



Kind Colleagues 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 Colleagues Week 1

Navigating Challenges: The benefits of our kindness practice can be especially salient during the most challenging times. When challenges arise, responding 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 impact of our behaviors, saying “no” when we need to, calling out injustices, and supporting emotional health 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 skills necessary to face a challenge or adversity in a way that is kind to yourself or another person in need.

Kind Colleagues Week 2: Self-Kindness

Complaining and Blaming: We all complain—it’s a normal part of our experience. But psychologist Guy Winch cautions that when we get stuck in a loop of complaining, venting, and feeling powerless to change anything, it can lower our self-esteem and make us feel mistreated. The key is to complain effectively, which means staying focused on solving problems, processing information, and coming up with viable solutions. Complaining effectively actually benefits our mental health and self-esteem.⁴ Complaining can easily turn into blaming—searching for someone or something to hold responsible for an action, a lack of action, a frustration, or a hurt. Professor Brené Brown concludes, “blame is simply the discharging of pain and discomfort. We blame when we’re uncomfortable...vulnerable, angry, hurt, in shame, grieving. There’s nothing productive about blame.”⁵ So while it’s normal to blame, when we build self-awareness around this impulse, we hold ourselves accountable and create better solutions to problems. We can begin to address our impulses to complain and blame through mindfulness and self-kindness practices, and then encourage members of our communities to do the same.



Kind Colleagues Week 3: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Bracelet Exercise: Encourage all staff members to wear a bracelet or rubber band, and agree to participate in an experiment. Talk about the idea of the unconscious brain (which guides our instinctual actions and reactions) vs. the conscious brain (which guides our thoughtful, deliberate responses). When does our reactive brain take charge? When do we need to tame our negative thoughts? What situations are easiest for the conscious brain to respond to with compassion? Challenge one another to notice when your unconscious brain reacts; when it does, move your bracelet to the other wrist. For instance, you might want to focus on your reactions to complaining, self-criticism, stress, or anger. The goal of moving the bracelet back and forth is to become more mindful and to build self-awareness around our thoughts and emotions. In noticing our reactions, we give ourselves the opportunity to move into consciousness, where we can choose to respond thoughtfully and with kindness instead of reacting impulsively. Share experiences during staff meetings.



Bracelet DIY



Kind Colleagues Week 4: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Acknowledging Courage: Researchers conclude that our work environment needs to be a kind space where we are comfortable being vulnerable, so that staff members can take risks, present innovative ideas, and solve problems creatively.⁶ Acting with courage in the workplace may take the form of having difficult conversations, embracing fears and feelings, promoting resilience in the face of mistakes, discussing diversity and inclusion, and avoiding shaming or blaming.⁷ Encourage staff members to participate in a courage recognition exercise by considering why it takes great courage to be kind. Have them list three examples of when they showed strength by acting with kindness even when it was not easy. Next, list three examples of when someone else had the courage to be kind. Invite staff members to share an example during a staff meeting, or simply discuss how they benefited from recognizing courage during this activity.

Additional Activities

Kind Leadership: Part of the practice of kindness is doing the work to ensure a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace, and dedication to serving constituents that represent the diverse makeup of your communities. Attention to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Access (DEIA) initiatives encourages the learning necessary to identify potential issues surrounding hiring practices, who is encouraged to share ideas and feedback, barriers to access, etc. It also signals to employees an intention to understand the impact that social justice issues have in the workplace. For example, Black women identified being overlooked for promotions or raises, having to defend their race, exclusion, and other microaggressions as stressors within the workplace.⁸ A culture of collaboration, risk-taking, and learning from our mistakes is an essential part of the work we must do. Commit to the work of standing against injustice and oppression by communicating with those around you, learning as much as you can, defining clear stances and policies, and elevating marginalized voices.

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 staff 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.⁹ Gentle matter-of-factness is what empowers us to have difficult conversations with kindness, and to feel more connected when we've finished.



References

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