



Kind Campus Month 6: Courage to Be Kind

Question of the Month

Why does it take courage to be kind? How can we be kind in tough situations?

Kind Campus Week 1

Navigating Challenges: The benefits of our kindness practice can be especially salient during the most challenging times. When challenges arise, reacting with kindness does not mean that you should “just deal with it” or not experience strong reactions and emotions. But treating ourselves with kindness, care, and concern in the face of negative life events can help us lower defensiveness or self-judgment and cope with stress.¹ It takes courage to choose kind behaviors that support community connection or self-care when experiencing change, loss, or unjust treatment. Cultivating kind communities involves kind behavior like checking in on each other, knowing when to ask for help, considering the outcomes of our intentions, saying “no” when we need to, calling out injustices, and providing tools for emotional support and well-being. In fact, “research shows that one way to ensure we are able to confront challenges or adversity in our future is by getting involved in your community, volunteering, or helping a neighbor...by being engaged and contributing, we bolster our well-being and become more resilient.^{2,3}” Our kindness practice helps to build the emotional tools necessary to face a challenge or adversity in a way that is kind to yourself or another person in need.

Kind Campus Week 2: Self-Kindness

Benefits of Laughter: Laughter can be fun, silly, and create connection. It also carries many cognitive and health benefits, making it a great tool in our self-kindness practice.⁴ The Mayo Clinic confirms benefits including decreased blood pressure, reduced stress hormone levels, soothed tension, toned abdominal muscles, improved cardiac health and immune system, increased endorphins, and improved sense of general well-being.⁵ Additionally, laughter can help lessen stress, depression, and anxiety and may make you feel happier. It can also improve your self-esteem. While it is not healthy to ignore negative emotions, finding the right place for humor and laughter in our lives can help people remain resilient in the face of adverse circumstances. Professor George Bonanno notes, “Humor keeps negative emotions in check and gives us a different perspective, allowing us to see some of the bad things that happen to us as a challenge rather than a threat.”⁶ Giving yourself the time to let loose and laugh is great self-care!



Kind Campus Week 3: Kindness in Action with Everyday Practices

Kind Communication: The language we use when dealing with conflict profoundly impacts how a message is received. It can be difficult to communicate in a kind way when we’re reacting to strong emotions. Naming or labeling our emotions in the moment can help us get some distance from them, and putting feelings into words can help manage negative emotional experiences.⁷ Ask students to brainstorm some comments we make when we’re reacting from our unconscious brain in anger or frustration. (Examples might include: “You’re so mean!” or “Stop being a jerk!”). Work through the list and try using “I” statements instead, which reframe our reactions using less defensive, kindness-focused language. “I” statements help express how you feel with phrases such as “I feel ... when you...” or “I feel ... because ...” “I” statements help us practice shifting from our unconscious brain to our conscious brain. Our conscious brain is the region where higher-level thinking occurs, and where we develop empathy and compassion. Discuss what happens when we shift our language toward kindness and naming our emotions.



Kind Campus Week 4: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

“Ripple Effect” Exercise: With your class, brainstorm a list of kind acts that you might do or see on campus, at home, or in the community. Examples include introducing yourself to a new student, helping to put away dishes, or seeing someone pick up a piece of trash. Using your ideas, create “Ripple Effect” posters to hang around your classroom or campus. Write the kind act in the center of the poster, then draw a circle around it. Think about how that one act of kindness impacts the surrounding community, be it individuals or the overall environment. Draw a line from the kind act in the center to a new spot on the poster, and write down the effect. Effects could include new students smiling at others, family members having more time together, or people appreciating their shared spaces. How might these effects spread? Leave plenty of space and ask students for suggestions to add more connections to the kind act, and track how far its impact can go. Watching the growing reach of individual kind acts can influence future words and actions, and serves as a powerful visual reminder of what it means to be part of a kind campus or community. Use the **Tracking Kindness** resource for example scenarios.

Additional Activities

Take Five: This breathing activity is an accessible technique that can help manage stress and calm our bodies and minds. Speak with students about why it's important to learn skills that focus our thinking and soothe our minds. Doing **Take Five** together is a great transition between lessons or as a calming activity to help students refocus. As you do this activity, you can increase the time from "Take Five" to "Take Ten," or you can start with the longer timeframe with older students. An adult or student may lead this activity.

Kindness at Home

Many of us avoid difficult conversations, believing we're doing so out of kindness. But if we're actually being kind, then we'll talk to someone directly, with compassion and vulnerability. Ask students to practice grappling with difficult topics at home in a safe environment. Imagine the types of conversations you might dread or avoid because you don't know what to say, the topic is upsetting, or you're not sure how to support the other person. Remember that it may seem easier to avoid difficult conversations involving grief support/loss, social justice/inequality, or apologizing, but kindness must grapple with tough issues while allowing people to learn and make mistakes. Enter the conversation with interest and respect, and try to avoid preconceived notions about how it will unfold. Practice mindful listening, where you reflect and observe what the other says so you can come to an understanding, resolution, or action plan together. Finally, don't shy away from stating things clearly.⁸ Gentle matter-of-factness is what empowers us to have difficult conversations with kindness, and to feel more connected when we've finished.



References

1. Terry, M.L. & Leary, M.R. (2011). "Self-compassion, self-regulation, and health." *Self and Identity*, Volume 10, Issue 3 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2011.558404>.
2. Hayhurst, J.G., Hunter, J.A., & Ruffman, T. (2019). "Encouraging flourishing following tragedy: The role of civic engagement in well-being and resilience." *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 48(1):75-94 <https://www.proquest.com/openview/9e4dd14c2a1a9422b9f69f6389aeeab6/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=366337>.
3. Bergland, J. (2019, May 25). *Small Acts of Kindness Boost Resilience in Surprising Ways*. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201905/small-acts-kindness-boost-resilience-in-surprising-ways>.
4. Gonot-Schoupsky, F.N., Garip, G., and Sheffield, D. "Laughter and humour for personal development: A systematic scoping review of the evidence." *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*, 2020. Volume 37, August 2020, 101144 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101144>.
5. Mayo Clinic Staff (2021, Jul 29). *Stress relief from laughter? It's no joke*. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>.
6. Schiffman, R. (2020, Oct 1). *Laughter May Be Effective Medicine for These Trying Times*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/01/well/mind/laughter-may-be-effective-medicine-for-these-trying-times.html>.
7. Lieberman, M.D. et al. "Putting feelings into words: affect labeling disrupts amygdala activity in response to affective stimuli." *Psychological Science*, 2007 May;18(5):421-8. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01916.x.
8. Garfinkle, J. (2017, May 24). *How to Have Difficult Conversations When You Don't Like Conflict*. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/05/how-to-have-difficult-conversations-when-you-dont-like-conflict>.