



The Mental Health Benefits of Simple Acts of Kindness

There are many reasons acts of kindness are good for the giver and the receiver. New research looks at the mental health benefits, finding that performing acts of kindness may help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.

“Acts of kindness” refer to benevolent and helpful actions intentionally directed towards another person, motivated by the desire to help another, and not to gain reward or to avoid punishment.¹

In the study from researchers at the University of Ohio, people with elevated symptoms of depression or anxiety were randomly assigned to engage in acts of kindness, join in social activities, or participate in a brief intervention based on cognitive behavioral therapy (specifically cognitive reappraisal).²

Kindness is motivated by the desire to help another, and not to gain reward or to avoid punishment.

All three interventions were found to reduce symptoms, lessen distress and improve life satisfaction. The acts of kindness, however, showed greater benefits for social connection than either of the other two interventions. The authors note that gestures of kindness have distinct benefits versus general social interaction. “Acts of kindness may more effectively improve social connection and related dimensions of well-being than prevailing cognitive behavioral therapy techniques,” the authors concluded.

The study also provides some insight into the process. Participating in acts of kindness helped the individuals with depression or anxiety to divert their attention from themselves and take their minds off their own symptoms.

Research has also found that kindness can increase happiness and self-esteem, while decreasing stress and emotional reactivity.² People may limit their acts of kindness because they underestimate the value, according to a recent study.³

(continued on next page)



The Mental Health Benefits of Simple Acts of Kindness



People who received acts of kindness were more likely to be more generous themselves.³

Researchers found that while a giver looked at the value of the item or action, the receiver saw greater value in the warmth of the gesture and the positive social interaction. Another feature of acts of kindness, supported by research, is that it can be contagious. People who received acts of kindness were more likely to be more generous themselves.³

Everyday simple acts of kindness can contribute to boosting your mood, reducing stress, and possibly alleviating symptoms of depression or anxiety. In addition, what might seem like a small kind gesture could have a greater impact than you might think.

Need some ideas to start your random acts of kindness?

Some resources from the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation:

- **Kindness at Home** – **Download free lessons** on how to start setting a tone of kindness in your home.
- **Kindness in the Workplace** – **Free resources** to assess your workplace and a Kindness in the Workplace action planning guide that includes seven key ingredients that make for a positive and kind culture where people want to show up and do their best.
- **Kindness in the Classroom**[®] – **See this** CASEL approved, highly effective, evidence-based, social emotional learning curriculum used all over the world, with focuses on equity, teacher self-care, digital citizenship and kindness. Curriculum is entirely free.

As you start to look for ways to bring kindness to the people in your path, it becomes a part of the way you live. It enhances the joy you experience in life, but also for those around you. Why not be kind to someone today?

References

1. Cregg, D.R., Cheavens, J.S. 2022. Healing through helping: an experimental investigation of kindness, social activities, and reappraisal as well-being interventions. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*.
2. Positive Psychology - What is Kindness in Psychology? 21 May 2019 by Kori D. Miller
3. Kumar, A. 2022. Kindness Can Have Unexpectedly Positive Consequences. *Scientific American*.



optumidaho.com