

Random Acts Of Kindness

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This is a strategy to highlight the importance of kindness and sensitive students to its occurrence within the school community. By so doing, it increases the prevalence of kindly acts thereby starting a very positive cycle of, the more acts of kindness that are witnessed, the more are done and the more that are done, the more are witnessed.

According to research by Sonja Lyubomirsky (University of California) and others, both random (letting someone stressed, anxious and obviously in a hurry jump in front of you in the queue for a taxi) and systematic (taking your elderly neighbour shopping every Thursday evening) acts of kindness are very effective ways to lift our levels of happiness.

“Being kind to others, whether friends or strangers, triggers a cascade of positive effects – it makes you feel generous and capable, gives you a greater sense of connection with others and wins you smiles, approval and reciprocated kindness – all happiness boosters”

This strategy asks students to keep an eye out for people committing random acts of kindness. That is, kindly acts done spontaneously and with no ulterior motive or agenda and done without a desire for recognition or personal gain.

Random acts of kindness can be performed by anyone in the school community and likewise witnessed by anyone, anywhere within the school community. What works really well in this strategy is that names of individuals are never used, thereby significantly reducing the temptation to be kind simply to be noticed.

Those witnessing an act of kindness simply write a short description of what they saw on a post-it note, sign it and stick it on a large piece of card titled, “Random Acts of Kindness” placed in some prominent position in the classroom.

Students cannot place their own names on the Random Acts of Kindness card. Nor can they place the name of a person or persons who have been kind to them. If a student experiences an act of kindness they need only acknowledge it by the use of good manners and the showing of genuine

appreciation. Those whose names are placed on the card have been seen to be kind without necessarily knowing they have been seen.

Students do not have to inform the person they are choosing to acknowledge before doing so. In fact, its best if they say nothing and simply post a description of the good deed.

Starting the description of the act of kindness with the words, “I saw” helps to keep the note succinct and to the point.

Following are some examples:

I saw...

- A year 6 girl talking to someone who was lonely
- A boy helping another boy who was hurt
- A girl helping someone who was sad
- Some boys playing with a new kid
- Two girls carrying things for Mrs Jones
- A group helping a boy find something he lost
- Year 6 boys asking two boys to join their game
- A class encouraging someone not to give up
- Some kids cleaning up rubbish
- A girl sharing her lunch
- A girl listening to a problem
- Some kids let someone else go first
- Three boys helping the gardener
- A year one sticking up for his mates
- Some older kids helping others sort out a problem
- A year 7 making sure a prep was alright
- A boy and a girl help to clean up a mess
- A girl jumping in and give things a go
- A group of girls walk away from gossiping
- Year 5’s take time to listen to a new student
- Someone help a parent

- Someone being honest about their friends behaviour
- A boy being really calm when others were upset
- Two girls stop others from being cruel
- A boy wrote a note to cheer someone up
- A person found some money and handed it in

Depending on the quantity of descriptions posted, a teacher can choose to either investigate the notes at the end of the day or at various times of the day. If there are lots of notes then the teacher can simply thin them out by picking a few and reading them out aloud and stating the names of the people who wrote them.

EXAMPLE:

Teacher: This one is from John who says he saw someone listening patiently to a new student in the school who doesn't speak much English. When did you see this happen John?

John: At recess

Teacher: And what year was this kindly person from?

John: Year 6

Teacher: Did they spend quite a bit of time listening?

John: Yes, heaps

Teacher: Thank you for noticing and I'm sure the new student will have a good story to tell their parents tonight.

Teacher: Now Angela says she saw a group of year 6's inviting some kids from another class to join them. Is that right Angela?

Angela: Yes – they were playing on the oval

Teacher: And what were you doing?

Angela: Just sitting under the big tree

Teacher: Well not just sitting but watching as well

Angela: Yes

Teacher: How many year 6's?

Angela: Oh, maybe five or six.

Teacher: Did they join in when invited?

Angela: Yes

Teacher: I'm glad you saw that - five or six considerate and caring people. I'm impressed.

It's always good to have someone explain their note fully. Giving them the time to flesh out what they saw allows the class to connect more strongly with the event and deepens their understanding of what kindness can look, feel and sound like. For example...

Darren would you like to stand up and tell us about what you saw. Here's your note and without using names let us know the who, what, where and when of the kind act you witnessed.

(Darren tells his story)

Quite a powerful thing you saw Darren and it makes me very proud to know that the person whose kindness you described is in our classroom.

Quite often several students have witnessed the same act of random kindness and the story might be told in various classrooms. If several students from the same classroom have witnessed the act then one note can be posted with several supporting signatures. This is only possible of course if all those who witnessed the act are aware of each other witnessing it. If not then there is likely to be several post it notes detailing the same event. When this occurs the simplest thing to do is to read one and then ask if there are others who witnessed the same event. Getting a quick comment on or embellishment to the story from the others is all that is necessary to satisfy their desire to contribute and share. Whatever hiccups occur are easy to sort out and if there are sufficient post it notes to create the problem then the process of generating random acts of kindness is well and truly working. As each note is read by the teacher or explained by the contributing student it is removed from the board.

An important part of the process is to get students to recognise the many and varied ways acts of kindness can be expressed, It's easy to identify someone helping someone who has fallen and hurt themselves as being kind, but a little harder to see that someone who removes a sharp bit of plastic from the sandpit and puts in the bin is being kind as well. Just as someone asking a group to stop spreading rumours is showing a great kindness to both the rumour mongers and their target.

If a person suspects that it is them being acknowledged for a random act of kindness there is no need for them to identify themselves or outwardly respond to the acknowledgement. They merely need to know that their good deed was both seen and appreciated by the school community.

Encouraging students to peruse the random acts of kindness board and to talk about what has been witnessed, creates an awareness of the central role kindness plays in maintaining a safe school environment and helps establish the habit of both being kind and acknowledging kindness when it happens.

This idea can be easily transferred to assemblies, with the host class sharing one or two of their acknowledgements with the entire school as part of the regular business of the assembly. Of course, the principal, deputy or any teacher can also share with the school their own observations of kindness without naming the individuals.

Note: Class teachers can also post notes on the board. The kindly behaviour of any member of the school community, parent, teacher, student and other staff can be acknowledged by anyone who chooses to do so.

When writing becomes the problem then the process simply becomes a verbal one. At one time or at various times in the day children are asked if they have seen someone being kind and if they would like to share the story. Following the who, what, where and when procedure keeps things on track.

Example:

Teacher: Boys and Girls, Melinda has a story to share with us. Remember Melinda we don't use peoples names and I'll start by asking you questions. Is the person you want to talk about in our class?

Melinda: Yes.

Teacher: That's good to know. So, a member of our class was kind. Were they kind to someone else in our class?

Melinda: No.

Teacher: Then they must have been kind to someone in another class?

Melinda: Yes.

Teacher: Whose class is it?

Melinda: Mrs Jones.

Teacher: Someone in our class was kind to someone in Mrs Jones' class. What kind thing did they do?

Melinda: They helped them.

Teacher: To do what?

Melinda: To clean up a big mess.

Teacher: A big mess! And what caused the big mess?

Melinda: They dropped their lunch and it went splat.

Teacher: So this was at lunchtime?

Melinda: Yes.

Teacher: The person from Mrs Jones' class dropped their lunch and the person from our class helped them to clean it up. Is that right?

Melinda: Yes.

Teacher: And you think that was a kind thing to do?

Melinda: Yes.

Teacher: Well I do to. Thanks for sharing that story Melinda and thank you to the person who helped someone from another class who had a problem.

(Joseph puts up his hand)

Teacher: Yes Joseph?

Joseph: That was me that helped Andrew.

Teacher: You mean Melinda's story was about you helping Andrew when he dropped his lunch?

Joseph: Yes, I helped him clean it all up.

Teacher: Is that right Melinda?

Melinda: Yes.

Teacher: Now Joseph, Melinda didn't tell us your name or Andrews for a reason. We have talked about this quite a bit and you seem to have forgotten. I think it will help if I go through things again. Melinda, when you do the right thing, do you do it to get a reward or because you know and believe it's the best thing to do?

Melinda: Because it's the best thing to do

Teacher: Of course you do. Now tell me, is kindness a right thing or a wrong thing to do?

Melinda: It's a right thing to do

Teacher: I'm so glad you know that. So, if it's the right thing to do then being kind is also the best thing to do, is that right?

Melinda: Yes.

Teacher: Joseph, do you agree that doing something kind is the right thing and the best thing to do?

Joseph: Yes.

Teacher: And that's why you helped Andrew. Melinda, do you do kind things to get rewards or do you do them because they are they are the right and best things to do?

Melinda: Right and best thing to do.

Teacher: Now, see if you can work this out. Do you do kind things so that people see you doing them or do you do them because they're the right and best things to do?

Melinda: I do them because they're the right and best things to do.

Teacher: Do you do right things to so that people will thank you and say well done or do you do them because they're the right and best thing to do?

Melinda: Because they're the right and best thing to do.

Teacher: Joseph, when you kindly helped Andrew did he thank you?

Joseph: Yes.

Teacher: Of course he did, because he's polite and he was grateful. Now, a tricky question - Melinda, if someone didn't say thank you when you helped them, would you still help them again if they needed it?

Melinda: Yes.

Teacher: You would?

Melinda: Yes.

Teacher: Melinda, that tells me you believe in the Golden Rule and you're strong enough to stick to it. Joseph, Andrew knows you helped him and he's glad you did. Melinda knows you helped Andrew and she's glad you did. Two people know what you did and are glad you did it. Now, a tricky question for you - Did you help Andrew so that you or someone else could tell all of us that you were kind, or did you help Andrew because it was the right and best thing to do?

Joseph: I helped Andrew because it was the right and best thing to do

Teacher: That's what we all have to believe about each other. That each and every one of us would do the right thing because it's the right and best thing to do – not because we want everyone to know we did it. Melinda, if someone is only going to be kind because people will notice them, what is going to happen if there is no one to notice them? Will they still be kind or will they just not bother?

Melinda: Just not bother

Teacher: You see Joseph, that's the problem. I would like to believe that you and everyone else would be kind if no one noticed them. That you'd be kind because kind is right and that's enough for you. Melinda told us about a boy in our class who helped a boy in another class. She told us about a boy who had been kind. You knew it was you, Melinda knew it was. Do you think that's enough? Do you think you can feel good about your kindness without me or anyone else knowing it was you? Can you feel good about what you did just because you did it?

Joseph: Yes.

Teacher: Of course you can. Joseph you did a very good thing. You were kind and you don't need me or a whole load of people to know it was you for you to feel good about that. Does that make sense to you?

Joseph: Yes.

Teacher: You told me it was you and I'm happy to know that, but I'll be even happier to know that you can do the right thing, the kind thing without anyone knowing. Can you do that Joseph? Can you do the right and best thing without anyone knowing and still feel good about it?

Joseph: Yes.

Teacher: Now, that is being strong. Boys and girls I hope we can all be strong but you know what – most times when we are being kind, someone knows about it. Sometimes it's only the person you're being kind to. Sometimes it's someone who saw you, like Melinda saw Joseph. Whichever one it is, I reckon it's enough and if someone shares a story about your kindness don't tell us it was you, just listen and feel good about what you did and how you were helping to make our school safer and stronger. Thank you for listening and learning Joseph and thank you for thinking carefully about your answers Melinda. Let's move on. Has anyone got another story about someone being kind they would like to share with us? And remember no names.