

Kindness

The image shows the words "Be kind" written in a black, cursive, handwritten style. The letter "B" is large and loops around the word "kind".

I recently read an interview with Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin and one sentence that Jane Fonda said stuck in my brain. Quote, "Why aren't we taught that kindness matters?"

So what is kindness? How do we express it? Are we surrounded by more meanness or kindness in the world today? And can humans be taught to be kind or is it genetic?

Merriam -Webster dictionary defines the word kind as: having or showing a gentle nature and a desire to help others: wanting and liking to do good things and to bring happiness to others. And defines kindness as: the quality or state of being kind; and a kind act.

Basically, expressing kindness is showing your gentle nature towards others by wanting to help; doing good deeds; and bringing happiness and joy to others (and yourself). Acts of kindness brings back to the giver a sense of personal satisfaction and connectedness with others. It can bring to all parties involved calmness and a sense of relaxation; it eases pain, increases energy levels and could also reduce high blood pressure. In true expressions of kindness the giver expects nothing tangible in return.

Expressions of kindness are shown in many different ways. Kindness can be expressed in words: speaking kindly to others, including and especially to those who don't expect it (salespersons, wait staff, telemarketers, etc.). It can be expressed in your body language: a smile, a gentle touch on the arm or shoulder, or a hug. Expressions through an action of work: carrying someone's package, doing a small repair job, shopping for someone, volunteering to build a home, working in a food pantry or preparing food for a homeless shelter, etc. Kindness is also expressed in the giving of donations of food, clothing and money to charitable organizations. From the person offering a simple smile to the major philanthropist, all are expressing their kindness.

Is there more meanness or more kindness in the world? I think that is a matter of does the beholder see the glass half empty or half full? One must always keep in mind that the cruelty and violence in the world has always taken place at varying degrees and in

various locations through time. It may seem like it is worse or more rampant, but this may be partly due to the media outlets headlining the negative instead of the positive.

Since kindness can be directly associated with how people positively get along in society, is it a part of one's physical makeup? A small study done in 2011 showed that a gene variation was found in study participants who were more kind, caring and trustworthy. If broader studies have the same results then yes, there is a definite genetic link that exists in a human's makeup that makes them a kinder person.

But can kindness be taught? To answer Ms. Fonda's question: kindness can be taught and is being taught. With today's growing trend in education on the side of promoting children's social-emotional and character development, they are being armed with the skill set needed to teach them kindness. Receiving kindness and showing kindness through classroom behavior and doing service oriented projects enhance these children's progress to show kindness to others. We must all do our part: families, communities, and school classrooms must provide the necessary nurturing of kindness as a consistent example that children will naturally emulate.

As our human community globally reaches the tipping point, we can then make an impactful change in the meanness and cruelty that also exists in our world. Although it may be far in the future, a world filled with kindness will be possible.

Kindness does matter. Giving you all a big hug of kindness -

With Gratitude,

Kai