

The Dance of Kindness: Promoting Goodwill in Your Program



"Be Nice!"

We have often heard adults say, "Be nice!" or "That isn't nice!" Do we expect children to just "be nice"? Of course, we would like them to, but realistically it's not always that simple. As with all components of caring for children, we need to consider the child's developmental ability, family, culture, and background.

Naturally Kind?

Are children naturally kind? Research has shown that children can express kindness at a very young age. We have all seen the young toddler gently stroke a crying friend's face, or the preschooler who tries to bring the baby a bottle. Kindness is genuine in most children and occurs as a result of sincere response, not because of adult

expectations. Instead of expecting kindness, it is more important to inspire kindness. What inspires children to be kind?

Inspiring Kindness

Think of what inspires you to be kind. It probably is not being yelled at or made to feel bad, but rather being encouraged, witnessing acts of goodwill, or having understand-

ing of others' needs. When we are surrounded by others who show kindness, it motivates us to be kind, also. In order for children to act kind, they need to be completely cared for, nurtured, and loved. Their environment should be safe and one that promotes positive, supportive experiences.

Setting the Stage for Kindness

The environments and experiences we prepare for young children can have a powerful effect on kindness. Creating a sense of community and family provides children with a nurturing atmosphere. When we feel part of a family, we want to care for that family.

Try building community by doing the following:

- Offer a welcome sign (include everyone's name and picture)
- Display and label pictures of children, families, and happenings of the group
- Create spaces for positive interactions (cozy reading area, art, dramatic play)
- Add home-like touches (table lamps, cozy rugs, tablecloths, flowers)
- Provide mailboxes for families and children
- Communicate through notes, newsletters, notice boards, e-mail, and everyday greetings



Doing the Dance

We can encourage kind actions and the understanding of others by offering role play. Young children need to practice opportunities to work out their feelings and ideas in acceptable ways. Dramatic play, puppets, and stories are helpful in identifying feelings and discovering solutions to problems.

When a difficult concept arises, pose the idea of "Let's help. What can we do?" Allowing children to analyze what to do is much more valuable than simply telling them what to do.

Promoting Goodwill

We can all help one another in creating goodwill. The child care environment is a great place to start. Consider doing the dance of kindness everyday by encouraging the following in your environment:

- Re-tell kind actions children have experienced ("Jay and Sally shared their Zoo building with Ethan. They had such fun!")
- Provide opportunities to care for materials, plants, and each other
- Create "thank you" display areas, such as bulletin boards, sharing acts of kindness
- Offer writing materials to promote communication with families, friends, and others
- Create caring rituals: make cards for those absent, pass a hug at circle time, sing welcome and "see you tomorrow" songs, send happy thoughts to each other
- Make Connections with the community (cooks, bus drivers, neighbors, maintenance, etc.)

Your guidance will help children choose kind, considerate, and helpful actions.

The Dance Continues

We all need nurturing. Discover ways to show acts of kindness to those you work with; celebrate accomplishments, share ideas, help each other, or simply share a smile and kind word. The dance of kindness leaves both children and adults feeling a sense of caring and hope. Children learn vital skills that will stay in their hearts and minds as they continue to experience life.

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