The Power of Kindness
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“Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind.” – Henry James

Can you remember the last time somebody was kind to you? Or when you were kind to someone else? Do you remember their reaction?

Kindness leaves a lasting impression on both the user and the experiencer.

Kindness isn’t one of those things we think about every day. And rarely do we think about it having profound effect on the world around us. Kindness is in fact, often underrated and disregarded. This is in part because people who are kind are often viewed as “enablers” or “suckers” by the cynical.

In this fast-paced world, kindness and compassion take a back seat. Selfies, self-interest and interacting through the online world only keeps us from being kind.

Many people today are so absorbed in their own life that they often forget how powerful being kind to others can be. Most don’t expect others to go out of their way and do something for them and not expect any reward or recognition in return.

Kindness is one of the essentials to our existence. From birth we are nurtured in kindness. Therefore, kindness is a part of our DNA.

What is kindness, anyway?

According to Psychology Today, "Kindness means a behavioral response of compassion and actions that are selfless; or a mindset that places compassion for others before one’s own interests."

Kindness is the ways both big and small, that we express compassion, concern, consideration and care for ourselves and others. Kindness transcends race, religion, social class and language barriers.

Being kind has a big impact on the world around us and on ourselves in ways that most don’t realize. It has many benefits including increasing our happiness and helping us have a healthy heart.

You probably don’t realize you’re performing many kindnesses every day. Simple things like smiling and greeting others in a friendly way, complimenting someone about their hair, clothes, laugh or something they do are acts of kindness.

Helping someone in some way, opening a door or saying thank you, please or excuse me are kind acts. It shows kindness when you don’t gossip, find fault in others or make negative judgements either.
In this guide, we’re going to discover how the power of kindness effects not only you but the world. Then we’ll look at the benefits of being kind has on you. Next you’ll discover how you can still be kind in different types of stressful situations.

We’ll look at how you can be more kind and how to give and receive kindness. Finally, you will see the different types of kindness you can have.

**Power of Kindness on You and the World**

The type of society we live in has become known as “me first”. We’re taught early on to look out for ourselves first, and many do that. We’re self-focused, self-possessed and find it difficult to see beyond ourselves at those around us. We often don’t see how our actions affect others.

But our actions do affect others, sometimes in large ways and sometimes in small ways that create a wave of actions. The Butterfly Effect in Chaos Theory states that on tiny event in one area of the globe can have a substantial effect somewhere else. The same is true with small acts of kindness.

Every time kindness is performed it creates a ripple effect. It spreads from person to person, continuing endlessly. You could say kindness is contagious, like a disease in which the outcome is beautiful.

Kindness keeps us from being short tempered with others when we’re stressed and frustrated. It helps people realize we’re all on the same team.

Jamil Zaki, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University and Director of the Stanford Social Neuroscience Lab conducted a series of studies observing how witnessing kindness inspires kindness, saying it causes it to spread like a virus.

Zaki says, “We find that people imitate not only the particulars of positive actions, but also the spirit underlying them. This implies is that kindness itself is contagious, and that it can cascade across people, taking on new forms along the way.”

Today, we are bombarded with social media and news media that focuses on the negative interactions that affect us. It’s seen in the victims of bullying, of abuse, and of those who abuse their power. Even our entertainment is often riddled with abusive comments and negative actions.

Yet, when we were to look at how important an act of kindness can help someone in need, we realize how it can empower both ourselves and others.

Helping the disabled person who is struggling to gather items out their reach can change the course of their day. By giving a hungry person something to eat or helping a homeless person find shelter can change their outlook on life. Helping an elderly neighbor carry in groceries, mow their yard or just check on them occasionally, can help them feel less lonely. If you say thank you, please, and hello to others who are serving you, you brighten their day.

If you perform even the smallest act of kindness, you have the potential to change the course of persons life, even if only for a short period of time.

But kindness not only effects the one you are performing it for. It has a positive effect on you as well.
When you are kind to someone, your body gets a surge in serotonin, feel-good endorphins and oxytocin, all hormones that promote a natural high.

These hormones reduce pain and lower blood pressure, helping you feel relaxed and loved.

The person you are kind to will experience this surge in hormones too. And anyone who witnesses the act of kindness will feel the same feel-good effects.

Kindness fuels curiosity to know each other better. It helps us hear each other without putting up any pretenses. It’s considering other people and what they experience and their concerns and how you can make their lives easier.

Kindness is a contagion. It ripples and grows, effecting the unsuspecting and the observing. One act of kindness can change thousands of lives. In the words of Maya Angelou, “People will forget what you did, they will forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

**Personal Benefits of Kindness**

The benefits from kindness are more than just feeling good. Kindness affects both our emotional and physical body in different ways. Here are some of the benefits of being and showing kindness to others.

- **Kindness slows down the aging process.** People who volunteer tend to experience less aches and pains than others. Kindness and helping others will protect your health in the same way aspirin helps against heart disease.

- **It improves our relationships and connections with others.** Kindness helps us relate to other people and have more positive relationships with everyone we encounter.

- **Kindness increases happiness.** In a study by *The Journal of Social Psychology*, who practiced an act of kindness or tried something new each day enjoyed a higher level of happiness than those who didn’t make any changes.

- **The release of feel-good hormones happens from acts of kindness.** Doing nice things for others can increase your serotonin levels. These are the neurotransmitters responsible for our feelings of satisfaction and well-being. Kindness also releases the endorphins known as the “helper’s high”.

- **Kindness improves our own self-respect and self-love.** It makes us happier and in a better mood more often by doing kind acts often. Buy someone coffee or lunch, help someone in need or volunteer your time to get the pick-me-up you need.

- **Kindness helps prevent illnesses caused from inflammation.** These health problems include diabetes, cancer, chronic pain, obesity and migraines. Volunteering seems to lower the levels of inflammation. Oxytocin is released, even from small acts of kindness, which in turn reduces inflammation. Share a smile, make a donation, help others in some small to feel the effects of kindness.

- **Kindness eases your anxiety, whether it’s mild nervousness or you’re having severe panic.** Being nice to others is one of the easiest and most inexpensive ways to fight of
anxiety. Look for ways to help others when you are feeling anxious. Smile at someone, call a friend or lend your time to an organization.

- It is good for your heart. Kindness not only makes your heart feel good; it also affects the actual chemical balance of your heart. It releases the hormone oxytocin which reduces blood pressure thereby protecting the heart.
- Kindness helps reduce stress. Helping others lets you move away from your own worries and problems.

Incorporate the smallest acts of kindness every day. You’ll notice changes in how it affects your life and begin to see the ripple effects on other people as well.

Being Kind in Negative Situations

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” —Ian Maclaren

There are times in life when you are stressed, frustrated or angry with yourself, someone or situation. You may end up annoyed, rude and sending out negative emotions. Learning how to control your negative reactions in stressful situations with kindness is key to staying calm.

Begin by Understanding Your Emotions

What is creating the stress and negative emotions? Are you overwhelmed at work? Is it a person that is triggering the emotion? Finding the root cause of your negativity will allow you to make changes to reduce the stress.

Change What You Can

Once you find the root cause, take action to change it. If it cannot be changed, can it be cut from your life? While making changes, cut out other stress triggers as much as possible. Change negative thought patterns into more positive ones.

Incorporate Healthy Outlets

Regular exercise can give you an emotional lift and an outlet for negative emotions. Meditation helps you relax. Volunteering and helping others will help you be less negative.

Respond to Negativity with Kindness

1. Don’t mirror others negative actions and thoughts. Treat them kindly. This could mean apologizing if it’s appropriate. Acknowledge other’s points of view without judging.
2. Speak in a pleasant, friendly voice as if you were talking to a friend. Keep your voice controlled and without anger.
3. Keep an open and relaxed body posture. Don’t roll your eyes, sigh or make other negative body language movements.
4. Breathe! Take a few long, slow, deep breaths in through your nose, pause slightly, then let your breath out. Deep breathing relaxes you and re-centers your emotions.
5. Smile. It puts you and others at ease.
6. Distract yourself by engaging in something pleasant or helping someone else.

Just because you are stressed doesn’t mean you need to react negatively to others. Instead, act in a way that is kind and considerate of the feelings of all involved. As Mother Teresa’s poem
Anyway, states: “People are often unreasonable, illogical and self-centered; forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives; be kind anyway.”

How to be More Kind

“We cannot do great things on this earth, only small things with great love.”

-Mother Teresa

Kindness is such a simple act. It doesn’t take a lot of time, money or resources unless you want it to. The smallest acts of kindness often go the longest way to changing lives. You can cultivate more kindness in your life in many ways.

1. When you believe in someone, tell them and show them your support. This support may be just what they need to drive them to achieve things greater things.

2. Think about your words before you speak. If what you’re thinking isn’t kind, stop what you’re doing. Think about how to better phrase what you’re thinking or perhaps don’t say it at all. Remember to be kind in how you deal with the person.

3. When you receive kindness spread it around. Continue to spread the kindness by paying it forward.

4. Everyone faces challenges even if they don’t outwardly show it. Don’t discriminate on who you are kind to.

5. Be an example. Be a role model to others by always being kind.

6. It doesn’t matter if it’s a close relationship or a stranger, it’s important to be mindful of how you treat others. Be considerate of everyone.

7. Practice having good intentions. Try to have good intentions when you say something nice. Don't expect something in return.

8. Reach out when others don’t.

9. If showing kindness is hard for you, try to remember how you felt when someone was kind to you.

10. Be kind every day. Holding the door for someone while giving them a genuine smile is an easy way to brighten someone’s day.

11. Create a kindness calendar. Add some type of kindness you can do to each day. For example, take a cup of coffee to your coworker, help your elderly neighbor with their groceries, thank the mail carrier with a card, give your umbrella to a mom and her kids
waiting for the bus in the rain, share your lunch with a homeless person or any other act
of kindness.

There are many ways you can be kind. If you are stumped for ideas, here are a few to get you
started.

• Let someone in front of you at the grocery store because they have fewer items.
• Smile at someone who really needs it. Maybe you see a struggling mom trying to shop
  with her three kids. Give her an encouraging smile.
• Talk with a friend who is having problems. Lending a ear may be all they need.
• Buy food for a homeless person the next time you go for fast food or a restaurant.
• Compliment a stranger.
• Help a coworker on a project even if you have a full schedule.
• Let someone in your lane in a traffic jam.
• Donate old clothes to someone in need.
• Call your grandparents or parents instead of waiting for them to call.
• Say please, thank you and your welcome.
• Compliment someone on their hair, outfit or something else.
• Offer your seat on the bus or train.
• Bake something for a neighbor, older relative or nursing home and visit with them.
• Text someone good morning or good night.
• Plan to meet with an old friend you haven’t seen in a while.
• Wash someone’s car for free.
• Have a sick neighbor? Mow their yard or shovel their snow. Take out their trash. See if
  they need you to pick anything up for them – medication, groceries, etc.
• Stop and help someone broke down on the road. Or see if they have help coming.
• Plan a surprise party for a friend’s birthday.
• Wish someone a good day.
• Leave a nice note on someone’s car or in their mailbox.
• Tell someone how much you appreciate them.
• Smile at everyone.
• Help a stranger in some way.
• Actively listen when someone is talking to you.
• Give an unexpected gift to someone.
• Thank someone for something specific they've done for you.
• Make a donation to charity.
• Volunteer your time.
• Share a memory with a child or friend.

When carrying out your act of kindness, be sure to not intrude or embarrass the receiver. Discretion is key. Give your smile or gift then move on, unless the receiver wants to talk. Some acts of kindness can be carried out anonymously as well.

Above all else, carry out your acts of kindness because you genuinely want to make yourself and others feel good. Not because you expect something in return.

**Character Traits of Kindness**

“Use your voice for kindness, your ears for empathy, your hands for helping others, your mind for truth, and your heart for compassionate love.”

– David Scott

Kindness is not only about what you do but how you do it. It can accompany every type of action from praise to criticism. When an action comes from a place of empathy, you experience kindness.

Kindness comes in many forms. It’s about honesty, empathy, forgiveness, trust, patience, compassion and humility.

**Honesty:** Honesty doesn’t always mean you are being kind. You can be honest and kind at the same time though. When you need to be honest, but it feels like a criticism, you should find a way to deliver it with kindness, say with a soft voice, a hand on someone’s shoulder or the way you word your response.

**Forgiveness:** When you forgive others and yourself, you are freeing yourself from blame and condemnation. It allows you to be happy. Forgiveness is a form of kindness as it lets you accept
others as they are. “Forgive others, not because they deserve forgiveness, but because you deserve peace”

**Trust:** Trust is different from honesty. When you show kindness to others, it builds their trust in you. There are many ways to do this; keep your word, ask what they need, then help them get it.

**Empathy:** Kindness requires empathy. It means putting yourself in another’s position and feelings. Empathy allows you to understand and be sensitive to what others are feeling. It is important to building positive relationships and for good communication.

**Patience:** Patience is needed when being kind. Patience makes us take the time to get our thoughts and actions in order before we react. A kind act is often given with patience. “A moment of patience in a moment of anger saves you a hundred moments of regret.”

**Compassion:** This is when we feel for another’s problems and take action to help. Compassion is an action of kindness. It is a guide for kindness.

**Humility:** Being humble means you do things out of the kindness of your heart, not expecting anything in return. This is a true act of kindness.

Kindness has all these character traits in it. Being honest, building trust, being humble, compassionate and empathetic all work together to perform true acts of kindness.

### How to Give and Receive Kindness

*Aesop, the ancient Greek storyteller, once said, “No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.”*

Now that you know what kindness is and its power and benefits on you and the world, you need to know how to give and receive kindness.

1. Kindness begins with yourself. Be kind to yourself when you take a misstep. Being angry and negative over a mistake you made can lead you to being angry and frustrated with others.

2. Begin with compassion, then with kindness. Recognize that we all have challenges before making a comment or making an assumption about another person or situation. Follow up your compassion with an act of kindness.

3. Be of service to others. Do at least one kind act for someone close to you, an acquaintance or stranger or yourself every day. It can be as simple as bringing a coworker a cup of coffee or giving a stranger a smile.

4. Choose to be kind even when others are not. Being kind is a choice you have every day.
5. Give for the sake of giving. Don’t expect anything in return. When you give kindness expecting thanks or some form of credit, it is self-serving and some form of making the recipient feel indebted. The rewards are better when we are kind without expecting any payback.

I heard a story about a little boy from a family who had very little money. He really wanted fishing lures but had no money to buy them. This anonymous person bought a handful of fishing lures and a package of gummy worms and left them in the family mailbox along with a note saying they were free. The boy was thrilled, and the anonymous person was filled with happiness at seeing the boy’s joy. Now that is kindness!

6. Practice being kind more often. Like everything, we become kinder the more we do it. Random acts of kindness get easier. Do one small, kind thing each day for someone and pay attention to the impact you make. It will make you feel lighter, kinder and notice more opportunities to be kind.

7. Kindness is contagious. Be the one who shows kindness every day and others will begin to do the same. Be the boss, leader, coworker, family member or neighbor who people follow your actions in kindness.

8. Kindness lasts. When you do an act of kindness for someone or it’s done for you, it is remembered. Maybe you were shy in college and you had a staff member compliment you on your looks. Do you still remember the unexpected kindness? How do you want to be remembered?

Studies have shown that when we do kind things it makes us happier and increases our self-love and respect. Doing some act of kindness daily can put you in a better mood more often. Go ahead and do some random small act of kindness today!

What to Do Next

“It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act.” Dalai Lama

We’ve discovered why kindness has a powerful impact on our own lives and the lives of others in the world. The benefits of kindness far outweigh the small actions it takes to do a kindness for someone.

Kindness helps you stay healthy, happy and feel good about yourself. By doing for others without expectations you are spreading joy that can change a life or at least someone’s day.

Kindness is necessary when you’re stressed or facing negative emotions. Instead of quickly reacting, take the time (patience) first to clear your thoughts and assess your feelings. Then react in kindness.

Kindness has several common characteristics we all have or can develop including compassion, honesty, trust, patience, humility, empathy and forgiveness. Use each of these daily to spread kindness.

Start doing random acts of kindness. Here are some seven more examples to get you started.
1. Set up a gratitude corner in your office or classroom. Participants can post messages about the kind things someone did for them over the week. At the end of the week talk about the messages together as a group.

2. Buy coffee for the person behind you in line. They won’t be expecting it and it’ll bring a big smile to their morning.

3. Begin keeping a gratitude journal. You can use a paper and pen or use an app like Bliss. Gratitude is linked to well-being and better health.

4. Pick up trash around your community.

5. Pay for someone else’s entry into a national park.

6. Create a free library for people to borrow books to read. Give away books to kids in need. Or spend time reading to kids at day cares, hospitals or homeless shelters.

7. Spend time with elderly in nursing homes, hospitals or in your neighborhood. Read to them, visit and really listen to their stories. Bring them small gifts like handmade lap quilts, baked goods or something that they are interested in.

8. Let somebody have the better parking space or give up your seat to someone.

9. Hold the door open for someone.

10. Volunteer at a soup kitchen, animal shelter or women’s shelter.

No matter how small or how big an act of kindness you perform, it will change someone’s life in some way. Find a way to be kind every day. You never know who is watching.