

CREATING A KINDNESS COLLECTION

HOW-TO-GUIDE

We have all experienced kindness. We know how important it is. But, there is more than just anecdotal evidence to support that kindness is important. Scientific studies have shown that performing random acts of kindness is good for our health.¹ They improve our life satisfaction by increasing our sense of belonging and self-worth, and they improve our health by decreasing anxiety, depression, and blood pressure. And here's the best (and perhaps, most surprising) part – these benefits apply to the *giver* of kindness, the *recipient* of kindness, and *anyone who witnesses* the act! So, every act of kindness improves the lives of at least three people!

Teaching Kindness in School

Can we teach kindness? Why should I spend time on it when I have so many other things I have to teach? Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, productive citizen, and successful worker. Many risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropping out) can be prevented or reduced when multiyear, integrated efforts are used to develop students' social and emotional skills. This is best done through effective classroom instruction, student engagement in positive activities in and out of the classroom, and broad parent and community involvement.² Additionally, social and emotional learning (SEL) has a positive impact on academics. In fact, one study shows that students who have been in directed SEL programs can increase their scores on standardized tests by up to 11%!³

Researchers at the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin recently shared the results of a study done to find out what happens when schools deliberately teach kindness skills.⁴ It shows that a kindness program "can improve kids' grades, cognitive abilities, and relationship skills." In addition, the researchers found that teaching kindness can enhance students' ability to better calm themselves in stressful situations and help them be more flexible in their thinking. Another study on kindness⁵ shows that being kind spurs others to be kind as well. The more we give or treat people kindly, the more we inspire others to give and practice kindness.



The Kindness Loop

The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation (RAK) Kindness in the Classroom Pedagogy⁶ focuses on inspiring and empowering students with kindness skills that prompt them to act kindly toward others and share kindness. This model is designed to help cause an internal shift toward seeing oneself as a kind person. A change in awareness, attitude, and behavior over time is expected as a result of engaging in experiential learning through our lessons and resources.

¹ From the Random Acts of Kindness website document: http://downloads.randomactsofkindness.org/RAK_kindness_health_facts.pdf

² From the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/>

³ From the American Psychological Association's Monitor on Psychology: <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2010/04/classrooms.aspx>

⁴ From the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin, Madison http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_if_schools_taught_kindness

⁵ From research conducted by political scientist James Fowler of the University of California, San Diego, and medical sociologist Nicholas Christakis of Harvard University <http://www.wired.com/2010/03/kindness-spreads/>

⁶ From Random Acts of Kindness Educator Guide: Kindness in the Classroom, page 4. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/rak-file-uploads/RAK+Educator+Guide+2015.pdf>

Inspire, Empower, Act, and Share

RAK has developed four important steps in the process of building kindness skills and shifting to authentic expression of intrinsic kindness through the Kindness Loop. They are Inspire, Empower, Act, and Share. This loop is incorporated into the RAK lesson plan activities for Kindergarten through 12th grade; the activities are designed to inspire, empower, promote action and provide opportunities for sharing.

1

Inspire

students to explore various concepts of kindness through different learning modalities, such as video clips, role-plays, books, games and other hands-on activities.

2

Empower

students to assess how they can be kind in their daily lives.

3

Act

kindly in the future, through a research project, community service project or another activity that provides students with a chance to practice or demonstrate kindness.

4

Share

and reflect on acts of kindness as a class, either by having students verbalize their knowledge and actions (e.g., "I donated blankets to an animal shelter"), write about their response to those actions (e.g., "I learned that animals need our help") and/or produce a product (e.g., contributing to a "wall of kindness" in the classroom by drawing a picture of their latest kind act).



RAK believes that when students participate in all four steps of the RAK Kindness Loop multiple times, it will help them to build skills, internalize kindness, and then engage in inspired action.

Kindness Definition

For the Teacher

RAK defines kindness as a natural quality of the heart, expressed through an act of good will and reflecting care for self and others.

For the Students

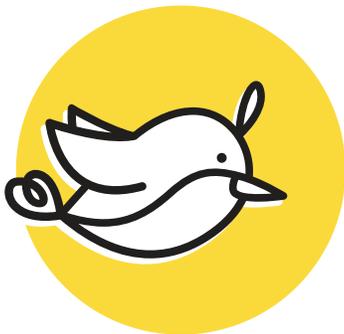
Kindness means being friendly, generous or considerate to ourselves and others through our words and actions.

Creating a Kindness Collection for your Class

RAK KINDNESS CONCEPTS

- Assertiveness
- Caring
- Compassion
- Fairness
- Gratitude
- Integrity
- Helpfulness
- Perseverance
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Self-care
- Self-discipline

Each concept is defined [here](#) on pages 10-12.



The [Random Acts of Kindness website](#) offers a rich and varied library for educators. There are a lot of incredible resources serving various purposes. What are some ways you should go about creating a collection of activities that will benefit the students that you teach and yourself? How can you use kindness activities in a way that is deliberate but does not detract from your many other teaching responsibilities?

We created a Kindness Collection (available on the Discover Kindness in the Classroom website) that models an approach to selecting and organizing resources to teach kindness in the classroom. We also offer this How-To Guide, designed to help you select RAK Kindness Concepts and create your own Kindness Collection for your students.

Let's take a look.

Start with Your Students

INTERESTS AND NEEDS

You know their interests, academic talents, and needs. You know how they relate to their peers in your classroom. You may even know a little about their lives outside the classroom. Consider the 12 kindness concepts. Which do you feel your students need to experience and practice most? What kind of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills would benefit your students, improve their relationships, inspire student leaders, or enhance your classroom climate? Which kindness concepts might best support your students' academic achievement?

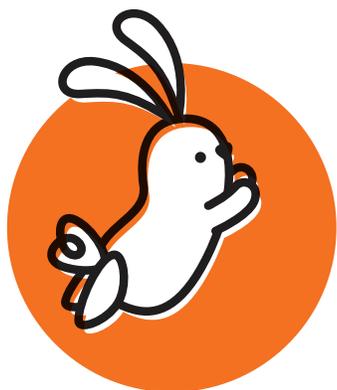
AGE AND EMOTIONAL MATURITY

Of course, you must also consider the age and emotional maturity of your students. With a little adjustment, most of the activities in the RAK lesson plans are suitable for students in grade levels other than those indicated. Consider modifying activities to suit your students.

Instructional Considerations

TIME

How much time can you devote to Kindness in the Classroom activities? If you have twenty minutes a day, you can choose activities that fit that time frame or modify an activity as needed. If you have twenty minutes a week, you will need to be more particular about the activities you choose, so that the students have some continuity from week to week and see the connections between them.



RESOURCES

Make an assessment of what resources you currently have at your disposal and what you can reasonably acquire for various activities. Choose activities supported by the materials you can use.

SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION

Consider partnering with your grade level or subject area team members. If possible, enlist the support of the administration and parents. RAK provides a helpful [Collaborative Learning Guide](#) that can be used by a team of teachers, parents, and administrators to set goals and identify areas of need for discussion. Invite students to join a [Kindness Club](#) outside of school hours. The more people who champion and expand your students' kindness project, the more success and reach the project will have!

Curriculum Connections

The RAK website has numerous excellent resources for your classes. You can find many outstanding lessons to support your needs. However, it may be easiest to start with the [Educator Guide](#). On pages 10-12 of the guide, you will find a chart showing each of the kindness concepts along with the lesson plans that focus on them. Use this to focus your search on the lessons that directly support the concept you are going to teach.

Helping students connect emotionally to academic content can increase their interest and improve their learning and retention. Take a look at current curriculum to see where kindness lessons easily fit in. One option is to incorporate kindness concepts in your existing lessons by including activities that focus on kindness concepts, while not taking time away from academic content. For example, literature often touches on themes of responsibility, self-discipline, or fairness. A discussion about weather may prompt a discussion on fears and how we can be compassionate toward those who are nervous during storms. Units about pioneers, inventors, or civil rights leaders could integrate activities related to perseverance, gratitude, or integrity.

Recommendations for Your Kindness Collection

Here are some suggestions to help you put together a kindness collection for your students.

1. The [RAK Educator Guide](#) is a great place to start.
2. Focus on one Kindness Concept at a time for the week or the month and practice and acknowledge acts of kindness every chance you get.

3. Use the Kindness Loop as you plan.
 - Identify one or two activities that will inspire your students to want to learn more about the concept and practice it.
 - Choose one or two activities that will empower your students with the information they need to know about the concept (and what it might look like in practice).
 - Add one activity that involves practicing the concept.
 - Include a sharing activity, so students can share with each other and with the greater community what they have learned and accomplished.
4. Choose activities that support a variety of learning styles, such as role playing, performing, creating videos, drawing, writing, and reading.
5. RAK is a Tier 1 program, but you can use [RAK's Tips for Diverse Learners](#) for Tier 2 support.

This approach will allow you to create a complete unit with 4-6 activities that address the Kindness Concept you chose and engage your students in authentic, purposeful learning about kindness.

Additional Tips

- Start small. Consider teaching one stand-alone lesson and one add-on activity each week.
- Add a Kindness Minute to your opening meeting or morning announcements and have students share acts of kindness or recognize others' achievements and acts of kindness.
- Add kindness quotes and pictures to your class decorations, handouts, and/or parent newsletter.
- Practice kindness in your interactions with your students and compliment acts of kindness you witness.
- Include a kindness goal statement on activities where it is appropriate. For example, you might add, "I will practice showing respect to my classmates" at the top of the instruction sheet for a group activity.
- Consider ways you can change your class rules to provide a more kindness-centered focus.
- Include some of the [RAK Focusing Strategies](#) in your lessons or as a five-minute time filler.
- When developing a unit in any subject area, add a kindness concept step in the process. This will help you remember to add a kindness focus whenever appropriate.
- Be sure to share your strategies, projects, stories, and successes with your colleagues and students' families.



- Allow your students to make decisions about the kindness concepts they would like to explore and practice.
- Celebrate and reward milestones and enjoy the journey. Encourage your students to do the same!

Additional Resources

- [Helpful Links for Educators from RAK](#) is a list of resources that supports the RAK program and philosophy.
- [DoSomething.org](#) is a platform for young people to get involved in solving or helping with social programs and issues.
- [Teaching Tolerance](#) was started to help improve relationships in and out of our schools and provides many excellent resources.
- In this [blog](#) you will find examples of random acts of kindness that might inspire you and your students.
- This [article](#) includes 101 ideas for random acts of kindness.
- [Random Acts](#) encourages random acts of kindness and will even offer financial support to help complete it.
- [Kindnessusa.org](#) explores the history behind random acts of kindness and includes stories of kindness and other related information.
- [CASEL](#) (The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning) provides research and background information to help you prepare better SEL lessons.

