



Kind Campus MONTH 8

Gratitude for Kindness

How do we show thanks for the kindness we receive
and for the good things in our lives?



Understanding our Social and Emotional Brains

Rejection: Rejection is a normal part of our lives. We propose a great idea, but our team doesn't respond enthusiastically. We post an opinion on social media, but people criticize or ignore it. We might be picked last for a team, lose out on a role in the school play, have our prom invitation rejected, or say something in class that causes others to laugh. Rejection hurts because our brains are designed to respond powerfully to this experience. Through experiments involving MRIs, psychologist Guy Winch has observed that "the same areas of our brain become activated when we experience rejection as when we experience physical pain" (2015). One way to help mitigate those discouraged feelings is by creating a supportive school climate that values new ideas, thoughtful listening, and self-kindness. When we create a culture in which people feel connected, we help one another practice self-kindness instead of self-criticism.



Self-Awareness

"I am ...": This activity encourages students to think about all of the ways they're striving to be kind at school and in their community. It offsets societal messages that we're never enough or that there's something wrong that needs improving. Repeating the positive "I am" phrases boosts confidence and helps students calm their minds and bodies. You can use the list provided (see supplementary materials), or work together as a class to identify qualities you value.



Awareness of Others

Effective Apologies: We all make mistakes, but in our perfectionistic society there's pressure to always be right. That can make for people who don't know how to admit they're wrong, or how to apologize when they are. Researchers have confirmed the importance of helping children learn to apologize with sincerity. A school culture that encourages apologizing reduces physical aggression and fosters forgiveness, which benefits everyone (Eaton & Struthers, 2006). Learning to apologize sincerely is a powerful kindness skill. It includes clearly stating "I'm sorry," keeping the focus on the apology itself, and avoiding a dynamic in which the apologizer needs to be comforted.

Help students learn to apologize genuinely using the following steps, or by creating your own outline. First, guide students in role-playing around apologizing and saying "I'm sorry" to other students. Use the "I'm Sorry" notes as a tool to apologize to friends, classmates, teachers, relatives, etc., and post your "How to Say I'm Sorry" steps prominently in class.

How to Say I'm Sorry:

1. I'm sorry for ... (I'm sorry for saying that nobody wants to be your friend).
2. This is wrong because ... (This is wrong because it hurt your feelings).
3. In the future, I will ... (In the future, I will keep unkind words in my head).
4. Will you forgive me?

(Visit <http://www.cuppacocoa.com/a-better-way-to-say-sorry> for an extended discussion.)



Gratitude for Kindness: Kindness in Action



Self-Kindness

Reframing Experiences: Psychologist Rick Hanson notes, “The brain is like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positive ones” (www.rickhanson.net). Help students re-assess a negative experience by reframing it to see how they built resilience or perspective, or developed a strategy for the future. Start by asking students to think about a time when they experienced something difficult. What emotions did they feel? Next have students reframe the experience so there’s one positive thing they can notice or take away. Finally, ask students if telling the story differently helped change their outlook to feel more positive about surviving a difficult time.



Kindness Toward Others

Thank You Notes: Research shows that teaching children to practice gratitude improves overall life contentment, helps kids feel connected, fosters a positive outlook, and even helps lessen anxiety (Kerr, O’Donovan, & Pepping, 2015). Encourage classes to express gratitude this month through learning to write thank you notes. For younger students, encourage them to draw a picture of the kind act, writing “Thank you, (name)” and “From, (their name)” below their drawing. For older students, discuss the three steps of expressing gratitude in writing:

1. What are you thankful for? (Thank you for...)
2. How did it make you feel? (It felt...)
3. Recognize kindness in the other person. (You are a kind person.)

Example: Thank you, Shawn, for sitting next to me at lunch. It felt good to have someone to talk to. You are a kind person.

Encourage students to show gratitude for different non-profit organizations and governmental agencies that help make their communities kind places. Choose a different community group each month, such as the public library, youth groups, community centers, police or fire departments, or a local museum. Having students write Kind Notes to these organizations is a great way to practice writing skills and intentional kindness at the same time! Deliver the Kind Notes to groups at the end of each month.



Kindness Dilemmas

Taking Stock of Kindness Practice: Take note of any changes you’ve seen throughout the school year in your students, classroom, and school because of your kindness practice. Share your observations. Discuss how students’ kindness skills have improved. Talk about the challenges to practicing kindness, and how it is easier some days than others—even after all this time! Use the classroom, small-group, or individual practice method this month to continue building your skills.



Adult Practice

Paying Attention to Good Facts: Shift away from our inherent negativity bias by acknowledging good facts you typically overlook. When you notice something good, hold the fact in your mind for several seconds, letting the goodness sink in. Revisit the bracelet exercise from earlier in the year. This time, focus on moving the bracelet when you notice kind acts or positive experiences. Psychologist Rick Hanson recommends taking in the good as a way to reshape how our brains function, which then reshapes the way we perceive and interact with the world. He recommends three steps: 1) Pay attention to good facts and allow yourself to feel good about the experience. 2) Dwell on the positive aspects of the experience so you really appreciate it. 3) Try to transform the good experience into something you can feel within your body (Hanson, 2009). Then relish these positive aspects in your life and allow them to guide your intentional kindness!



Our Kindness Priorities This Month

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Share photos of your students doing a kindness activity with us!



"I love integrating it into our social emotional learning. Having visuals sets a positive school climate."

-School Counselor, Newton, CT