

A Kindness Practice for Families

Explore this mindfulness practice that parents and kids can do together—offering good wishes and compassion to others.

October 30, 2019



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Empathy is declining in our children. Recently, researchers [surveyed](#) 10,000 middle- and high-school students—eighty per cent reported personal achievement was more important to them than caring for other people.

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What's at the heart of this crisis in compassion? [Too much screen time](#), for one. Stress is another factor. The hormone oxytocin, responsible for connecting and bonding us to our kids, giving us that warm, fuzzy feeling during caregiving—that hormone works on the same receptors in the brain as cortisol, the stress hormone. And therein lies the tension: It's neurologically impossible to be both stressed out, and really loving and kind at the same time.

This is an informal [mindfulness](#) practice that you can do with your family. It's the basis of most compassion and empathy training. You can do this practice on birthdays, or when other opportunities to make wishes come around. You can also use this practice to wind down before bed.

1. **To begin, find a comfortable sitting position.** You can even place a hand on the heart. Allow your eyes to close or lower your gaze toward the floor.
2. **Bring to mind someone who you really respect and look up to,** and who really loves you in return. Notice how you feel as you bring this person to mind.
3. **Make a kind wish and send it their way.** What would make them happy?
4. **Next, bring to mind someone else you love and care about:** A family member, a friend, a beloved colleague. Just bring this person to mind, sending this person a kind wish.
5. **We'll move from here to a more neutral person.** Perhaps someone you don't know very well: A parent you see occasionally in the pick-up line, a person who delivers your mail, or makes your coffee in the morning. Just bring this person to mind and imagine yourself sending them some kind of kind wish.
6. **Lastly, bring to mind someone who has frustrated you lately, someone who is a little difficult.** Send this last person a kind wish—something nice for them in their life.
7. **Check in with your mind and body as you conclude this practice.**

Allow your eyes to open if they've been closed. Notice if there's any shift.

The point of is: We don't have to be perfectly loving beings at all times. We don't have the psychological, financial, or genetic resources to literally treat everyone as we treat our own child—let alone treat our own child as we'd always like to. Instead, we strive to do our best and aim for that middle path: loving, caring, and acts of kindness. Because compassion, and even self-compassion, [runs in families](#). I encourage you to find ways to practice compassion. What you do now will make a difference for future generations.