

Kind Campus MONTH 3

Kindness Starts with Me



Why is it important to be kind to ourselves?



Understanding our Social and Emotional Brains

Negativity Bias: Our brains are wired to focus on events, details, and interactions of a negative character, such as signs of danger, physical and emotional pain, and social threats. This negativity bias directs us to notice and respond to negative stimuli more than we notice positive or even neutral stimuli (Hanson, 2011). It's hard-wired into the human experience to learn from painful episodes more immediately than we learn from pleasant ones. And while the negativity bias can help us build determination and become more resilient, it also can limit our ability to express gratitude and appreciate the positive things in our lives. But the good news is that researchers have found that we can perceive threats while still cultivating our potential to see the good in life (Stillman, Van Bavel, & Cunningham, 2015). The more we understand how the brain functions, the more we understand how practicing gratitude and kindness can reshape our brains for the better!



Self-Awareness

Bracelet Exercise: Encourage students to wear a bracelet or a rubber band, and agree to participate in an experiment. Talk with them about the idea of the conscious vs. unconscious brain (the thinking brain vs. the reptile/lizard brain). When does their reptile brain fire? When do students need to tame their lizard brain? What situations are easiest for the thinking brain to respond with compassion? Next, challenge students to notice when their unconscious/reptile brain reacts; when it does, have them move their bracelet to the other wrist. For instance, students might want to focus on reactions to frustration during class, self-critical thoughts, or reactions to negative social media posts. The goal is to empower students to build self-awareness, so as they move the bracelet, it reminds them to resist self-judgment. As students become mindful of reactions, they learn to move into their conscious/thinking brain, where they can choose to respond with kindness instead of reacting impulsively.



Awareness of Others

The Platinum Rule: Most of us are familiar with the Golden Rule—treat others as you would like to be treated. The Golden Rule suits us well in a general sense, because we can think to ourselves, “I’d like to be treated with kindness, so I will treat others with kindness.” But when it comes down to what that kindness looks like, we need to practice increasing our awareness to the Platinum Rule: Treat others as they would like to be treated. As we move more deeply into building awareness of others, we want to tune in to another’s preferences, especially when they’re different from ours. Rather than assuming one choice is comfortable for all, build awareness of others and their needs, furthering your own compassion and kindness.



Kindness Starts with Me: Kindness in Action



Self-Kindness

Just Like My Friend: Talk about how easily we can be hard on ourselves—we're often self-critical without even realizing it. Researcher Kristen Neff suggests cultivating self-compassion, comprised of "kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness" (2018). Thinking about how we'd respond to a friend in our situation can help us reframe our experience and show kindness to ourselves. To emphasize common humanity, have students try this activity:

- 1) Think about a time when a friend or family member had a difficult experience.
- 2) As you think about that person, say these words to yourself: "May my friend feel safe. May my friend feel happy. May my friend feel healthy. May my friend live with ease."
- 3) Now think about a time when you had a difficult experience.
- 4) As you think about your own experience, say these words to yourself: "Just like my friend, may I feel safe and protected. Just like my friend, may I feel happy and calm. Just like my friend, may I feel healthy and strong. Just like my friend, may I feel at ease with my life."

Have students write down their reflections about this activity—how do they feel afterward? Do they notice a difference?



Kindness Toward Others

"What is Kindness?": Together as a class, club, or group, watch the "What is Kindness?" video (link in supplementary materials online). Ask your students, "Why is kindness important to our community? In our homes? In our schools? In our neighborhoods?" What would the world be like if everyone practiced kindness? How would that help members of our communities listen with more compassion and connect to one another? As you discuss what kindness means, encourage students to start looking for moments of kindness they've witnessed in their communities, families, schools, and neighborhoods to share with the class.

Send or email a copy of the Kind Campus parent letter to students' homes. Encourage students to discuss with their families what kindness means in their home, neighborhood, and community. Encourage families to watch the "What is Kindness?" video as a family to help with their discussion.



Kindness Dilemmas

Kind Problem-Solving: Before this month's dilemma practice, discuss how when we practice kindness skills, it helps increase our self-kindness. Taking a moment to pause, breathe, and think before reacting in difficult situations helps improve our self-control and our relationships with others. Discuss how feeling threatened, scared, and upset are normal human reactions. Practicing kindness helps us negotiate these feelings while treating ourselves with gentle matter-of-factness. Choose a kindness dilemma from the provided samples (or create your own) and discuss as a class, using group/paired discussion or the individual practice method outlined below.

Individual Practice: Pass out the Kindness Dilemma Individual Practice worksheet to students (see supplementary materials). Write this month's kindness dilemma on the board. Read the dilemma together and allow students time to explore the different steps on their own. If desired, allow time for students to share their thoughts with the class. This can also be used as part of behavior management in the classroom.



Adult Practice

A Moment for Kindness: Create space in the workday to focus on kindness individually and together as a staff. Begin each meeting with an opportunity to share about kindness (observed, received, and practiced).



Our Kindness Priorities This Month

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Share photos of your students' kindness-themed art with us!



"I love kids helping kids and seeing their reaction when someone has been kind to them."

-Social worker, Danbury, CT