

Kind Campus MONTH 5

Allowing Time for Kindness



Why should we make time to practice kindness?



Understanding our Social and Emotional Brains

Neuroplasticity: Did you know that we have the power to change the way our brains function by consciously changing the way we think? The concept is called neuroplasticity, and it's the research focus of Rick Hanson, PhD. Hanson discovered that by focusing on a positive event for just over 10 seconds, he could fundamentally change the way he experienced the world. On a biological level, Hanson was changing his brain structure by altering his mental activities. As Hanson puts it, "Neurons that fire together, wire together. Passing mental states become lasting neural traits." By focusing on positive experiences and feelings rather than dwelling on negative ones, we can change our outlook on life and improve our lives overall (www.rickhanson.net).



Self-Awareness

Stretching and Breathing is a simple exercise that can help students build awareness of their thoughts and how they affect their bodies. This activity works well as a 5-10 minute break in class and may help students reduce stress and increase focus. Talk with students about why it's important for us to learn skills to calm ourselves and focus. Then invite an adult or student to lead the activity by following the script provided online (see supplementary materials).



Awareness of Others

Mindful Listening: Careful listening is difficult, but we can develop mindful listening skills with simple practice. Start by asking students to sit without speaking for a minute or two and really listen to the sounds around them. Encourage them to jot down what they hear. At the end of the focused listening period, ask the following questions: Where did the sound come from? Was it low-pitched or high? Was it a sound they'd noticed before?

During a break or at lunch, host a table where students pair up with the goal of mindful listening. (This activity also works great in classes, during club meetings, and after sports practices.) Each student talks for two minutes about their day or an important experience while their partner listens without interruption or judgment. At the end of the two minutes, the listening partner reports back to the group, club, or team. Switch roles and repeat.



Allowing Time for Kindness: Kindness in Action



Self-Kindness

Benefits of Taking Breaks: In addition to being kind to our minds and bodies, a short break also can improve productivity. This may seem counter-intuitive—it may never feel as though there's enough time to take a break, or that it will slow your momentum. But research indicates that when we focus on a single task for a prolonged period of time, our attention naturally wanders. Taking a break and then returning to the task, also called “goal reactivation,” improves our focus, attention, and performance, and allows us to engage in sustained mental efforts (Ariga & Lleras, 2010).



Kindness Toward Others

Kindness Coins: Kindness Coins are a tool to practice connecting with kindness, rather than an expected reward for kindness. The best rewards for kindness are intrinsic. Many Kind Campus students help make Kindness Coins by volunteering in our studios (<https://bensbells.org/shop/kindness-coins-set-10>). Each coin comes with a tag that states, in English and Spanish, “This is a Ben’s Bells Kindness Coin. Thank you for sharing your kindness. Pass it on.” Kindness Coins serve as helpful reminders to slow down, become aware of our emotions, and practice intentional kindness.

Introduce Kindness Coins to your school as a mission for your students, staff, and faculty to seek and find kindness. Begin by randomly passing out Kindness Coins. When students, staff, and faculty see moments of kindness—or want to practice gratitude—they give away their Kindness Coins. Share and record experiences on a bulletin board for everyone to enjoy.



Kindness Dilemmas

Assuming Good Intentions: Talk about what it means to assume someone has good intentions. There are times when others may hurt us physically or emotionally without intending to. But when we assume that someone has good intentions, we encourage a generous spirit, and we create opportunities for others to apologize or rephrase something with kindness. Leading questions help facilitate positive discussions, such as: Did my classmate purposefully knock my books out of my hand as he rushed to class? Did that student cut me off in the lunch line just to make me frustrated? Did my friend ignore me to make me feel sad?

Break students into small groups and choose several Assuming Good Intentions Dilemmas (see supplementary materials). Urge students to pay attention to their initial reactions, which may not take into account the other person’s intention. Instead, encourage students to consider how their responses might change if they assume the best intentions of others.



Adult Practice

Gratitude Wall: Set up a Gratitude Wall in the teachers’ lounge, so staff and faculty can post notes publicly for everyone to reflect upon. Encourage staff and faculty to create a daily time for expressing gratitude or keep a gratitude journal. Doing so helps improve overall well-being, furthers our professional and personal goals, strengthens empathy, and improves prosocial behaviors (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Thank You Notes: Using the “Thank You for Your Kindness” notes (see supplementary materials), encourage staff and faculty to write notes to one another and practice gratitude on campus. Discuss this practice with students, and explain the value of expressing thanks and appreciation for peers. Teachers can also use the “Thank You for Your Kindness” notes to recognize when students act as kind role models in classrooms, hallways, lunchrooms, and playgrounds.



Our Kindness Priorities This Month

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Share photos of your students exchanging Kindness Coins with us!



“I love that there is a daily reminder of students being kind to other students and showing appreciation for the adults in the school.”

-Classroom teacher, Tucson, AZ