



Peer Education Project

Why Kindness Matters



A Guide for School Staff



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"[Being kind] is making time for the activities you enjoy i.e. hobbies, playing with pets, speaking with friends and spending time with loved ones, playing sports, and other physical activities."

Peer Educator
Peer Education Project

Why is kindness good for our mental health?

Researchers suggest that kindness is choosing to do something for ourselves or others, that is motivated by genuine, warm feelings.

“Acts of kindness” do not have to be grand gestures, they can be as small as listening to a pupil as they talk about a bad day or being accepting towards differences in the classroom.

It may feel intuitive that kindness can help others, but there is a growing body of research to show that being kind also has benefits for our own mental health and wellbeing.

In fact, studies have found that being kind can:

-  reduce stress;
-  improve our mood;
-  increase self-esteem, happiness and life satisfaction;
-  create a sense of belonging;
-  reduce loneliness;
-  keep things in perspective, and
-  make the world a happier place by motivating others to be kind too!

We found that 63% of UK adults agree that when other people are kind it has a positive impact on their mental health, and the same proportion agree that being kind to others has a positive impact on their mental health.

Top tips for showing kindness

There are many ways that we can show kindness to ourselves and others but if your pupils are struggling to get started, here are some top tips to remind them of:

Keep others in mind

Part of being kind is considering the feelings of others. Encourage your pupils to find ways of showing kindness that are based on what others need or want, rather than what we assume will be useful.

For example, if they want to donate to a foodbank, help them find out what the foodbank needs before buying or collecting things.



Pace themselves

It's very easy to give away all our energy by focusing on others.

Remind your pupils that kindness has to start with them – taking time to be kind to themselves will help to build up more energy for showing kindness to others.

Start small

Encourage your pupils to start small, so they do not become overwhelmed or give more than they can. Helping others doesn't have to cost money or take a lot of time.



For your pupils, it could start with holding a door open at school for another pupil or member of staff, inviting someone to join in with their group or helping a peer with their classwork.

Do something they enjoy!

Encourage your pupils to share their skills and interests with others as a way of showing kindness.



Remind them that acts of kindness can also be for yourself, so they should do things that they enjoy!

Remember that people of all ages need kindness

Remind pupils to think of ways to be kind to people of any age.

Encourage pupils to think of people around them they could show kindness to, such as other people in their family, school or community.



How to support your pupils to show kindness...

Kindness can be shown in many different ways and it can look different to everyone. You can play a key role in helping children and young people to have the greatest effect by supporting and encouraging them to find what works for them, and for others.

...to themselves

Being kind to ourselves can be even harder than being kind to others. It is very easy to hold higher standards for our own behaviour, thoughts, and feelings than others, but over time this can chip away at our confidence and self-esteem. This is especially true for children and young people.

It is important to remind your pupils to top themselves up with self-kindness from time-to-time. Nobody can pour from an empty cup! You can encourage this by supporting your pupils to do the following things:



Spend 30 minutes every day doing something they love.

Doing things we love can help to boost our mood and clear our minds and, with a clear mind, we are more likely to be patient and kind to ourselves, and others.

Praise themselves.

Encourage your pupils to find one thing to compliment or congratulate themselves on every morning and ask them to write it down when they can to remind themselves of it.

You could build this into the beginning or end of each lesson so pupils can have time to settle and reconnect with themselves before beginning work or leaving the class.

[Try these gratitude journal writing prompt cards!](#)



"I made a mistake"

Practice 'thought-swaps'.

Encourage your pupils to practice training their brains to swap each negative thought about themselves with a more balanced one.

For example, instead of thinking 'I made a mistake', swap it for 'I'm learning'. It could be built into the lesson to write down the new thoughts for the future.

"I'm learning"

Be patient.

Remind your pupils to treat themselves as patiently as they would treat a best friend.

Support your pupils to find what helps them to feel calmer and less frustrated – maybe it is putting their pen down and taking some deep breaths.



Be kind to others.

Research shows that being kind to others makes us feel good and has positive effects on our own mental health and wellbeing, so encourage your pupils to try some of the following things!



Practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness is about paying attention to what is happening in your mind and body right now, without judgement. You could set time aside at the beginning or end of each lesson for mindfulness.



Encourage your pupils to find what works for them. Encourage them to try a few of the following examples: writing or drawing about their day, [listening to a guided meditation](#), or just sitting in silence.

Remember – we learn by example! So try practicing these yourself and talking about what works for you with your pupils.



How to support your pupils to show kindness...

...to others

Encourage your pupils to:

- ☀️ share how they are kind to themselves with others.
- ☀️ offer their seat on public transport to someone who may need it more than them.
- ☀️ call a friend they haven't spoken to in a while.
- ☀️ smile and say hello to people they pass every day.
- ☀️ buy recycled and recyclable products.
- ☀️ help a friend or sibling with their homework.
- ☀️ volunteer at a local charity shop – this can act as work experience too!
- ☀️ pick up some rubbish lying around in the playground.
- ☀️ donate clothes to a charity or homeless shelter.
- ☀️ help with the gardening or housework.
- ☀️ be kind in the way they use social media.



How to support your pupils to show kindness...

...as a school community

Encouraging kindness as a school community involves not only the pupils, and a celebration of their kindness, but also staff. Keep this in mind when planning events or campaigns that encourage and recognise kindness in school.

Here are some ideas that you could try:

Allocate time to celebrating differences

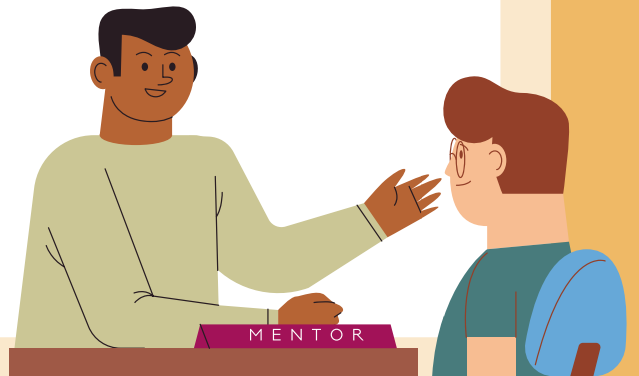
Set aside a whole day or week dedicated to celebrating all pupils' and school staff's differences in religion, culture, language, and identity. Encourage new foods, clothing, and practices to be brought into the classroom.



Set up a mentoring system

Your school could organise a mentoring system where pupils are paired with and build a supportive relationship with another, often younger, pupil. This could help pupils facing additional challenges at school or for all pupils during key transition stages, such as moving from Primary to Secondary school.

Drop-in peer support sessions are a less structured option.



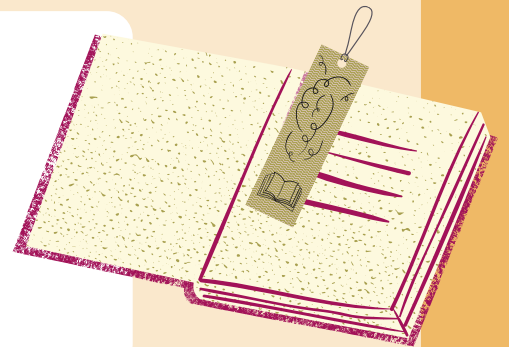
Create a gratitude jar

Find an empty jar and encourage pupils to write the things they are grateful for on slips of paper. Put these into the jar and at the end of a decided period of time – a week, month, or even term – read these out as a class to reflect, if the pupils are happy for you to do so.



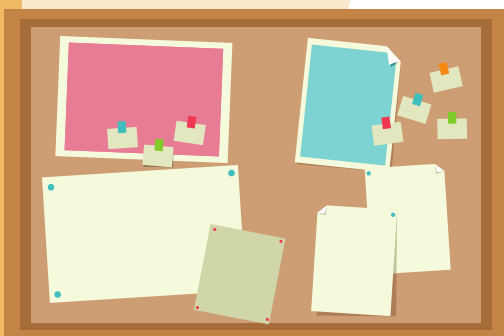
Get creative!

Encourage your pupils to make cards or bookmarks with kind images and quotes on them. Task pupils with hiding these in books from the school library for other pupils to find while they read.



Bulletin board or box

Create a Kindness Bulletin Board where examples of acts of kindness from pupils and staff can be posted to inspire others, and also provide top tips for building in acts of kindness into everyday life.



Kindness Awards

Create an awards ceremony where people can nominate staff members or pupils that they feel have been kind and caring in school. Encourage pupils to recognise and show gratitude for acts of kindness from others.

Remember, kindness incorporates self-care, helpfulness, gratitude, empathy, and compassion. You could have a Kindness Awards Ceremony where the nominees and acts of kindness are announced.



Charity events

Events that raise money for nominated charities are a great way to show kindness beyond the school community. You can even show kindness on the day by basing the event around completing acts of kindness or on something others enjoy, like a cake sale. Encourage your pupils to nominate charities of their choice to support during the event.



Random Acts of Kindness Challenge

Encourage pupils and staff to perform acts of kindness to as many others as possible (but remember quality over quantity!). Photos could be taken and used as a collage at the end.

You can encourage involvement by putting challenge posters up around the school with different tasks on them and pupils and staff can write their initials on the poster when they have completed that act of kindness.





Annual volunteering day

Set a day aside for your pupils to engage with their local community and build lasting connections. You could consider partnering with local organisations, like care homes, local parks, or nature reserves, and set up volunteering opportunities like litter picking, supermarket packing, and creative or musical sessions in care homes.



Kindness paper chain

Used as an icebreaker activity in the Kindness Lesson Plan, make your own paper chain of kindness for your classroom. Ask pupils to write acts of kindness that they have received on a slip of paper and create a colourful paper chain to display in your classroom.

The Alphabet Gratitude Game

The alphabet gratitude game is a fun activity for kicking off a lesson or using as a refresher activity. For each letter of the alphabet, in a chain, have each pupil name something they are thankful for. Explain how kindness has a knock-on effect!



Find out more



Watch our video on [Why Kindness Matters](#).



The practice of gratitude is an important part of building resilience, increasing mindfulness, and helping to develop a growth mindset. [These teaching resources can be used to support daily gratitude practice, or as stand-alone activities.](#)



Read this [report on 'Ten Steps towards Staff Wellbeing'](#) to understand how to support your staff's mental health and wellbeing.



Encourage your pupils to think about self-care, even when outside of the classroom, [with guidance from this webpage.](#)



Read this [guide on self-kindness and compassion](#) to understand how to look after your own mental health. Why not download the [kindness planner](#) to explore ways of inspiring kindness among your school staff and pupil body?



[Play this video on showing kindness for your pupils](#) (Y7-Y9 or S1-S3). It includes a mindfulness activity.



Show yourself some kindness by downloading this [self-care guide developed specifically for teachers and staff in the school setting.](#)

Find out more



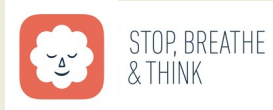
Use this [Kindness Activity Pack](#) with your pupils to reflect on the power of kindness. The pack suggests fun activities while encouraging small acts of kindness that can be done each day to support themselves and their communities.



Put this [poster](#) up around your school. It provides a few simple ways to be kind online and support people's wellbeing.



Try this [short mindfulness exercise](#) that can be done at your desk between lessons or during a breaktime to refresh and reframe your thoughts.



[Print out this self-care poster for teachers.](#)



Use this [Kindness Calendar](#) created for Mental Health Awareness Week 2020 with your pupils to encourage kindness.

Promote Kindness in School

Fundraising Ideas

Acts of kindness are a great way to uplift the people around us. Not only can they make others feel good but being kind also has benefits for our own mental health and wellbeing. Here are some ideas to spread the word that #KindnessMatters.

7 days of Kindness Challenge

Encourage pupils to volunteer their time in school, at home or in the community, aiming to complete a minimum of 1 hour per day across a week.

Get pupils to fill out sponsorship forms, asking family and friends to sponsor their volunteering time over the week and donate the money to the Mental Health Foundation.

Kindness Awards

Ask pupils and staff to nominate other staff members or pupils that they feel have been kind and caring in school. Encourage pupils to recognise and show gratitude for acts of kindness from others. Remember, kindness incorporates self-care, helpfulness, gratitude, empathy, and compassion.

You could have a Kindness Awards Ceremony where the nominees and acts of kindness are announced, inviting parents and caregivers along. Consider having a mini bake sale or cultural food bring-and-buy sale after the ceremony to raise money for MHF while in attendance.

Rainbow Day

The colours of the rainbow represent the messages of hope and kindness that children shared throughout the pandemic and are still so very important. Hold a rainbow day, where pupils and staff pay £1 to come into school dressed in rainbow clothes and accessories.

You could host competitions during the day e.g. see who can pop it the quickest using a pop it sensory fidget toy. Ask pupils and staff to pay 50p to have a go!

Any donations you raise will help us at the Mental Health Foundation to continue to raise awareness of mental health inequalities and the need for preventative action, and advocate for change so that individuals and communities can thrive.

How to send the money to us:

After you have finished fundraising, you can send the money over to us by making a donation via our website. Please give full details of your fundraising. Or you can e-mail events@mentalhealth.org.uk and we can provide you with our bank details.

Alternatively, you can set up a fundraising page for the school and ask pupils, parents and teachers to make any donations via this page.

Thank you so much for your support!





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