

Why kindness?



Monday May 18th

In recent times, many of our staff have highlighted the importance of our role in protecting and promoting good Mental Health, for students, staff and our community. Mental Health Awareness Week is a great opportunity for us to strengthen this work, especially in the current troubled times. The theme of kindness seems particularly fitting. The following is taken from a message from Mark Rowland, the Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation:

Last week, I waited in a socially distanced queue outside the supermarket as the rain started to fall. One of the staff noticed we were getting wet. He scurried away to find a pile of umbrellas, carefully disinfected the handles and passed them out with a smile. To my surprise, my eyes started to well up. At a time when I felt alone, I suddenly felt connected.

If I asked you the last time you gave or experienced kindness, you would tell me stories of when you felt moved, protected, held, seen, loved.

This year, Mental Health Awareness Week focuses on the power and potential of kindness. We think it could be the most important week we've hosted, not least because [our own research shows](#) that protecting our mental health is going to be central to us coping with and recovering from the coronavirus pandemic - with the psychological and social impacts likely to outlast the physical symptoms of the virus.

We have chosen kindness because of its singular ability to unlock our shared humanity. Kindness strengthens relationships, develops community and deepens solidarity. It is a cornerstone of our individual and collective mental health. Wisdom from every culture across history recognises that kindness is something that all human beings need to experience and practise to be fully alive.

Kindness is defined by doing something towards yourself and others, motivated by genuine desire to make a positive difference. We know from the research that [kindness and our mental health are deeply connected](#). The research shows that kindness is an antidote to isolation and creates a sense of belonging. It helps reduce stress, brings a fresh perspective and deepens friendships. Kindness to ourselves can prevent shame from corroding our sense of identity and help boost our self-esteem. Kindness can even improve feelings of confidence and optimism.

But kindness is an intrinsically risky endeavour. It can risk us looking foolish or being taken advantage of, which is why we sometimes retreat. To receive or to give kindness is an act of courage. We want to use Mental Health Awareness Week to support each other to take that brave step and harness the benefits for both giver and receiver. We have a once in a generation opportunity not only during but also following this pandemic for a reset and re-think about what kind of society we want to emerge from this crisis.

[Our own reports](#) and others such as Sir Michael Marmot's [10 years On](#) report reveal how inequality is rising in our society and its harmful effects on our health. Life expectancy is falling for the poorest for the first time in 100 years. As child poverty rises, children and young people in the poorest parts of our country are [two to three times](#) more likely to experience poor mental health than those in the richest.

Applied kindness could have a transformative impact on our schools, places of work, communities and families. As the former Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, has said, now is a time to put values above valuations. We must seize this time to shape a society that tips the balance in favour of good mental health, for all of us, but especially for those who are most vulnerable.

Following my emails last week, a number of staff came forward with examples of kindness from their own experience. Heather S forwarded this to me from emails sent from two of our language tutors, who were asked if they would provide some online learning for their family learning groups :

'I suspect that we'll get at least six people signing up but I don't mind a decrease in pay if it's only four—I'm fortunate to be well paid this year and am keen to help parents out with entertaining their children in these difficult times,'

'I have read that Alderman White was working with Hope partnership to provide kids and families with food in these difficult times. If that's the case, I'd like my wages for online classes to go to them if possible.'

Simple ideas to spread a little kindness

Set aside your phone: Time is the greatest gift we can give to others. If you're usually on the phone a lot, take a break from this habit. Take time to engage in a meaningful conversation with a friend or family member.

Send a care package to a friend: A care package is a wonderful thing to receive. Not only does it contain things someone would be happy to have, but the good thought that goes along with it can help boost positive feelings.

Write a letter to someone and actually mail it: Text messages are good for quick exchanges of information and status updates. However, a written letter is special because they are so rarely sent in the present day.

Give a loved one a list of the things you love about them: Most people only see their failings. Change this by giving a loved one a list of their qualities that make them amazing.

Teach someone a skill: One of the best ways to show a kindness to someone is to teach them a skill. Whether it's basic cooking, how to pay bills, how to build something, the know-how will be your lasting legacy to someone's life. As a kind gesture for yourself, learn something new as well.

At the supermarket, let the person purchasing just one or two items check out ahead of you—it would probably take less than five minutes and you would have made someone's day a little bit easier.



There are lots of resources and sources of information around that we will share during the week. Lisa has highlighted the Stress and Wellbeing course from the WHP CPD Hub. It gives a good introduction to the topic, along with some practical suggestions. I hope you find it interesting and helpful.

Thank you to everyone who has made suggestions and highlighted resources. Please keep them coming and I'll share as many as I can during the week. I'd particularly like to hear lots more examples of the acts of kindness you have carried out or observed from others, and the impact that they had.

The theme of each day:

Tuesday—The impact of kindness;

Wednesday—The science of gratitude;

Thursday—Supporting the mental health of our young people;

Friday—making changes permanent

