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BE WELL

Random Acts of Kindness

By Debbie DeAngelo
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Recently my husband and I were walking along a local trail when we noticed several white and orange miniature gourds randomly placed along the pedestrian path. A few of them were even artistically decorated. I was both surprised and elated. Some anonymous individual took the time to plan, prepare, and place these autumnal gems along a well-traversed trail for no other reason than to bring joy to others. Mission accomplished! That's the impact of random acts of kindness ... or any act of kindness for that matter.

Random acts of kindness are typically defined as actions performed without expectation of reward or anything in return. They are simply done to help people brighten their day. These altruistic actions have as profound an effect on the giver as they do the recipient. Think about how heartwarming it feels when you form a connection with a complete stranger by offering a helping hand. Just as importantly, there are numerous health benefits associated with forging these social connections.

Extending altruism stimulates the reward center of the brain, resulting in a flood of endorphins and oxytocin, the bonding hormone. This is often referred to as the helper's high. Good deeds also contribute to a sense of community, which is a factor in longevity. Additionally, kindness has been shown to increase feelings of well-being, combat the effects of stress, and lower blood pressure. By exhibiting goodwill toward others, you're giving yourself a gift, too. In other words, doing good does you good. Perhaps one of the best results of kindness is that witnessing it triggers a domino effect. That's right, kindness is contagious!

Keep in mind that practicing kindness doesn't imply that you don't have disagreements with people or that you allow others to take advantage of you. It simply hopes that you respectfully address conflict. It's actually possible to maintain boundaries and beliefs that differ from friends, relatives, and strangers without attacking their dignity.

Demonstrating kindness begins with the intention to be kind. It's easy to fly through the day and become so consumed by demands and the never-ending to-do list that we overlook opportunities to help people. Focus on this concept by asking yourself, "How am I going to practice kindness today?" Starting the day with this awareness increases the likelihood of attuning to and accomplishing helpful acts.

Perhaps the most rewarding is to blend some small, spontaneous gestures with thoughtful, planned deeds throughout the week. If you need a few ideas, check out the list below.

25 Acts of Kindness

1. Actively listen while chatting with someone (resist looking at your cellphone).
2. Be a courteous driver.
3. Leave a thank-you note for the mail carrier.
4. Call a friend who is lonely or experiencing hardship.
5. Shovel the walkway of an elderly neighbor.
6. Make soup for a sick relative or friend.
7. Help your parents with household projects.
8. Allow the person behind you in line to go in front of you.

9. Pick up litter when out for a walk.
10. Post a positive online review of a small business.
11. Acknowledge an employee's efforts to their manager.
12. Bring your spouse a cup of coffee in the morning without being asked.
13. Visit a senior that doesn't have family nearby.
14. Thank retail staff for their help.
15. Text a motivational message to a friend ... just because.
16. Bake cookies and take them to a neighbor.
17. Send a former teacher a card or email telling them how they impacted your life.
18. Give someone a genuine compliment.
19. Talk to someone at a party or at work who doesn't seem to know many people.
20. Treat service personnel (wait staff, cashiers, custodial workers) respectfully.
21. Brush the snow off the car next to yours in the parking lot.
22. Consider being an organ donor.
23. Drop off gently used towels to an animal shelter.
24. Contribute a sick day to someone at work who is dealing with a chronic illness.
25. Donate blood.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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