



# Kind Colleagues

## 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 Colleagues 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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 and we nurture the skills we need, like empathy, compassion, and self-awareness.

## Kind Colleagues Week 2: Self-Kindness

**Noticing:** Psychologist Tara Cousineau notes that “Kindness is not random. We have to intentionally redirect our energy and attention to noticing what is good, pleasant and beautiful about humanity.”<sup>3</sup> 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. Encourage colleagues to redirect their self-critical thoughts when they occur by labeling these thoughts for what they are—ideas that our mind gives us that aren’t necessarily true or accurate (and certainly not helpful or kind!). When we catch ourselves in a self-destructive thought pattern, try labeling self-critical thoughts with a “noticing” phrase:”

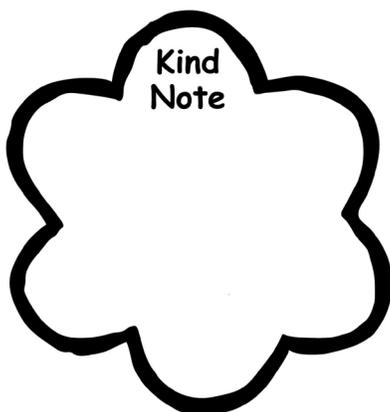


When we label our thoughts in a non-judgmental way, they lose their power over us and this ultimately decreases their frequency because they are no longer mentally reinforced.<sup>4</sup> Christine Carter, PhD notes that “Attending to what is happening within us at any given moment keeps a [volatile] external reality from determining our inner truth. It allows us to cultivate calm, open-mindedness, and non-reactivity.”<sup>5</sup>



## Kind Colleagues 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 a Kind Notes to write kind messages to fellow employees, volunteers, interns, clients, or customers. 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 Notes  
English • Spanish

**be kind**

### The Power of a Kind Note

**What is a Kind Note?**  
Kind Notes are a quick and easy way to practice kindness. Write a note to a friend, family member, or anyone in the community that you want to celebrate, thank, or encourage. One of the simplest ways to develop and share your kindness skills is to do something small on a daily basis. Whether recognizing a specific act of kindness or just reminding someone how special they are, these little green notes can create a huge impact and will benefit the writer as well as the recipient.

**Science of Kind Notes**  
Kind Notes provide a concrete way to actively practice intentional kindness through written communication as reflection, as well as learning to accurately understand and manage feelings and show gratitude. They can also be used to emphasize the importance of self-kindness through writing (or drawing) Kind Notes to oneself, recognizing something that you like about yourself or a quality that makes you a kind person.

**Ideas for Using Kind Notes**  
• Spread the word by giving a Kind Note to someone in your life. Thank a friend, encourage someone who is struggling, or praise a friend for a job well done!  
• Randomize them for a community organization in a group of individuals who will receive your Kind Notes (public servants, nonprofit groups, senior citizens, etc.). Designate someone to deliver or mail the Kind Notes to the group.  
• Write general Kind Notes and pass them out at random at an event or gathering. Examples: “You are wonderful!” or “Thank you for making the world kind!”  
• Write a Kind Note to yourself, recognizing something you did admirably that makes you kind. Send this, and a month later write yourself another Kind Note reflecting on the month’s grace. Revisit the original Kind Note on your own recognition and celebrate your development.  
• In a school setting, send a blank Kind Note template home with students to send to parents and encourage families to practice kindness together by writing Kind Notes to each other.

Discover FREE tools, crafts, and activities to practice kindness at [BenSells.org/Tools](https://BenSells.org/Tools)

## Kind Colleagues Week 4: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

**Belonging:** Humans experience the world as social creatures and rely on each other to survive and thrive. Knowing that we are part of a larger community gives us a sense of belonging that in turn provides motivation to actively participate in behavior and activities that benefit the group, and therefore ourselves. Need-to-belong theory claims that the motivation to form and sustain at least a minimum amount of social connections is one of the most powerful, universal, and influential human drives. It shapes emotion, cognition, and behavior.<sup>6</sup> The more that we consider these needs in everything we do, the more we feel motivated to share, learn, and practice intentional kindness.

**Belonging Activity:** Begin to build a kind environment by setting a goal for staff members to learn one another's names. Start with team members and people with whom you regularly interact. Being able to greet and recognize each person by name builds community connection. Have each person share their name and any history or story the name has for them. They might share the meaning of their name, who they were named for, why their parents gave them that name, or why they chose the name for themselves. The goals are to help remember one another's names through personal connections, and to give a sense of the variety of cultures and histories that staff members bring to your workplace.<sup>7</sup>

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### Additional Activities

#### Set the Tone for Kindness in your Workplace

Harness the power of visuals and create a strong impact during your first month of Kind Colleagues by posting this month's Kindness Quote poster and Science Quote poster. Many studies support the power of visuals; psychology professor Haig Kouyoumdjian writes that visual cues are tangible and beneficial tools that foster successful learning.<sup>8</sup> Visuals help improve memory and recall, and help people understand abstract, complicated, and complex information.<sup>9</sup> They can also elicit an emotional response that connects learning to the human experience and reminds viewers of shared values in the space or location. Reinforce your commitment to kindness by designating common areas around your workplace where your staff will benefit from the learning that comes from visuals.





## Kind Leadership

What is the place of kindness when it comes to workplace culture building? Acknowledging kindness as part of your culture has positive outcomes for employee connectedness and engagement.<sup>10</sup> This could include using the word “kindness” regularly, talking about kindness as a priority, and routinely noticing and recognizing kindness. Establishing a culture of kindness will support skill-building activities that become a part of your community’s daily life. With kindness established as a shared value, we can think about kindness more, rely on it more, talk about it when it’s hard, remove barriers to practicing kindness, and solve problems while still being kind. The work of doing kindness consists of keeping kindness active and making it a part of your everyday culture.

## Kindness at Home

How can we extend what we’re learning in the workplace to keep kindness active in our lives and engage wider communities? What does kindness look like in the home? Have participants begin a discussion at home by asking each person they live with, or a neighbor, 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 them to then share their own thoughts and ideas as well, describing what they’ve learned at work about kind actions and behavior. Staff may share parts of these discussions back in the workplace, or write down what stuck with them. These conversations will allow participants to reflect on what they’ve learned, experience examples of kindness outside of their workplace, and begin to include community members as they explore kindness as a universal human trait.



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