



Kind Campus Month 1: Defining Kindness

Question of the Month

What is kindness? What does it mean to “be kind” and why is being kind important?

Kind Campus Week 1

Neuroplasticity: As we learn about kindness and practice our kindness skill set, part of the work we’ll be doing is learning about how our brains work. Our emotions, motivations, defenses, reactions, and judgments are wired to serve us as social creatures, and kindness is an integral part of how we interact with others as well as engage in self-care. Our brains are flexible and capable of change through growth and new connections, a concept called neuroplasticity. Additionally, when we deliberately focus on a good or positive fact, we can heighten the internalization of beneficial experiences.¹ Psychologist Rick Hanson explains that “The more you get your neurons firing about positive facts, the more they’ll be wiring up positive neural structures. Taking in the good is a brain-science savvy and psychologically skillful way to improve how you feel, get things done, and treat others.”² We can reshape our assumed mental states to prefer a kindness focus which enhances our thoughts, actions, and behavior.

Kind vs. Nice: To define kindness, it’s helpful to think about the difference between “kind” and “nice,” terms people often use interchangeably. Being “nice” emphasizes being agreeable and polite—not rocking the boat, avoiding difficult conversations, and keeping things on a superficial level. But being “kind” is about the greater good. It’s a powerful skill set that requires great courage and careful thought. Kindness is about taking care of ourselves and one another. It’s intentional and it’s something we can do daily that encourages connections and reduces fears. So whereas being nice can increase stress, being kind relieves stress and empowers us to act with intention, to be deliberate and thoughtful in how we communicate. Kindness isn’t always easy—sometimes it’s incredibly difficult to be kind! But kindness is within our power if we commit to practicing it. Have a conversation with students about the difference between “kind” and “nice.”

Kind Campus Week 2: Self-Kindness

Noticing: Sometimes the person it is hardest to be kind to is ourselves—we can be our own worst critic. The first step in practicing self-kindness is to become aware of thoughts that are self-critical. Thoughts can become habitual and by noticing these thoughts when they happen, we can learn to break our self-critical cycles. When we catch ourselves in a self-destructive thought pattern, try labeling self-critical thoughts with a “noticing” phrase:



Additionally, as Professor Brené Brown reminds us, “Talk to yourself like you would someone you love.” This is an important component of self-kindness as the words we speak to ourselves guide our emotions and actions.

When we label our thoughts in a non-judgmental way, they lose their power over us and this ultimately decreases their frequency because they are no longer mentally reinforced.³ Christine Carter, PhD notes that “Attending to what is happening within us at any given moment keeps a [volatile] external reality from determining our inner truth. It allows us to cultivate calm, open-mindedness, and non-reactivity.”⁴



Kind Campus Week 3: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Kind Notes: Writing Kind Notes carries benefits for both the writer and the recipient! Kind Notes provide a simple but powerful way to practice kindness skills through written communication and reflection, as well as learning to accurately understand, describe, and manage feelings and show gratitude. They can recognize a specific act of kindness or just remind someone that they're special. Use the Kind Notes provided [HERE](#) to write kind messages to fellow students, faculty, staff, volunteers, and guests. Designate a place for others to pick up the notes, or arrange them all in a creative display. And spread the word! Encourage your group to use this powerful tool and discuss how it feels to write or receive a Kind Note. Visit our [Power of a Kind Note](#) guide for more ideas, info on the science and benefits of kindness, and much more.



Kind Campus Week 4: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Belonging Activity: Learning names: Begin to build a kind environment by setting a goal for your class to learn one another's names. Being able to recognize and greet each person by name builds a sense of belonging and a foundation for community connection. With that group connection established, take a few minutes each day to encourage students to share stories of their acts of kindness or acts that they witnessed. Sharing examples helps students recognize the value of kind acts and provides inspiration as they shape their commitment to kindness and help it to spread on your campus and beyond. This daily exchange also acts as a strong reminder of your school's kindness focus and helps to establish kindness as a core value on your campus.

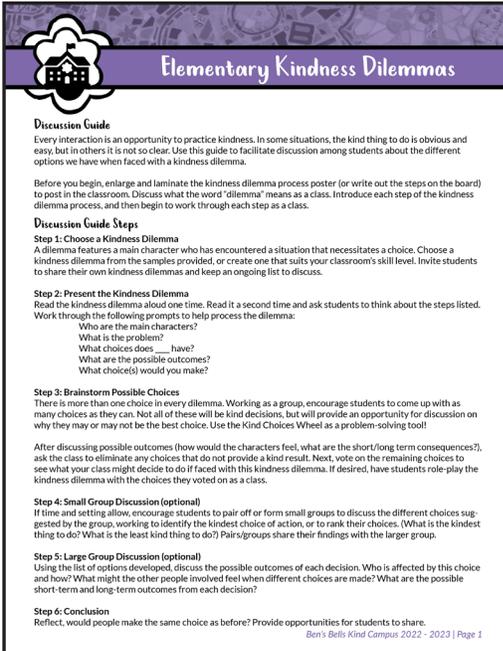
Additional Activities

Kindness Dilemmas

Every interaction is an opportunity to practice kindness. In some situations, the kind thing to do is obvious and easy, but in others it isn't as clear. When we feel threatened by a situation, we may automatically react, without thinking through how our actions affect others and ourselves. Kindness Dilemmas present a chance to think through each step of our decision-making process, with the end goal of building necessary problem-solving and critical thinking skills to use in real-life situations. Use the **Kindness Dilemmas Discussion Guide** to lead a group discussion, use **What is the Kind Thing To Do?** for individual practice, and use the **Kind Choices Wheel** as a problem-solving tool as you work through our Kindness Dilemmas (see supplementary materials)!

Kindness at Home

How can we extend what we're learning in the classroom to keep kindness active in our lives and engage wider communities? What does kindness look like in the home? Have students begin a discussion at home by asking each person they live with to describe what kindness means to them. What does it look like, what does it sound like, and how does it feel? What are some examples of kind acts they've experienced? Ask students to then share their own thoughts and ideas, describing what they've learned in the classroom about kind actions and behavior. Students may share parts of these discussions back in the classroom, or write down/draw what stuck with them. These conversations will allow students to think through some of what they've learned at school, experience examples of kindness outside of their campus, and begin to include family members as they explore kindness as a universal human trait. Send home **The Meaning of Kindness** sheets to help with this activity.



Elementary Kindness Dilemmas

Discussion Guide
Every interaction is an opportunity to practice kindness. In some situations, the kind thing to do is obvious and easy, but in others it is not so clear. Use this guide to facilitate discussion among students about the different options we have when faced with a kindness dilemma.

Before you begin, enlarge and laminate the kindness dilemma process poster (or write out the steps on the board) to post in the classroom. Discuss what the word "dilemma" means as a class. Introduce each step of the kindness dilemma process, and then begin to work through each step as a class.

Discussion Guide Steps

Step 1: Choose a Kindness Dilemma
A dilemma features a main character who has encountered a situation that necessitates a choice. Choose a kindness dilemma from the samples provided, or create one that suits your classroom's skill level. Invite students to share their own kindness dilemmas and keep an ongoing list to discuss.

Step 2: Present the Kindness Dilemma
Read the kindness dilemma aloud one time. Read it a second time and ask students to think about the steps listed. Work through the following prompts to help process the dilemma:
Who are the main characters?
What is the problem?
What choices does _____ have?
What are the possible outcomes?
What choice(s) would you make?

Step 3: Brainstorm Possible Choices
There is more than one choice in every dilemma. Working as a group, encourage students to come up with as many choices as they can. Not all of these will be kind decisions, but will provide an opportunity for discussion on why they may or may not be the best choice. Use the Kind Choices Wheel as a problem-solving tool!

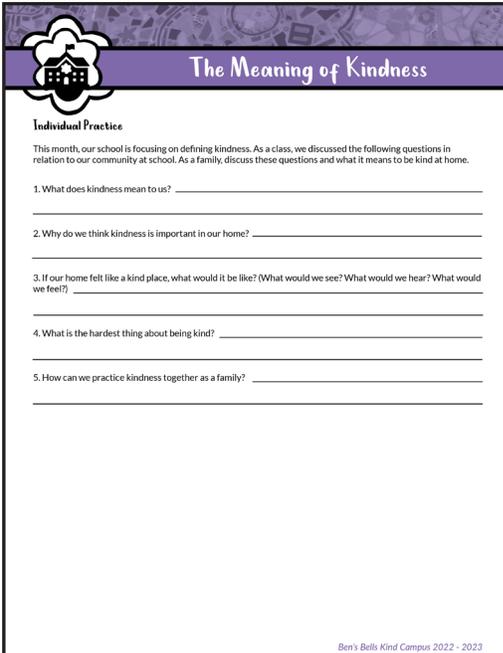
After discussing possible outcomes (how would the characters feel, what are the short/long term consequences?), ask the class to eliminate any choices that do not provide a kind result. Next, vote on the remaining choices to see what your class might decide to do if faced with this kindness dilemma. If desired, have students role-play the kindness dilemma with the choices they voted on as a class.

Step 4: Small Group Discussion (optional)
If time and setting allow, encourage students to pair off or form small groups to discuss the different choices suggested by the group working to identify the kindest choice of action, or to rank their choices. (What is the kindest thing to do? What is the least kind thing to do?) Pairs/groups share their findings with the larger group.

Step 5: Large Group Discussion (optional)
Using the list of options developed, discuss the possible outcomes of each decision. Who is affected by this choice and how? What might the other people involved feel when different choices are made? What are the possible short-term and long-term outcomes from each decision?

Step 6: Conclusion
Reflect, would people make the same choice as before? Provide opportunities for students to share.

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The Meaning of Kindness

Individual Practice

This month, our school is focusing on defining kindness. As a class, we discussed the following questions in relation to our community at school. As a family, discuss these questions and what it means to be kind at home.

1. What does kindness mean to us? _____
2. Why do we think kindness is important in our home? _____
3. If our home felt like a kind place, what would it be like? (What would we see? What would we hear? What would we feel?) _____
4. What is the hardest thing about being kind? _____
5. How can we practice kindness together as a family? _____

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References

1. Hanson, R. et al (2021). "Learning to learn from positive experiences." *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2021.2006759
2. Hanson, R. (2018, Jul 30). *Take in the Good*. Rick Hanson, PhD. Retrieved from <https://www.rickhanson.net/take-in-the-good/>.
3. Hayes, S.C., Strosahl, K.D., & Wilson, K.G. (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
4. Carter, C. (2020, Aug 14). *Seven Ways to Cope with Uncertainty*. Christine Carter. Retrieved from <https://www.christinecarter.com/2020/08/seven-ways-to-cope-with-uncertainty/>.