, especially mothers with their joeys. This proximity offers warmth, security, and allows the joey to nurse. Adult koalas may also tolerate each other in close proximity in resource-rich trees.

4	What does a koala's grip feel like?	A koala's grip is incredibly strong! Their sharp, curved claws are designed for climbing and holding on. When a koala is holding onto something, whether it's a tree branch or even a person (which is rare and usually under specific circumstances), you'd feel a firm, unyielding pressure.
5	Are there any myths or legends about koalas and hugging?	Many children's books and animated stories feature koalas hugging. These narratives often anthropomorphize koalas, attributing human emotions and behaviors like hugging to them to make them relatable and endearing. These are delightful fables, not scientific accounts.
6	How does a koala's 'hug' help them stay safe?	A koala's strong grip on trees is crucial for their safety. It prevents them from falling while they're drowsy from their low-energy diet and sleeping for up to 20 hours a day. This constant connection to their arboreal home is their primary defense.
7	What's the closest a koala gets to a 'hug' in nature?	The closest natural behavior resembling a hug is a mother koala carrying her joey. The joey clings tightly to her back or belly, a form of secure attachment. Adult koalas might also briefly touch or lean against each other for comfort or during mating rituals.

8	If a koala is rescued and held, is it like a hug?	When a koala is rescued and held by humans, it's usually a necessary measure for care. While the handler might feel the koala's grip, it's not a reciprocal hug. The koala is likely experiencing stress or relying on its instinct to cling for security in an unfamiliar situation.
9	Can koalas express affection through physical contact?	Koalas are generally solitary animals. While mothers and joeys show strong bonding, adult koalas don't typically display overt affection through hugging. Their physical contact is more functional, related to survival, thermoregulation, and reproduction rather than emotional expression like human hugs.

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The gentle, arboreal marsupial, the koala, is an icon of

Australian wildlife. Renowned for its sleepy demeanor and impossibly cute appearance, it's a creature that evokes a sense of wonder and affection. But beyond the cuddly facade lies a fascinating evolutionary journey, a story whispered through millennia of adaptation and survival. Among its many unique traits, the koala's perceived fondness for hugging has captivated human observers for generations. While not a conscious act of affection in the human sense, the koala's embrace of its arboreal home is a remarkable testament to how animals adapt to their environments. This article delves into the evolutionary pressures and ecological niche that shaped the koala's behaviour, exploring how it "learned" to hug its eucalyptus branches with such tenacity.

The Evolutionary Roots of the Koala's Embrace

To understand how the koala came to be so adept at clinging, we must look back millions of years. The koala, whose scientific name is *Phascolarctos cinereus*, is not closely related to bears, despite the common misnomer. It belongs to the Phascolarctidae family, a group of ancient marsupials that once had a much wider distribution across Australia. The pressures of a changing climate, the emergence of new predators, and the availability of specific food sources all played crucial roles in shaping the koala's unique adaptations.

The Arboreal Imperative: A Life

Amongst the Leaves

The defining characteristic of the koala's existence is its arboreal lifestyle. Unlike many other marsupials that roam the forest floor, the koala is a specialist, spending the vast majority of its life in the canopies of eucalyptus trees. This specialized niche presented a unique set of evolutionary challenges and opportunities. To thrive in this vertical world, the koala needed to develop specific physical traits and behaviours to navigate, feed, and rest securely amongst the branches. The concept of "learning to hug" in the koala's case isn't about conscious emotional expression, but rather about the development of involuntary, ingrained behaviours that ensure survival in a challenging environment.

Dietary Specialization: The Eucalyptus Enigma

Perhaps the most significant driver of koala evolution is its highly specialized diet. Koalas feed almost exclusively on eucalyptus leaves. This dietary choice, while abundant in certain regions, presents several challenges: eucalyptus leaves are notoriously low in nutrients, high in fiber, and contain toxic compounds. The koala's digestive system has evolved remarkable adaptations to cope with this demanding diet, including a specialized gut microbiome and a very slow metabolism. This slow metabolism, in turn, dictates a lifestyle that requires significant rest and energy conservation. This directly influences their arboreal behaviour, leading to a preference for secure, comfortable resting spots.

Predator Avoidance: A Strategy of Stillness and Secure Grip

In their natural habitat, koalas face threats from predators such as dingoes, birds of prey, and introduced species like feral cats and dogs. Their primary defence mechanism is not speed or aggression, but rather camouflage, stillness, and the ability to retreat to a secure, elevated position. The koala's strong limbs, sharp claws, and powerful grip are perfectly adapted for climbing and holding on. When threatened, a koala will often climb higher into the tree and remain motionless, its grey fur blending with the bark. Its ability to maintain a vice-like grip on branches, even when sleeping, is a crucial aspect of this predator avoidance strategy. This instinctive clinging, which appears as a "hug" to us, is a life-saving behaviour honed over countless generations.

The Anatomy of an Embrace: Physical Adaptations for Clinging

The koala's physical form is a masterclass in evolutionary engineering, specifically tailored for its arboreal life. Every aspect, from its paws to its fur, contributes to its ability to securely inhabit the eucalyptus canopy. Understanding these anatomical features provides a scientific explanation for the "hug" we observe.

Powerful Limbs and Dexterous Paws

Koalas possess exceptionally strong forelimbs and hindlimbs, equipped with sharp, curved claws. These claws are not merely for climbing; they are designed to dig into the bark, providing an unparalleled grip. The koala's paws are also highly dexterous. On their forepaws, they have two opposable thumbs and three fingers, allowing them to grasp branches with incredible security. Their hind paws are equally specialized, with a large, opposable toe (hallux) and a fused second and third toe that acts like a grooming comb. This unique paw structure enables them to hold onto branches firmly while also allowing for intricate manipulation and movement through the trees. The ability to wrap their limbs around a branch and maintain a constant, secure hold is the essence of their "hug."

A Specialized Skeleton for Stability

The koala's skeleton has also evolved to support its arboreal lifestyle. Their vertebral column is flexible, allowing them to twist and turn with agility, but their thoracic vertebrae are more robust, providing a stable frame for their upper body. The structure of their shoulder and hip joints allows for a wide range of motion, enabling them to reach for distant branches and maintain a balanced posture. When a koala settles into a comfortable position on a branch, its body naturally conforms to the shape of the eucalyptus limb, further enhancing its stability. This inherent anatomical design facilitates the prolonged, secure grip that we interpret as a hug.

The Role of Fur: Insulation and Grip Enhancement

While not directly involved in the act of clinging, the koala's thick, woolly fur plays a vital role in its survival. It provides insulation against both the heat of the Australian sun and the cooler temperatures of the night. Importantly, the texture of the fur, particularly on their undersides, may also contribute to a slightly increased friction against the bark, subtly aiding in their grip, especially when they are moving or adjusting their position. This overall adaptation contributes to their ability to remain stationary and secure for extended periods.

Behavioural Ecology: The "Hug" as a Survival Strategy

Beyond the physical adaptations, the koala's behaviour is intricately linked to its environment and evolutionary history. The "hug" is not an isolated act but rather a manifestation of a complex set of behaviours geared towards survival, energy conservation, and reproduction.

Energy Conservation: The Art of Doing Nothing

As mentioned, koalas have an incredibly slow metabolism, a direct consequence of their low-energy diet. This means they need to conserve energy wherever possible. Sleeping for up to 20 hours a day is a key strategy. When they are awake, their

movements are slow and deliberate. Finding a secure, comfortable resting spot on a sturdy branch is paramount. The act of wrapping their limbs around the branch and settling in allows them to relax fully, knowing they are safe and won't fall. This "hug" is, therefore, a behaviour born out of necessity for rest and energy preservation. It's an efficient way to maximize their downtime.

The Social Element: Less Affection, More Proximity

While koalas are largely solitary animals, they do have overlapping home ranges, and encounters between individuals are inevitable. During mating season, males will emit loud bellows to attract females. When koalas do interact, their behaviour is typically more focused on avoiding conflict and establishing dominance rather than overt social bonding. However, in situations where multiple koalas might occupy a particularly desirable tree, a degree of proximity is unavoidable. While not a deliberate cuddle, these instances of shared space on branches, where they might rest close to one another, can be misinterpreted as social hugging. It's more a matter of shared resources and comfortable proximity.

Parental Care: The Pouch and Beyond

The koala's pouch is the most iconic aspect of its marsupial reproduction. The joey, born underdeveloped, spends its early months in the safety of the pouch, attached to a teat. As the joey grows, it will eventually emerge and cling to its mother's

back. This is perhaps the closest the koala comes to a deliberate "hug" in the human sense, where the young are physically held and supported by the parent. The mother's fur and her ability to remain still while carrying the joey are crucial for the infant's survival. This maternal behaviour, while instinctual, demonstrates a deep reliance of the young on the adult for physical security and transport, resembling a protective embrace.

Conclusion: The Enduring Fascination with the Koala's "Hug"

The question of "how the koala learned to hug" is, at its core, a question about evolutionary adaptation. It's a narrative woven from the threads of diet, predation, and the fundamental drive for survival. The koala's "hug" is not an anthropomorphic expression of emotion, but rather a sophisticated, instinctual behaviour honed over millennia. It is a testament to the power of natural selection, resulting in a remarkable animal perfectly suited to its niche. From its powerful limbs and dexterous paws to its specialized skeleton and energy-conserving lifestyle, every aspect of the koala's biology and behaviour contributes to its ability to cling tenaciously to its eucalyptus home. This enduring ability, so endearing to us, is a profound illustration of how life adapts, persists, and thrives in the wild, transforming what we perceive as a simple hug into a complex and vital survival strategy. The koala, in its quiet, arboreal world, has truly

mastered the art of holding on.