



## Acts of Kindness

### Promoting Kindness and Happiness in Children

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*"No one has yet fully realized the wealth of sympathy, kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child. The effort of every true education should be to unlock that treasure."*

-Emma Goldman

## Activity 1

### Instructing Children to Complete Acts of Kindness

For this activity, students are given instructions to carry out acts of kindness in their family, peer group, school, or community. This activity is a good way to start a series of activities involving acts of kindness. The activity can be followed up by discussions about "what acts of kindness did you choose to do," "why did you choose those acts," "what was your experience," and "what do you think the person who received your acts of kindness felt?"

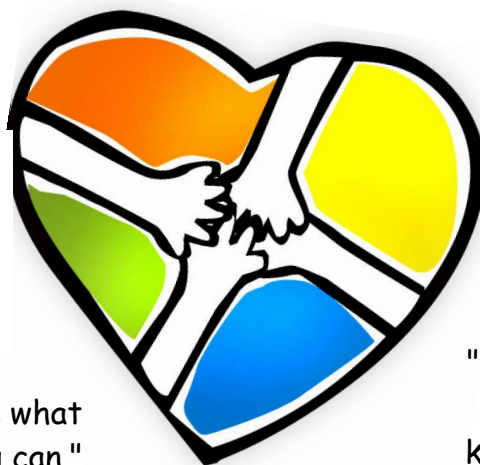
Please read the following instructions, and provide them to the children in print:

From time to time, all of us perform acts of kindness for other people. Sometimes our kind acts may be large (e.g., collecting clothes for children and families who are poor), and sometimes they may be small (e.g., opening a heavy door for someone). Sometimes, the person for whom we are doing it may know that it's us (e.g., we help a friend carry her books), and sometimes they don't (e.g., we leave a treat on a classmate's desk). Examples of kind acts include helping your parents cook dinner, doing a chore for your sister or brother, helping a friend with homework, or visiting a grandparent. *Tomorrow*, you are to perform *three* acts of kindness - all three in one day. The three kind acts do not need to be for the same person, and it does not matter if that person knows whether you did it or not. Also, the three kind acts you choose to do may be like the examples we described above, but they do not have to be. Later, you will be asked to report back to us and list what acts of kindness you chose to do. If you want to make a note of what acts you did in order to help you remember them, please feel free to do so.

Please do not do any kind acts that may place yourself or others in danger.

"We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love."  
-**Mother Teresa** (1910-1997)

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."  
-**Arthur Ashe** (1943-1993)



"Constant kindness can accomplish much. As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust, and hostility to evaporate."  
- **Albert Schweitzer** (1875-1965)

## Activity 2

### Kindness Collage

For this activity, students will learn to identify and understand acts of kindness.

**Step 1:** Brainstorm a list of kind actions.

**Examples:** Helping your parent set the dinner table; helping a friend with his/her homework; sharing your smile generously with people around you. What other examples can you think of?

**Step 2:** Conduct a newspaper/magazine search. Have students search for stories or pictures that display acts of kindness.

**Step 3:** Ask students to summarize and analyze the stories/pictures for the rest of the class, explaining why the pictures represent kindness to them.

**Step 4:** Pictures can be collected day by day and made into a "Classroom Kindness Collage."

**Step 5:** Encourage students to put some of those kindness examples into action.



## Activity 3

### Kindness Report

For this activity, students are going to perform acts of kindness over a period of time in the school year (time period to be determined by the teacher). Children are asked to complete acts of kindness that were identified and discussed in Activity 1, write up their experiences, and hand in a "Kindness Report." **Students will not be graded on this "assignment."**

The paper may contain 3 (or more) components:

1. Describe what acts of kindness they completed for someone
2. Describe how the person who received the acts of kindness may have felt?
3. Describe how doing the act of kindness made them (the acting child) feel

The report can be completed anonymously by each child. Teachers read each paper and give encouraging /constructive feedback to each child and hand the papers back to the students. Feedback may reflect what difference child made to someone else's life.

## ***Five Things to Promote Empathy and Kindness in Children***

### **1. Develop children's prosocial value orientation – that is, a “caring” identity – by engaging children in activities that benefit others.**

Recent research tells us that when you engage children and youth collectively in activities that benefit other human beings, you develop something that Ervin Staub calls a “prosocial value orientation” that is, an orientation that centers on helping and caring for others. Recent research also tells us that people who help others also report greater happiness, health, and well-being in their lives.

### **2. Foster the development of moral purpose through promoting children's engagement in activities that benefit the local and world community.**

William Damon, professor and development psychologist at Stanford University, tells us that middle childhood and early adolescence are particularly critical times for young people to develop a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. They need opportunities to engage in activities that help them develop a sense of who they are in the world and how they can contribute to making the world better for all. Engage students in your classroom in conversations about what matters and how they can make a difference. Facilitate the engagement of children in these local activities.

### **3. Model empathy, caring, and forgiveness.**

As we often realize, children often learn more from what we do than what we say. By middle childhood and early adolescence, youth are astute observers of our actions. Show caring and understanding in your interactions with students and the others with whom you interact. Talk about the good feelings that come from helping others, and engage students in opportunities to reflect their own feelings and experiences about helping others. Acknowledge your mistakes (e.g., say “I am sorry”). Show forgiveness to others and towards the children in your classroom.

### **4. Doing something good is “intrinsically rewarding” and should not be rewarded extrinsically.**

Research by Joan Grusec and her colleagues shows that children who are expected to do work that benefits others on a routine or self-regulated basis (i.e., without being “paid” or rewarded) are more likely to show spontaneous concern for the welfare of others. Work that focuses attention on what is one's “own,” or is based on frequent requests for assistance, is not positively related to the development of concern for others.

### **5. Encourage children to have a “gratitude” journal.**

Groundbreaking research in the area of positive psychology is showing us that people who take time in their daily lives to reflect on those things in their life for which they are grateful, gain many positive benefits – including greater happiness, optimism, and overall emotional and physical well-being. These individuals are also more likely to provide emotional support and help to others – suggesting that gratitude motivates individuals to do good.

## Did you know...?

...Research shows that practicing acts of kindness is not only good for the **recipient** but also good for the **doer**.

(Lyubomirsky, 2007)<sup>1</sup>

...Simply witnessing or hearing about a kindness leads people to feel "elevated" and increases their desire to perform good deeds.

(Lyubomirsky, 2007)<sup>1</sup>

...People, who perform acts of kindness or altruism, experience a boost in their level of happiness.

(Post, 2005)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lyubomirsky, S. (2007). *The how of happiness: A new approach to getting the life you want*. New York, NY: Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

<sup>2</sup>Post, S. (2005). Altruism, happiness, and health: It's good to be good. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 12, 66-77.

## How Does Helping Make Us happier?

- It leads to perceiving others more positively and fosters a sense of interdependence in your social community.
- It encourages a sense of appreciation for our own good fortune.
- It shifts the focus from self to others, and their experience of being helped.
- It impacts positive self-perception: we begin to view ourselves as being compassionate, which in turn promotes a sense of confidence and optimism.
- It encourages a sense of usefulness by highlighting our abilities, resources, and expertise.
- It may help us to learn new skills or discover hidden talents.
- It creates positive social consequences, contributes to people appreciating us, offering gratitude, and reciprocating in times of need.

(Lyubomirsky, 2007)<sup>1</sup>

## Additional Resources

- **The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation** - <http://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>
- **Sonja Lyubomirsky's Blog** - <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/how-happiness>
- **Greater Good: The Science of Meaningful Life** - <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>
- **RandomKid: The Power of ANYone** - [www.randomkid.org](http://www.randomkid.org)
- **Learning To Give** - <http://learningtogive.org/>
- **Kid Activities: Kindness - Random Acts** - <http://www.kidactivities.net/category/Random-Acts-of-Kindness.aspx>
- **Yes Magazine's Happiness** - <http://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness>
- Carter, C. (2011). *Raising happiness: 10 simple steps for more joyful kids and happier parents*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc
- Post, S.G. (2011). *The hidden gifts of helping: How the power of giving, compassion, and hope can get us through hard times*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.