



Kind Campus Month 2: Creating a Kind Campus

Question of the Month

What does kindness mean on your campus? When is it easy to be kind? When is it difficult?

Kind Campus Week 1

Belonging: Humans experience the world as social creatures and rely on each other to survive and thrive. Knowing we're part of a larger community gives us a sense of belonging that in turn provides motivation to actively participate in behavior that benefits 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.¹ The more that we consider these needs in everything we do, the more we feel motivated to share, learn, and practice intentional kindness. Our sense of belonging helps us receive kindness from others, practice kindness towards ourselves, and share kindness every day.

On the other hand, something else we may experience as a normal part of life is rejection. We might be picked last for a team, lose out on a role in the school play, have our prom invitation rejected, or say something in class that causes others to laugh. Rejection hurts because our brains are designed to respond powerfully to this experience. Through experiments involving MRIs, psychologist Guy Winch has observed that "the same areas of our brain become activated when we experience rejection as when we experience physical pain."² One way to help mitigate those discouraged feelings is by creating a supportive school climate that values new ideas, thoughtful listening, and self-kindness. When we create a culture in which people feel connected, we help one another practice self-kindness instead of self-criticism.

Making your campus a kind space means ensuring that all students, staff, and faculty feel recognized and included.

Kind Campus Week 2: Self-Kindness

Positive Affirmation Phrase: This month's self-kindness practice focuses on bringing calmness to challenging moments. Begin by coming up with a sentence or two, called a Positive Affirmation Phrase, to repeat to yourself when you're feeling stressed. The statement may affirm your humanity ("I am a human, and just like everyone else, I make mistakes.") or it may be a reminder to practice self-kindness ("May I treat myself with kindness while I'm going through this experience."). Write down the phrase and repeat it often.³ Including positive practices such as these in school has been found to increase well-being and reduce depression, anxiety, and stress, making such interventions "effective and easily implemented tools that help to enhance adolescents' mental health."⁴ Try this exercise with students by having them write their own phrases.



Kind Campus Week 3: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Create A "Be Kind" Code: Spending time establishing your class culture, and orienting to each other, is a great way to set the stage for your kindness practice with a set of shared values. It invites participants to open up to risk-taking, vulnerability, and learning in your kindness journey together. Plus, having clear expectations can support an environment in which kindness can thrive. We used to think that asking students to participate in developing rules would undermine a teacher's authority. But evidence shows that setting limits in ways that support student autonomy in turn supports more intrinsic motivation to learn. Further, as Dr. Kathryn R. Wentzel explains, "relationships with teachers and peers are likely to have motivational significance if they create contexts that make students feel like they are an integral and valued part of the classroom."⁵ Consider the time you spend creating your "Be Kind" Code together a wise investment for the school year. Dedicate time to explore these ideas as a class or group so that the resulting code will be meaningful for everyone involved.

See Creating A "Be Kind" Code [HERE](#) for a step-by-step guide.



Kind Campus Week 4: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Bracelet Exercise: Encourage students to wear a bracelet or rubber band around their wrist and participate in an experiment. Talk with them about the idea of building awareness around their thoughts and emotions, rather than reacting without thinking. When we feel challenged or frustrated, we're in reactive mode and it can be hard for us to be kind. Challenge students to notice when their brain reacts impulsively; when it does, have them move their bracelet to the other wrist. For instance, students might want to focus on reactions to frustration during class, self-critical thoughts, or reactions to negative social media posts. The goal of this exercise is to empower students to become more mindful and to build self-awareness. As students become mindful of reactions, they learn to move into their conscious brain, where they can choose to respond with kindness. The bracelet exercise is also a great tool for bringing focus to the good by moving the bracelet when we notice kind acts or positive experiences.

Additional Activities

Just Like Me

Talk about how easily we can feel different from others, and how focusing on difference can lead us to be unkind. This is especially true when someone is disrespectful, or holds a much different opinion than we do. Explain that if we focus on a kind state of mind, then we can prioritize connections, rather than differences. Lead the [Just Like Me](#) activity to help students see their connections, and to choose to bring focus to them as part of their ongoing kindness practice.

[“Mini Bell” Committee](#)

Begin the custom of publicly recognizing kind students and staff by honoring them with a [Mini-Bell](#) (or make an award). Start by forming a “Belling” committee that will assess nominations and choose someone on campus who will be celebrated for their kindness each month. Invite students and staff to participate, and rotate committee members throughout the school year. Invite everyone to submit nominations. Each month, after the committee has selected the “Bellee,” find a time to recognize the honoree. Try surprising them at an assembly, during announcements, or through another public forum. Share the kind words that were submitted about the recipient so that others can hear examples of kindness on campus. Each month the Mini-Bell is passed along to the next recipient. Your campus will benefit from participating in kindness recognition and gratitude, as well as be reminded that it takes a community to be kind.



Kindness at Home

Have students set the tone for their home kindness practice by creating and displaying visual reminders of kindness at home. Like the power of a mural on a school campus or in a community space, a visual reminder of our kindness practice can help us engage and retain focus, and serve as a daily reminder that kindness skill-building takes practice. It can also set the tone that yours is a kind place and that kindness is a shared value in your space. Many research studies support the power of visuals; psychology professor Haig Kouyoumdjian writes that visual cues are tangible and beneficial tools that foster successful learning, which “can help make abstract and difficult concepts more tangible and welcoming, as well as make learning more effective and long lasting.”⁶ Visual representations serve as reminders of one’s kind community and thereby inspire kind behavior and actions. Using the Ben’s Bells “Be Kind” flower or other imagery in any format that you would like, there are no limits to the kind art you can display!



References

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