

# Giving Kindness



Kindness or being kind are actions which benefit another and/or oneself. A gentle encouraging word spoken, petting your cat or dog, sharing a pleasant afternoon with a family member, donating to a charitable society are all different ways in which we allow kindness into our lives.

Sometimes people consider kindness as a 'giving' but also a 'giving in'. When we are genuinely kind and promoting benefits for another and/or oneself there is a feeling of effortlessness and a sense of goodwill.

However, if our kindness is accompanied by a feeling of loss or 'giving in', our kindness loses its spontaneity and we feel we must or ought to or should be kind. When this happens, we can ask ourselves: "Do I really want to be kind?" Maybe at that time, you don't. Maybe you do not have the energy or resources to be kind at the time. Being kind involves a certain realism about what one can do easily or comfortably.

Kindness is an action which benefits another and/or oneself. However, sometimes seemingly 'kind' acts can be cruel. For example, individuals who feed their dogs chocolates, which temporarily produce a tasty benefit, do their pets no true service particularly if their pets are overweight and in danger of becoming diabetic. Also, chocolates can be quite toxic to dogs.

Kindness is not 'wimpish' behavior. Being kind does not mean as, one person said to me, "having tire tracks all across your face!" Kindness is consideration of another and oneself at the same time. Kindness involves awareness of oneself, others, and of opportunities to be kind.

People usually do not talk about the kindness that they gave as a matter of politeness and charity. However, in this course, we can learn much through the sharing of experiences in which we have been kind towards another.

In thinking about and reflecting upon experiences in which we have been kind to another, we are enabled to also think and reflect upon the various motivations and awareness that urge us to carry out kind acts.

Kindness is a gift. Maimonides was a medieval Jewish philosopher, doctor, scholar and legalist. He listed eight ascending levels of giving to the poor. Other people, such as Julie Salamon and Dr. Paul T.P. Wong have developed, respectively, The Ladder of Charity and the Ladder of Generosity.

Here is a Spectrum of Kindness based on degrees of awareness in a kind act.

1. Knowing that kindness is required, but refusing to act
2. Kindness without knowing or being aware that one was kind
3. Kindness because one was asked to give
4. Reluctant kindness
5. Kindness expecting a return
6. Kindness out of guilt
7. Kindness without expecting a return
8. Proactive kindness

In knowing that a kindness is required and refusing to act on this impulse, there is, never-the-less, a miniscule amount of awareness of kindness. But this kindness is only a potential that is not actualized.

Sometimes we can be kind without knowing that we have been kind. Once, my foster mom told me that she always appreciated the kindness I gave her when she was ill. I was unaware of how much my support had meant to her. I was just being a son.

If we are asked to give, then we are unaware of the opportunity to give. Once we become aware of the opportunity to be kind, we can be reluctantly kind, or kind out of guilt, or kind either expecting a return or not expecting a return, or we can be proactively kind.

From time to time, we are presented with a situation where we are begrudgingly or reluctantly kind, as in the case of a panhandler asking for spare change.

When kindness is given to create shame in the receiver, or the kindness is given to impress or receive recognition, then these kindnesses are given with an expectation of some return. An honest self-appraisal will show that we can also be kind out of guilt. There is the motivation to give a gift of kindness, but this impulse is tempered by a degree of self-interest.

Kindness without expecting a return offers a greater awareness of the true value of kindness and its potential.

Proactive kindness is best described as using one's generosity in such a way that the receiver does not have to ask for help at the present time or in the future.

Kindness can be given or activated in a number of ways, but first there has to be awareness that a kindness can be given. Once this awareness is known to the giver, he or she can decide to exercise his or her right to be kind.



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**I experienced being kind to another.**

Jot down a few notes about your experience:

What were you doing?

What were you thinking about?

What were you feeling?

What were you aware of?

