

Combatting Bullying with Kindness

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We tell children it is important to be kind to others. “Play nicely”; “share”; and “Treat others the way you want to be treated” are all ways that I have personally told kids to express kindness. Of course, I’ve always known that being kind is important, but I’ve recently learned that kindness is not just the nice thing to do, it actually reduces bullying in schools and has a number of other tangibly positive results.

Did you know that practicing acts of kindness actually changes the brain? Dr. O’Grady [shares](#) in *Psychology Today*:

"The neuroscience and social science research is clear: 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 best learned by feeling it so that they can reproduce it. Kindness is an emotion that students feel and empathy is a strength that they share."

What results can we expect from teaching kindness in schools and other settings with children? [Studies](#) show that when people give freely to others, there is

- **A stronger sense of community:** Children who practice kindness feel empowered and a greater sense of belonging.
- **Increased happiness:** giving to others through acts of kindness activates parts of the brain that evokes feelings of joy.
- **The Domino Effect:** When one person is kind, chances are high that the person receiving an act of kindness will be kind to others.
- **A spirit of gratitude:** Both the giver and the receiver of kindness are more likely to be grateful for the blessings in their life.

There are many ways to cultivate kindness. Dr. O’Grady suggests a few including:

- **Noticing kindness:** When you see a child doing something kind, tell them you noticed, affirming their behavior.
- **Publicly recognize kindness:** In some settings, it may be appropriate to recognize acts of kindness by sharing with the class or giving some other token of recognition.
- **Practice kindness:** As a class, you might even explore ways to spread kindness by tracking it through projects such as “Paying it Forward” and having students observe the results of being kind to others.
- **Teach empathy:** Help children to relate to others. The fruit of this increased understanding is often kindness.

As parents, teachers and volunteers, one essential way to combat bullying is to plant the seeds of kindness among children, helping them grow in virtue.

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