

Parenting - 5 tips for raising kind kids.

How to teach your children to be kind

You may wonder, as a parent, if you can teach your kids to be kind. Or are kids born that way? The answer is both. Kids are born kind and they also learn to be kind from others.

There is a hormone in the brain that helps. It helps with bonding, caring, love, trust, and generosity. You, and other adults they know, also teach your kids to be kind.

"The environment in which kids are raised plays a key role in kindness," says Laura Lamminen, Ph.D., ABPP, a board-certified pediatric psychologist with Children's HealthSM. "When parents are gentle and kind towards their children – when they soothe them when they're feeling down, when they provide love and compassion, – kids, in turn, develop those skills and share them with others."

Why being kind is a good thing

Studies show that people who are kind are more likely to feel they belong. They also feel better about themselves.

"Raising kind kids has many benefits, both physical and mental," explains Dr. Lamminen. "Kindness is good for the heart; it builds self-confidence and connections and increases happiness."

Being kind may help your kids:

- Have more energy
- Feel better about themselves
- Feel happy and more positive
- Be accepted by friends

Also, being kind can help kids have less:

- Sadness (depression)
- Pain
- Stress
- Worry
- High blood pressure

How to raise kind kids

Being kind, yourself, is one of the best ways to teach your child to be kind. When you do something nice for another person – like saying hello or bringing in a neighbor's trash cans – your child will see what you do and learn to do the same thing. "Kindness is catching. When kids see someone being kind, they want to pay it forward," says Dr. Lamminen.

Most kids who are kind have these things in common:

- **Giving** – they may give of their time or give in another way
- **Thoughtful** – they think about others and do nice things for others
- **Positive** – they like to help, share, volunteer, and donate
- **Empathy** – they see and understand how people feel

Kids can learn to act kind even when they are very young “Kids want to make people happy, and parents can encourage those feelings.” When a child who is 2 years old does not want to share a toy, here is what you can say. “We share toys with others, and it makes play more fun.”

Here are 5 tips to start teaching your kids to be kind.

1. Bond with your kids

Even when your child is very young, there are many ways you can bond with them. Do things like snuggle, hug, and kiss. Do things together, such as read a book, hold them closely while they feed, play with them. Notice what your child needs. Show them you understand what they are feeling.

2. Help your kids learn to get along

When your child accepts, helps, and plays well with other kids, they learn to get along with others. Help your child meet their own needs and the needs of others. When your child does something good, be sure to tell them by saying something like, “You were kind and helpful to your friend.”

3. Tell your kids why you are proud of them

When you praise your child, be sure to say what they did that was good. Instead of saying, “I’m proud of you,” say, “I’m proud that you helped your friend find his book. It was nice of you to take the time to help.” This tells them what they did that you are proud of them for.

4. Show your kids how to act

You are a role model for your child. Let them see you do something good for someone – even when it does not help you. Let your child help you with these acts of kindness. Take your child with you to help others.

5. Help your kids connect with others

Ask your child how they can help their teacher. If your child doesn’t have older relatives, there might be older members in the neighborhood they can get to know. Go together to visit and even help older family members or neighbors.

There are many ways you and your kids can help in the community. Volunteer with your child. This teaches kindness, respect, understanding and patience. Local non-profits often offer teens a chance to volunteer. These are great ways for teens to connect with others who are like them.