

In a world far too often shaped by war, misunderstanding, and resentment, the soft power of kindness is a beacon of hope—a gentle force that can affect real and lasting change. The subject "Acts of Kindness: Encourage peaceful and inclusive societies; Show the strength of reflective communication in creating peace" is a timely reminder: even the smallest act of kindness can be capable of rippling outward, bringing people together, fostering understanding, and making the world a better place.

Kindness is literally just being friendly, kind, and considerate. It doesn't cost money, stature, or Herculean effort—merely a willingness to care. Look at your everyday life: holding a door for a stranger, offering a genuine compliment, or firing off a quick "How are you?" text message to a friend. They might be small, but they can pick up someone's day—and often, have them pay it forward.

These little things alone give much happiness, but as a collective they add up in the long term and make people feel appreciated and worthwhile. Science has time and again established that kindness is not being good but rather being strong. Research conducted by the American Psychological Association indicates that either giving or merely observing kindness can lower stress, lessen loneliness, and increase mental well-being. In 2021, scientists at the University of British Columbia found that everyday acts of kindness were strengthened to maintain people happier and more connected. Even better, when people are treated kindly, they are more likely to "pay it forward," a virtuous feedback loop that enhances the health of entire communities

That is, kindness is contagious—and scientifically demonstrated to enhance quality of life for all concerned. I saw it myself one Saturday afternoon on the baseball field. I was playing second base in a close little-league game when our teammate Chris misplayed a routine grounder. His head dropped, and you could see he was distressed. It could have been easy for teammates to get

mad or just stay quiet, but what I did instead was run up to him, tapped him on the back, and said, "Forget it—we've got your back." Chris dove to catch a tough ground ball and threw it back to me for the out the next inning. He informed me later that what I said to him helped motivate him to keep his focus and remain confident. That moment taught me that encouragement—basic, sincere encouragement—can change anyone's whole day.

It reaffirmed an old truth: that kindness goes for strength, not weakness. Off the field, kindness is also key to making spaces more inclusive. Inclusivity is more than tolerance—it is creating a space where every individual feels welcome, valued, and respected despite their background, identity, or experience.

These subtle things such as showing a stranger within a group one's company, offering help without being asked to, or mere listening with non-judgment send out the powerful message of: "You belong here." In the workplace, schools, and in neighborhoods, such slight but purposeful actions melt the barriers between the people from differing backgrounds, vanquish isolations, and allow the cultivation of trust within groups of heterogeneous individuals.

Specifically, schools can revolutionize the overall culture of a school. Preschools like "The Kindness Curriculum" developed by University of Wisconsin–Madison researchers have concluded that educating preschoolers in empathy, mindfulness, and compassion lead to classrooms becoming better behaved and academically successful. Emotional intelligence is rooted in soft skills, which make children grow into adults who are able to solve conflicts better, communicate better, and form inclusive relationships. And when conflict or disagreement does occur—because it will—compassionate communication and kindness are how to resolve it. Disagreements too often arise out of disagreement because we feel misunderstood or unheard.

But if we go into disagreement with compassion and with a willingness to hear the other person out, we open doors to healing and to compromise.

The answer is: Rather than trying to "win" an argument, we can listen using open-ended questions, validate the other person's feelings, and speak softly. This de-escalates conflict and opens space for conversation. Conflict resolution and nonviolent communication initiatives among communities consistently find that empathetic dialogue is more enduring and less confrontational than criticism or silence. Kindness does not always have to stop with words—it can be expressed through art. Art, literature, and media can transmit kindness across cultural and language barriers. A mural to unity, a neighbor-assisting-neighbor short film, or an unpretentious social-media post describing a good deed—all these forms of art remind us of our shared humanity and ask us to be kind.

These narrative and visual reminders are a daily reminder to be more compassionate towards each other. We are also inspired by the everyday heroes—ordinary individuals with extraordinary impact in their ordinary acts of kindness. From the bus driver who smiles at each passenger, the teacher who provides extra tutoring after school, to the activist who fights for the rights of marginalized groups, these people remind us that kindness is not weakness but courage in action.

Throughout history, nonviolent social movements of transformation—from the American civil rights movement to global solidarity movements with refugees—have appealed to acts of kindness to displace oppression and uplift communities. And it's really those small, ordinary acts of kindness that lie at the foundation of peaceful, equitable communities. Holding doors open, lending a listening ear, or calling someone to see how they're doing may not amount to much

alone—but together, they add up to a culture of care. When folks feel respected and heard, they're more apt to pay that same sort of respect back.

It creates a ripple effect that can shift the climate of entire communities from fear and polarization to cooperation and empathy. The world isn't going to change overnight, but perhaps with each act of kindness we are a little closer to that peaceful, tolerant world we all hope to live in.