



Kind Campus Month 3: Kindness Starts with Me

Question of the Month

Why is it important to be kind to ourselves? What are some everyday examples of self-kindness?

Kind Campus Week 1

How Our Brains Work: Understanding how our brains work is crucial to practicing kindness — both toward ourselves and others. The more we understand how our brains function, and what we're aware of vs. what's built in, the more we can address our own behavior and lead others in practicing intentional kindness. The **unconscious brain** plays a primary role in forming memories and responses to emotional events — particularly to fearful events. It also controls our responses to fear, such as fight, flight, or freeze, and helps us sense and respond to danger.¹ When our unconscious brain is threatened, we're in reactive mode and it can be hard for us to be kind.

The goal is to shift to our **conscious brain**, where higher-level thinking occurs, allowing us to respond thoughtfully with kindness, rather than just reacting. Another built-in tool is our **negativity bias**:² 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 can also limit our ability to express gratitude and appreciate the positive in our lives. The good news is that researchers have found we can perceive threats while still cultivating our potential to see the good in life.³ The more we understand how the brain functions, the more we understand how practicing gratitude and kindness can reshape our brains for the better!

Kind Campus Week 2: Self-Kindness

Kind Notes to Self: To emphasize the importance of self-kindness, have students write (or draw) Kind Notes to themselves, recognizing something they like about themselves or a quality that makes them a kind person. As we know, Kind Notes are a small way we can make a big impact, and they can also have some great benefits to our health and mindset. These benefits extend to writing notes to ourselves as well! Have students keep their Kind Notes nearby or display them in their workspace as a reminder of their kindness throughout the day. Another option is for teachers to collect the Kind Notes and keep them until the end of the year. During the last month of school, have students write an end-of-year Kind Note to themselves, reflecting on the growth of their acts of kindness. Return the original Kind Notes to students so they can recognize and celebrate their development.



Kind Campus Week 3: Kindness in Action with Everyday Practices

Be Kind to Your Body: Being kind to our bodies by getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, and eating healthfully has a strong impact on our attention, mood, mindset, and ability to focus on our kindness practice. For instance, sleep deprivation negatively impacts our attention span, memory, cognitive functions, and overall quality of life.⁴ Elsewhere, reports show that students who regularly exercise achieve more academic success, improve their cognitive performance, cultivate positive classroom behaviors, and even improve their attendance.⁵ We also know that when students eat healthfully, they have stronger academic records, better attendance, fewer behavior challenges, and improved overall cognitive function.⁶ Healthy eating isn't just what we eat, but how we eat—eating mindfully, limiting distractions, and practicing gratitude for the food's source and its chef. Help students build mindfulness and self-awareness around being kind to their bodies with guiding questions: How does your body feel after you get a good night's sleep/exercise/eat healthy food? What sensations do you notice? What are your mood and energy levels like as you go about the rest of your day? Why is it important to be kind to your body?



Kind Campus Week 4: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Asking for Help: Asking for help when we need it, in the classroom or in other areas of our lives, is a kind way to treat ourselves when we're overwhelmed or facing difficulties with a project. It requires vulnerability to admit we need help, but rather than thinking we're burdening the other person, we might instead frame it as an opportunity to collaborate, share ideas, and ultimately boost happiness in our helper.⁷ We can see it as an invitation for them to practice kindness towards us. Ask students to write down an example of the last time they helped someone. How did it make them feel? Next, have students write down an example of the last time they asked for help. What was the response? If positive, how did receiving the help make them feel? Discuss why asking for help when needed is a form of self-kindness. Work to create an environment where students feel comfortable asking for help, and cultivating a sense of belonging which ultimately affects if and how students speak up when they have a need.⁸

Additional Activities

Just Like My Friend

Use the Just Like My Friend exercise to frame a discussion with students about how easily we can be hard on ourselves, and how we can instead work to reframe experiences to cultivate self-compassion and show kindness to ourselves.



Kindness at Home

Encourage students to practice one new healthy habit at home for a week, and to invite other members of their household to participate. They might try going to bed 15 minutes earlier each night, getting outside for 10–15 minutes or taking a family walk, or replacing one snack a day with a healthier option. At the end of the week, ask students to share what it felt like to devote time towards being kind to their bodies. How did it feel physically? Did they notice any changes in their mood or in their ability to focus? Discuss how incorporating acts of self-kindness into our daily routines can benefit not only ourselves, but our entire households as we support each other in shared goals.



References

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