



National Kindness Day

Teaching Kids to be Kind

“Say ‘please.’”

“Give Johnny a turn with the ball.”

“Go say sorry to Mia right now!”

“What’s the magic word?”

“Now say ‘Thank you Miss Kelly!’”

We want to raise our children to be kind, compassionate, and thoughtful. But if you’ve ever been on the receiving end of a scripted apology or a forced ‘thank you’, you know that having kids parrot back polite words doesn’t quite cut it. If we want to raise children who are genuinely kind, we need to realise that micromanaging our kids’ interactions isn’t the right way to encourage moral behaviour. Instead, we need to take a holistic approach: one that encourages discussion, role modelling, and highlighting opportunities for kindness.

As Mr Rogers taught, *“Like many other values our children get from us, compassion is more likely to be caught than taught.”*

Please and thank you

Politeness and compassion are different, though related, aspects of a bigger personality trait called ‘agreeableness’. Politeness refers to being respectful, having good manners, and abiding by the rules of society. It’s definitely something we want to encourage in our kids, but if we want them to internalise politeness, we need to go beyond just reminding them to say “please” and “thank you”.

Discuss and reflect on moments when you noticed your child speaking politely. It doesn’t need to be a big deal, just simply observe what you saw. “I noticed you saying please when you wanted your sister to share her snacks. I wonder if speaking to her so politely helped her want to share.”

Role model politeness, especially to people who are serving you – such as retail staff and waiters.

Highlight opportunities by reminding them well in advance to speak politely. For example, if it’s your child’s first time buying something at the shop or booking their own doctors’ appointment, you can role play what to say, which includes saying “please” and “thank you”.

Saying sorry

Very few social interactions between kids occur without someone getting hurt, either physically or emotionally. When things go wrong, kind kids don't just say sorry, they are sorry. Being able to emotionally understand what another person feels is called empathy, a skill which can be strengthened with practice.

Discuss what others may be feeling, using books as a springboard. How are the characters feeling? Why are they feeling that way?

Role model empathy, by allowing them to experience the type of emotional understanding that you want them to demonstrate. This looks like taking time to understand their feelings, even when they're upset or excited about things that seem trivial.

Highlight opportunities to respond empathetically. For example, if their little sister is crying, nudge them towards offering her a hug or a kind word.

Spontaneous kindness

In my opinion, one of the proudest moments we can experience as parents is when we see our children treating others kindly through their own initiative. When our kids are the ones mowing the lawn of the elderly neighbours, or letting the youngest kid on the team have a shot at the goal, or splitting their donut in half to share with their baby brother... these are the moments that fill our hearts. How do we raise kids who are kind without prodding?

- ▶ Discuss what it means to be kind, and do it frequently and informally, like on car rides or around the dinner table. You could ask them how they feel when someone is kind to them, and how they feel when they are kind to others.
- ▶ Role model acts of kindness, such as taking a meal to a friend who is sick.
- ▶ Highlighting opportunities to join you in acts of kindness, or to plan their own experiences. You could let them know that you will be visiting someone at the nursing home and that you would love them to join you. Or maybe you can let them know that you are baking cookies as a gift for their teacher and ask them if they would like to make something too.

Raising kind kids isn't something we accomplish in a day. Much like becoming a firefighter, or a doctor, or a neuroscientist, becoming kind takes time, practice, and mentoring.

"In a world where you can be anything, be kind"



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