

# Kindness works wonders



Tuesday May 19th

*The following passage is taken from an article in the Observer newspaper this Sunday, by Professor Peter Fonagy is chief executive of the Anna Freud Centre and Head of the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences at UCL:*

“Be kind” has been a recurring message in 2020. Our gratitude to key workers at the front line of the pandemic shows how much we value kindness. Yet kindness is not always easy to sustain, and as a society we struggle to be kind to certain groups. Thinking seriously about why this might be can help us to understand both the nature of psychological distress and our difficulties with reaching out to those in need.

Kindness is more than mere sentiment. Real kindness and concern require us to understand how the other person came to think and feel the way they do, no matter how alien or difficult that might seem to us.

Our capacity to see both our own and others’ point of view is the essence of our humanity, which from an evolutionary point of view has enabled our planetary ascendance. Our species’ dominance is the result of our capacity to collaborate, which allows us to transmit and develop complex ideas.

Successful collaboration requires us to tune in to the social cues that tell us whether people are trustworthy. While collaboration is essential, so is vigilance, because not everyone is trustworthy. But when vigilance dominates, we close our minds.

When we are looking for people who we can trust, one of the key clues is whether they seem concerned about us and interested in what we think and feel, even if our views differ from theirs. In other words, are they showing kindness?

Teachers who show consistent awareness of their students’ concerns are the most likely to succeed in getting them to learn. The teacher I remember best presented each of us with a book at the end of each term that she chose as best suited to our character. I could never quite figure out why she chose the books she gave to me, but I remember her lessons, along with the kindness her action conveyed.

Kindness overcomes our natural and necessary vigilance and opens our minds. Trust creates a human chain for transporting items of culture across generations.

Tragically, those whose experiences have left them least able to trust – people with mental health issues, drug problems, homeless people and yes, sometimes people from other cultures and ethnic groups – are often excluded from this human chain. Those of us who have not experienced the same challenges can find their suspicions hard to understand, and we struggle to be kind. We regard them as problematic and threatening. They are “alien”, “unengaged” and “hard to reach”.

Stigma is the cruellest of social forces because it works in two directions. While we may want to be kind, if we can’t understand the other person’s concerns our good intentions will not penetrate their defensive barriers. The result is often a vicious circle of social disengagement, distrust and withdrawal: our tolerance of the challenges they present is limited, and we withdraw kindness when it is needed most. This is the challenge when thinking about mental health and social inclusion.

Study after study shows that children who have been maltreated struggle in school, even when surrounded by well-meaning adults striving to show “kindness”. Their capacity to trust is so damaged that learning becomes almost impossible. Often these children are stigmatised as “troublemakers”. But it is not motivation that they lack. It is the kindness that springs from genuinely understanding their perspective.

Mental Health Awareness Week is important because our ability to think about other people has enabled us to create a shared social world in which we can think together, trust and cooperate. The pandemic has reminded us that only by thinking together can we hope to survive and flourish, and excessive vigilance breeds lack of concern, unkindness and social irresponsibility. We need to apply these lessons widely, for our collective mental health and to help the most vulnerable and isolated.

*Like so many across the country, in the last few weeks WHP staff have been supporting others in their community, sometimes as part of a local group, sometimes just an informal arrangement within their local area. This experience is typical:*

I am the treasurer of a small local group who run music sessions for pre-schoolers with communication difficulties. For a couple of years, I also helped out at the weekly music sessions, and I continue to do so every now and then. It’s fair to say that although I “give up” an afternoon when I do that, it honestly get far more back from being there than I give up in time. I have met lots of lovely local families that I would never have come into contact with, and it’s a complete distraction from day to day life. If I can get to a session, I know I will come away in a far more positive mood than when I first arrived!





# COPING CALENDAR: KEEP CALM. STAY WISE. BE KIND



30 actions to look after ourselves and each other as we face this global crisis together. Please use & share 🙌

**1** Make a plan to help you keep calm and stay in contact

**2** Enjoy washing your hands. Remember all they do for you!

**3** Write down ten things you feel grateful for in life and why

**4** Stay hydrated, eat healthy food and boost your immune system

**5** Get active. Even if you're stuck indoors, move & stretch

**6** Contact a neighbour or friend and offer to help them

**7** Share what you are feeling and be willing to ask for help

**8** Take five minutes to sit still and breathe. Repeat regularly

**9** Call a loved one to catch up and really listen to them

**10** Get good sleep. No screens before bed or when waking up

**11** Notice five things that are beautiful in the world around you

**12** Immerse yourself in a new book, TV show or podcast

**13** Respond positively to everyone you interact with

**14** Play a game that you enjoyed when you were younger

**15** Make some progress on a project that matters to you

**16** Rediscover your favourite music that really lifts your spirits

**17** Learn something new or do something creative

**18** Find a fun way to do an extra 15 minutes of physical activity

**19** Do three acts of kindness to help others, however small

**20** Make time for self-care. Do something kind for yourself

**21** Send a letter or message to someone you can't be with

**22** Find positive stories in the news and share these with others

**23** Have a tech-free day. Stop scrolling and turn off the news

**24** Put your worries into perspective and try to let them go

**25** Look for the good in others and notice their strengths

**26** Take a small step towards an important goal

**27** Thank three people you're grateful to and tell them why

**28** Make a plan to meet up with others again later in the year

**29** Connect with nature. Breathe and notice life continuing

**30** Remember that all feelings and situations pass in time



“Everything can be taken from us but one thing: the freedom to choose our attitude in any given set of circumstances” ~ Viktor Frankl



**ACTION FOR HAPPINESS**



[www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)

Find out more about the Ten Keys to Happier Living, including books, guides, posters and more here: [www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys](http://www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys)

Over the last couple of weeks, people have been sharing resources and sources of information that may be of help and interest:

(From Janette): There are also a number of excellent apps that help to track mood and practice gratitude. Here are some of my favourites:

Moody: Mood Tracker & Journal (£4.99) <https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/moody-mood-tracker-journal/id1402824590>

Daylio (Free) <https://daylio.webflow.io/>

Gratitude (Free) <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/gratitude-happiness-journal/id1372575227>

(From Sue): Mind information: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/>

Mental Health Helplines :<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/>

Rethink Mental Health Organisation :<https://www.rethink.org/>

Another way to lift the spirits is singing and it is also great for mental health. Rock Choir, the largest contemporary choir in the UK, are hosting a 24hour fundraising extravaganza raising money for the Mental Health Foundation, running throughout today and tonight - this is Rock Choirs own act of kindness. Featuring singing sessions, songs from across the decades, as well as video messages from their own key worker choir members and their celebrity friends, such as Jess Glynne, Michael Ball and Sir Cliff Richard, to name but a few! Join in at <https://www.facebook.com/TheRockChoir/?fbclid=224166474&bbemailid=21946205&bbeid=1509546089>



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**MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK** →

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