

# Learning Kindness

Young children are biologically “wired” to be kind. The way they tightly hug their parents. Reaching out to hold the hand of a friend who is crying. How they look into the eyes of strangers and ask them with genuine concern, “What’s wrong?” Through it, they build strong, positive relationships with family and friends. Adolescents are also wired to be kind. But moving into the teen years, young people may face stress, peer pressure, and other challenging moments. Sometimes their kindness doesn’t show on their faces.

## It Starts at Home

So what, as a parent, can you do about it? You try to create a home that is a comfortable place for your tweens and teens. But even home can be a tough place to be at times. What are the chances you and your spouse are *always* sympathetic to each other? How often do arguments between family members take place in which less-than-nice words are used? It’s in these everyday moments that parents must take a step back, and remember to see your children for who they are. And from that place, commit to making your home a safe haven. One in which you accept the times when your child is not kind but never forget who they really are inside.

It takes compassion and an understanding of where these emotions may be coming from. Knowing that even when they’re frustrated or scared, your teens are still good at heart. And because they feel safe at home you may be the last one to see their kindness. It’s not uncommon for teens to express the brunt of their pain with those they feel most comfortable.

The question is, are you going to get angry at them, or double-down on their goodwill by giving them space, listening, and understanding? Kindness means sometimes rolling with the punches. And trust that when you take action in this way, you’ll get it in return. Just when teens feel the least kind is likely the time when they need the most kindness from you.

# Kindness is Good for Health

Need more convincing? Engaging in [acts of kindness may improve both teens' physical and mental health and well-being](#). (Yes, the same applies to adults!) Here are three ways being kind impacts health for the better.

## 1) It Releases Hormones That Make You Feel Good

Being nice to others boosts a chemical into the body called [serotonin](#). Serotonin sends the body feelings of well-being and happiness. If you've experienced a warm feeling after doing good for another, that's the serotonin sending word to the brain's pleasure centers that your act should also feel good to you! A [review](#) of 27 different studies looking at the impact of performing acts of kindness on the person carrying them out suggests that helping others often gives a "better return on investment than helping yourself." So, instead of encouraging teens to just "treat themselves" when

they're feeling down, suggest that happiness may come to them if they treat someone else instead.

## **2) It Reduces Stress and Anxiety**

[Meditation](#), [healthy eating](#), and [exercise](#) are all strategies to reduce stress and anxiety and are part of a [larger stress management plan](#). Being kind offers another easy, no-cost opportunity for fostering a more positive mental outlook. That's because it's hard to concentrate on yourself when doing something nice for someone else. It allows for a chance to separate from personal worries.

So, if your teens are feeling emotionally stressed or anxious suggest they manage those feelings by giving back to those around them. Encourage them to join a school group committed to service to others. Let them volunteer at a local food pantry or animal shelter. Propose they support friends who've been bullied. The possibilities for being kind are literally endless. From [Stand for the Silent](#), to the [Key Club](#), from [Habitat for Humanity](#), to the [Red Cross Youth](#), the list goes on and on. And don't write off the little things. A smaller act, such as running an errand for a sick neighbor or a simple gesture, such as a smile, can raise someone's spirits.

## **3) It can Relieve Pain**

Being kind to others also triggers the body to release a hormone called [oxytocin](#). This hormone is sometimes referred to as the "cuddle chemical" because its levels increase during body contact as well as during social bonding. Oxytocin reduces inflammation and can relieve [different types of pain](#), such as [headaches](#). It can even [help heal wounds](#) through its anti-inflammatory properties. Luckily, for every good act a bit of oxytocin is released. And the higher the levels of oxytocin there are in the body, the more you'll want to help others!

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## **Kindness is Contagious**

Kindness in its many forms works wonders every day. If you feel like your teen is pushing away and you're not seeing as much of their goodness, they may just need to see more humanity from you. Model decency everyday whether it's taking a neighbor's trash to the curb, or giving up a seat on the bus. Encourage teens to follow through with personal acts of goodwill in their everyday lives. Notice when they are kind and acknowledge their actions. And accept when they're not so kind.

At times it takes effort to be good, but it has its rewards. Remind them they'll gain more power from relationships with other people when they've reached out. When you're good to others, people take notice and are gracious in return. They'll come to expect the best from you. When teens know others have high expectations of them, the world changes for the better. Their unselfishness towards family, friends, causes, and even random strangers, benefits the world around them. Each act of goodwill creates a stronger sense of self and the bonus of improved health. Kindness creates kindness.