



Kindness Summary

Why Kindness?

Your child's ability to show kindness and get along with and play with others can shape their experiences at the park, in playgroups, and at preschool or childcare. You can offer them support as they exercise their newly forming social awareness and relationship skills.

Tip These steps are best done when you and your child are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and actively building a healthy parent relationship will support these steps.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Simple questions can be conversation starters to engage your child in learning about kindness.
 - *"What do you notice? I notice..."*
 - *"How do you feel? I feel..."*
 - *"I wonder if the other person feels sad because their head is down. How do you think they might feel?"*
 - *"What are you wondering? I am wondering what happens next."*
 - *"Did you think what that person did for you was kind? How did it make you feel?"*
- When reading books, look at the images of children or animals and guess the feelings by asking *"What do you think this character is thinking? What do you think that character is feeling?"*
- Practicing naming feelings will enable your child to identify their own feelings as well as others and seek support when they need it.
- If your child is feeling unsure about how others are feeling -- or is buried in their own feelings -- consider asking questions like:
 - *"What do you notice the other child is feeling?"*
 - *"What does their face look like?"*
 - *"What does their voice sound like? How are they moving?"*

Step 2. Teach New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model kindness while interacting with your child. Modeling kindness can be one of the greatest teaching tools.
 - Share the focus. As you spend time with your child, follow their lead.
 - Notice gestures and listen for thought and feeling: *"I noticed you are smiling while playing that game. You look happy."*
 - Children require your attention to thrive. So, why not build a special time into your routine when you are fully present to listen to what your child has to tell you? Turn off your phone. Set a timer if needed. Then, notice your body language. Ask yourself, "What is my body communicating, and how am I demonstrating that I am listening?"
- Read and "pretend play" together.
 - During reading time, select a book of faces to help your child learn to identify the different feelings of other children. Point out how you can tell what each child is feeling. Practice recreating those cues with your child.
 - After reading a story together, act out the plot and use feeling words and expressions to match how the characters were feeling throughout the story. This expands their feelings vocabulary and teaches them how to recognize a wide range of perspectives and feelings that they might not encounter in day-to-day interactions with others.
- Make your thinking and feelings explicit. Talk about how you are feeling, why you are feeling it, and what signs you are giving (even when it's not a comfortable feeling). *"I am feeling sad right now because our friends can't meet us for a playdate. Can you tell? I am frowning."*
- Talk aloud about the ways in which you respond to your own big feelings: *"I'm going to take a few deep breaths before trying again and see if that helps."*
- Grow empathetic thinking. In addition to growing these essential skills that help your child learn kindness, there are beliefs and attitudes that you can promote to contribute to your child's thinking. For example, when your child points a blaming finger saying "he did it!" you could say:
 - *"What do you think he's feeling?"*
 - *"What choice would you make if you were feeling sad or hurt?"*
 - *"What do you think could make him feel better?"*

Trap Don't tell your child what they feel; ask instead. Three-and-four-year-olds are striving for independence and may create a power struggle if you are too direct about their thoughts and feelings. You might say, *"You look angry. Is that right?"*

Step 3. Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Provide opportunities for your child to meet and interact with other children and people of all ages, races, and cultures. Point out commonalities, make connections, and also discuss how differences help us learn more about ourselves and others.
- Model warm greetings and be certain to introduce your child and facilitate a greeting with any new individuals. Share one thing you know or love about that person with your child to make a caring connection.

- When out in your community while running errands with your child, make introductions and involve your child in conversations with neighbors, the bank teller, or the grocery cashier.
- If your child is in day care, be sure and create caring, trusting connections with the caregivers alongside your child.
- Recognize effort by using “I notice...” statements like, *“I noticed how you let your friend choose a snack first. That was kind of you.”*
- Read together. When you read stories together, you engage in an activity that can be deeply connecting for both of you. Reflect on the story, and you will take the learning opportunity one step further. *“I think it was kind of the character to give his friend a high-five for doing a good job playing the game.”* Involve your child in selecting the book, holding it, and turning the pages to build ownership and interest in reading.
- Many children are born with a cautious or shy temperament, and they might not readily warm up to strangers and may show a fear of strangers. Respect that temperament by not forcing interaction and instead, model your own kind interactions with others.

Trap Do not force physical interactions like hugs, high fives, or hand shakes between your child and other new individuals. Teach your young child early that they can control their own physical space and are never obligated to make physical contact with another.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child’s Development and Success

- Use “Show me...” statements like *“Show me you can say kind words to your sister when she is helping you.”*
- Schedule playdates. Playdates can become invaluable practice for your child.
- Don’t move on quickly if your child shows interest in a new person. Children often need more time to adjust with new individuals. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to warm up to the new person. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to gain relationship skills over time.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when all is going well. If your child was scared or shy when encountering others on the playground but seems perfectly content today, notice their newfound comfort. *“I notice you are feeling happy making new friends on the playground today!”*
- Build celebrations into your everyday routines. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

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