

It's always cool to be kind!

10 Tips to teach your kids how

by Diane Peters

Wouldn't it be wonderful to live in a kind world? A place where everyone said sweet words, doors were always held open, there was no bullying and peace reigned supreme. Sure, that's a dream world, but it's one you can at least aim for creating with your kids. Children who learn respect and empathy and turn those principles into words and acts of kindness can have a huge impact. They make their home and schools better places. And studies show that kind kids are less likely to bully or be violent.

It's not difficult to teach your children to be kind and that kindness has value. "When you do something for others, it makes you feel good. It benefits both the giver and the receiver," says Julie Kaufman of the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation in Denver. Those great feelings can snowball into your kids wanting to do more kind things.

So how do you start? Here are 10 suggestions for bringing more kindness into your family:

1. Model it

The best way to teach your children kindness is not by explaining: it's by doing. Whether you do volunteer work, mow an elderly neighbor's lawn or just treat others with dignity and respect, kids pick up on this and want to emulate it. But there's a caveat: your actions should match your words (that means no being nice to someone in person and then talking about them behind their back!) and you should show respect for others no matter what their financial situation, religion or even personality. And even if someone is not a great person and you dislike them for good reason, you can still be civil.

2. Be kind to your kids

If you run a kind, respectful household, kids learn what it feels like to be treated kindly. That doesn't mean you never punish a child! But it does help to keep punishments verbal, not physical, and to make sure all discipline comes with an explanation.

3. Reward kind acts

You know how kids love attention: so shower them with it, when they've done kind things. Instead of just scolding them for not sharing or being rough with another child, make a fuss when they do share or give. Better still, if your child is ages 6-10, you might want to adapt the "Caught Being Kind" program that Maury Nation, assistant professor at Vanderbilt University and an expert in bullying, has been testing in schools. If you catch your child doing something kind, give them a star on the fridge, and have those build towards a treat such as a special dinner or an outing.

4. Consider the teaching medium

Just for fun, Ted Dreier built a robotic cow in his garage. When he took it to a local school and had it tell kids about kindness — things such as saying thank you, giving out hugs and helping to wash the dishes — they listened in enraptured silence for 30 minutes. "Kids love Moozie, it's a medium that works," says Dreier, who now runs the Children's Kindness Network and www.moozie.com. Turn your kids on to Moozie or another character that they'll listen to.

5. Read about it

Slip some kind books into your household reading list.

Ages 3-5

Koi and the Kola Nuts: A Tale from Liberia by Verna Aardema.

A retelling of an African folk tale, Koi has nothing but kola nuts, but gives them away and receives love and generosity in return.

The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein.

This simple story about a boy and a tree can spark discussions about giving, taking and loving.

The Gift of the Crocodile: A Cinderella Story by Judy Sierra.

Set in the Spice Islands, this version of the Cinderella tale sees Damura finding acceptance by being kind to animals.

The Giant Hug by Sandra Horning.

Owen the pig wants to give his granny a hug, but she lives so far away that he has to send it through the mail. Follow Owen's hug as it travels across the country in a series of hilarious, sometimes awkward, always heartfelt embraces between animals of different shapes and sizes.

Teachers are Terrific by Golden Books

The wonderful Precious Moments characters teach toddlers to be nice! This sturdy board book reinforces the joy of learning while encouraging young children to respect and listen to their nursery school teachers.

Ages 6-9

The Quiltmaker's Gift by Jeff Brumbeau.

A quilt maker agrees to give a greedy king one of her coveted quilts — but only if he gives away his material possessions. When he does, he gets happiness as well as his prize.

The Paper Crane by Molly Bang.

A restaurant owner and son give a poor man a fine meal and get a simple gift in return. The gift becomes so much more in time.

Smoky Night by Eve Bunting.

It's the night of the Los Angeles riots, and a group of neighbors are brought together to learn important lessons from the upheaval.

Ages 9-14

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott.

A classic full of generosity, including the March girls giving away Christmas breakfast to a poor family.

Pay it Forward by Catherine Ryan Hyde.

The movie was based on this book about a 12-year-old boy who takes an extra credit social studies assignment to think of a way to make the world a better place and turns it into a nation-wide movement.

Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents by Sarah Conover.

Thirty-one Buddhist tales teaching respect, kindness and generosity that will also expose your child to a different religious tradition.

The Acorn People by Ron Jones.

A camp counselor is overwhelmed at the prospect of working with disabled children, until he meets his campers — The Acorn People. A group of kids who teach him that, inside, they are the same as any average kid, and with encouragement, determination, and friendship, nothing is impossible.

6. Give them tasks to do

One study out of the University of Minnesota showed that children who did housework had better feelings of responsibility and self-worth years later. And children who feel good about themselves are more respectful to others.

Kids ages 3-5 can help put away their toys and set the table for dinner. Or, even just play quietly while you prepare meals. This is the age to get them started on kid friendly recipes too — check out these [breakfast](#), [lunch](#) and [dinner](#) cooking with kids recipes for ideas.

Kids ages 6-9 can sweep and dust. At dinnertime, they can set the table and do tasks such as washing vegetables and tearing up lettuce leaves for salad.

Kids ages 10-14 can help mow the lawn and cut the grass, take out the garbage and even prepare dinner one night a week (provided you do the main chopping).

7. Help others

Organizations such as the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation and the Pay it Forward Foundation all suggest teaching children kindness by having them do kind acts, such as:

Participate in a walk or run that raises money for a good cause.

Donate regularly to the local food bank.

Let your child think of ways to help out victims of hurricanes, earthquakes and other disasters.

If you have money to give to charity, ask your children to help you decide who to give to.

Initiate a fundraiser through school to help people in need.

8. Make friends

Friendship is the most long lasting way we can show kindness to another person.

Have your children make friendship bracelets and necklaces. Try this [beaded bracelet](#) with younger children ages 6-9, and adapt it using pipe cleaner and large beads for a children 3-5. Older children, ages 10-14 can try this [fun beaded necklace](#). Once they're made, encourage them give away at least two.

Encourage your child to befriend someone at school who is lonely or left out.

9. Watch the language

Words have enormous power. Work on purging your vocabulary of words such as stupid, shut up, idiot and any racist or biased terms. When your child says such words, right away tell them that those words hurt others and ask them to rephrase what they want to say. No need for a big lecture (your child might start feeling guilty), just a quick correction.

10. Enjoy kindness

Finally, the whole point of being kind is to make the world a more fun, safe and happy place. So when your child does a kind act, when you witness something kind or even when you're the recipient of kindness, show your joy. Keep an open discussion about your feelings around kind acts and let your child feel how wonderful it is to give — and receive — from others.