

Kindness Makes a World of Difference

By DeeDee Hughes

There is no doubt that being kind creates a better environment for yourself and for those around you, right? We all know that kindness

Constant kindness can ACCOMPLISH much. As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust, and hostility to evaporate.

—Albert Schweitzer
(1875-1965); French
philosopher, physician

can spread warmth in a friendship that has cooled or smooth tensions in an argument. A smile can actually change the world—kind acts and gentle words have cemented friendships between nations. Kindness is taught in many schools alongside the ABCs and the multiplication tables. And when asked, most parents would probably say we are teaching our children to be kind every day. But are we?

What are the things that you can't see that are IMPORTANT? I would say justice, truth, humility, service, compassion, love...They're the guiding lights of a life.

—Jimmy Carter; 39th U.S. President



Or rather, how can we do this more consciously and more effectively?

THE RIPPLE EFFECT: Kindness is Contagious

When Oak Meadow conducted a survey asking what homeschooling families do to cultivate good citizenship, the number one response was **treat others with respect and kindness**. It seems that for a lot of us, performing acts of kindness is an ingrained part of our lives. The ability to respect and be kind to others is something that has value on a personal level, on an academic level, on a business level, on a political level, and on just about any other level you could name.

A spark of kindness can spread like wildfire. A pair of researchers from University of California, San Diego and Harvard University

found that acts of giving expanded exponentially among a group—one good deed leading to another—even when not giving would have resulted in greater personal gain. Another study from researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles and University of Plymouth in the United Kingdom showed that people were more likely to want to help others after they witnessed someone else doing good in the world. We are inspired by acts of kindness and compassion.

Increasingly, businesses are recognizing the importance and value of a humane business model with kindness

The basis of all good human behavior is KINDNESS.

—Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962); American humanitarian, diplomat

at its core: the family-friendly workplace, flex-time so work fits into life better, paternity leave to recognize that new fathers need to be with their babies as much as new mothers do, etc. These compassionate company policies make it easier for an employee to focus on work—balance in an employee's life ultimately helps the company thrive.



Fred, I don't see any cauliflower on your plate...try a spoonful...if you don't try it, you can just forget dessert...Eleanor, don't talk with food in your mouth. I can't understand a word you're saying. And use your napkin."

If you are wincing a little as you laugh, you're not alone! How many times have we interrupted our children but then gotten frustrated when they interrupt us? How

Political leaders, too, are making compassion a priority. Recently, guided by the impetus of a single individual, Karen Armstrong, a multinational council of leaders and citizens worked together to create a [Charter for Compassion](#). This ground-breaking charter, which strives to put compassion at the center of any interaction, has now been affirmed by more than 85,000 individuals, city governments, civic organizations, schools and universities around the world. The charter affirms that compassion is *"indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community."*

As people throughout the world explore creative ways to put the charter's tenets into action, Armstrong reported one especially enthusiastic response: "During Ramadan, people in Jordan and Pakistan ran a web competition where participants were invited to post a compassionate action every day during the holy month. They were only expecting to have a few takers the first year...but forty thousand people did it every day."

CREATING A WORLD OF KINDNESS

All parents want their children to grow into loving, kind, compassionate individuals, but usually we don't give much thought to how to encourage these qualities. So what can we do?

First and foremost, **treat your children with kindness**. Setting a good example starts at home. Humorist Erma Bombeck had some fun turning the spotlight on the common insistence that we treat our children with as much respect as we treat anyone else. She imagined what it would be like to speak to her dinner guests the way she did to her children... "Well, it's about time you two got here! What have you been doing? Dawdling?...Fred! Take it easy on the chip dip or you'll ruin your dinner... Don't tell me your hands are clean, Eleanor. I saw you playing with the dog..."

Life is short but there is always time for COURTESY.—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882); American poet

many times have we insisted on having the last word, and then gotten angry when our children do the same thing to us? How many times have we forgotten to ask our children nicely to do something but then called them out when they are demanding with us? Unless your children are still really, really little, we've all been there.

SIMPLE STEPS TO TEACH KINDNESS

How we speak to and treat our children matters. Modeling skills such as good listening, how to speak nicely even when in a hurry or upset, and the Golden Rule all contribute to creating a kinder Planet Earth. Of course, demonstrating behaviors like these is one thing—figuring out how to teach these "kindness skills" to our children can take a bit more thought. Here are some suggestions:

Words are very powerful so **use respectful language**. Kindness and respect go hand-in-hand, one often leading to the other. Do you describe your two-year-old's behavior as *stubborn* or *persistent*? Is the gaggle of kids in your backyard *noisy* or *enthusiastic*? What about the *timid*

*Kindness in WORDS creates confidence.
Kindness in thinking creates profoundness.
Kindness in giving creates love.*

—Lao Tzu; sixth century B.C.E. philosopher

or *reluctant* child who is simply approaching new experiences in a *thoughtful* or *careful* way? There's a world of difference in attitude behind these word choices. Imagine how your child feels when these words are used. How

would you feel? Becoming more aware of what you say and making an effort to “kind-up” your own vocabulary can make a big difference.

Everyone wants to be heard. **Listen to kids and they will listen to you.** Be especially careful of interruptions, and if you have to interrupt, apologize first, just as you would if you had to interrupt a business meeting or adult conversation. When children are older, having regular family meetings can help them learn how to listen carefully and wait their turn to speak. Using a talking stick, common in many Native American traditions, can help remind everyone that the person speaking deserves everyone’s full attention.

Lots of parents find themselves passing along the old saying “*You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar*” because it is so true! “Ask nicely” is a common reminder in many households. Other parents like to pretend they can’t hear whining, or they insist on a demand being rephrased into a pleasant request before complying. In return, make sure you phrase your commands into gentle reminders and requests. “Dirty clothes need to go in the basket” usually gets quicker (and more cheerful) compliance than “This place is a mess! Clean it up!”

Service is at the heart of kindness. Doing something nice for someone is extremely rewarding so **let your child help you.** Letting your child help also gives him or her feelings of belonging and being needed, and teaches that everyone has gifts to share. Kindness should not be forced, however so **let your child choose to be kind.** Provide

The ideas that have lighted my way have been kindness, beauty and TRUTH.

—Albert Einstein (1879-1955); physicist

children with opportunities to perform kind acts, but don’t make them (after all, that wouldn’t be kind).

Strive to live by the Golden Rule: “**Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.**” This one can be the most challenging of all as parents transition from the no-boundaries caregiving of early childhood into the more independent preteen and teenage years. There’s a point at which all of us realize that we need to knock on our pre-teen’s bedroom door before entering if we expect him to knock on ours. Remaining patient as our teen is still searching for his cell phone ten minutes after we were supposed to leave is important if we want him to be patient the next time we’re running late. Being guided by the Golden Rule will help us as we navigate the ever-shifting boundaries of the parent-child relationship.

Last, but maybe most important of all: **Say you’re sorry.** When we model disrespect, we must also model apologizing. Teaching kindness is easy when everyone is in a good mood, well-fed, well-rested, and patient. But teaching our children what to do when we forget to be kind is just as important as teaching them how to be kind in the first place. A sincere apology shows respect and humility, and can be one of the kindest acts of all. Sometimes two simple words can have a magical effect—a cure-all, a peace offering, and a fresh start all at once.

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Many parents use story time as a way to introduce conversations of how to treat others, and how to be part of a harmonious supportive group, be it in a family, community, or beyond. Some particularly lovely and powerful literary examples are:

***The Giving Tree*—Shel Silverstein**

***The Quiltmaker’s Gift*—Jeff Brumbeau**

***The Sneetches*—Dr. Seuss**

***Frederick*—Leo Lionni**

***Sarah, Plain and Tall*—Patricia MacLachlan**

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