



5 Radical Minutes Research Support

The Kindness Blog: [Why Teaching Kindness in Schools is Essential](#)

Phrases like "random acts of kindness" and "pay it forward" have become popular terms in modern society. Perhaps this could be best explained by those who have identified a deficiency in their lives that can only be fulfilled by altruism.

It seems that we just can't get enough of those addictive, feel-good emotions -- and with good reason. Scientific studies prove that kindness has many physical, emotional, and mental health benefits. And children need a healthy dose of the warm-and-fuzzies to thrive as healthy, happy, well-rounded individuals.

[Patty O'Grady, PhD](#), an expert in neuroscience, emotional learning, and positive psychology, specializes in education. She reports:

Kindness changes the brain by the experience of kindness. Children and adolescents do not learn kindness by only thinking about it and talking about it. Kindness is best learned by feeling it so that they can reproduce it.

A great number of benefits have been reported to support teaching kindness in schools, best summed up by the following:

Happy, Caring Children

Greater Good Science Center: [What Is Altruism?](#)

The good feelings that we experience when being kind are produced by endorphins. They activate areas of the brain that are associated with pleasure, social connection, and trust. These feelings of joyfulness are proven to be contagious and encourage more kind behavior (also known as altruism) by the giver and recipient.

Increased Peer Acceptance

PLOS One: [Kindness Counts: Prompting Prosocial Behavior in Preadolescents Boosts Peer Acceptance and Well-Being](#)

Research on the subject has determined that kindness increases our ability to form meaningful connections with others. Kind, happy children enjoy greater peer acceptance because they are well liked. Better-than-average mental health is reported in classrooms that practice more inclusive behavior due to an even distribution of popularity.

Greater Sense of Belonging and Improved Self-Esteem

Greater Good Science Center: [5 Ways Giving Is Good for You](#)

Studies show that people experience a "helper's high" when they do a good deed. This rush of endorphins creates a lasting sense of pride, wellbeing, and an enriched sense of belonging. It's reported that even small acts of kindness heighten our sense of wellbeing, increase energy, and give a wonderful feeling of optimism and self-worth.

Improved Health and Less Stress

The Huffington Post: [5 Beneficial Side Effects of Kindness](#)

Being kind can trigger a release of the hormone oxytocin, which has a number of physical and mental health benefits. Oxytocin can significantly increase a person's level of happiness and reduce stress levels. It also protects the heart by lowering blood pressure and reducing free radicals and inflammation, which incidentally speed up the aging process.

Increased Feelings of Gratitude

Edutopia: [Why Teaching Kindness in Schools Is Essential to Reduce Bullying](#)

When children are part of projects that help others less fortunate than themselves, it provides them with a real sense of perspective. Helping someone else makes them appreciate the good things in their own lives.

Better Concentration and Improved Results

MNT: [What is Serotonin and What Does It Do?](#)

Kindness is a key ingredient that helps children feel good about themselves as it increases serotonin levels. This important chemical affects learning, memory, mood, sleep, health, and digestion. Having a positive outlook enables greater attention spans and more creative thinking to produce better results at school.

Reduced Depression

Dr. Wayne Dyer, an internationally-renowned author and speaker, says in his book *The Power of Intention*:

“Research has shown that a simple act of kindness directed toward another improves the functioning of the immune system and stimulates the production of serotonin in both the recipient of the kindness and the person extending the kindness. Kindness extended, received, or observed beneficially impacts the physical health and feelings of everyone involved!” – Dr. Wayne Dyer

Less Bullying

Phys.org: [Researchers Advocate Kindness to Combat Bullying](#)

Shanetia Clark and Barbara Marinak are Penn State Harrisburg faculty researchers. They say, “Unlike previous generations, today's adolescents are victimizing each other at alarming rates.” They argue that adolescent bullying and violence can be confronted with in-school programs that integrate “kindness -- the antithesis of victimization.”

Many traditional anti-bullying programs focus on the negative actions that cause anxiety in children. When kindness and compassion are taught instead, it fosters the positive behavior that's expected.

Promoting its psychological opposite is key in reducing bullying to create warm and inclusive school environments. Maurice Elias, Professor at Rutgers University Psychology Department, is also an advocate for kindness. He says:

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As a citizen, grandparent, father, and professional, it is clear to me that the mission of schools must include teaching kindness. Without it, communities, families, schools, and classrooms become places of incivility where lasting learning is unlikely to take place . . . [W]e need to be prepared to teach kindness, because it can be delayed due to maltreatment early in life. It can be smothered under the weight of poverty, and it can be derailed by victimization later in life . . . Kindness can be taught, and it is a defining aspect of civilized human life. It belongs in every home, school, neighborhood, and society.

It's become quite clear that modern education must encompass more than just academics, and that matters of the heart must be taken seriously and nurtured as a matter of priority.

How do you teach kindness? Has it reduced bullying at your school?

Much thanks to Lisa Currie's research in her [article](#) on Kindness Blog.