

Practicing Acts of Kindness - Activity Four:

The centrality of social connections to our health and well-being cannot be overstressed. “Relationships constitute the single most important factor responsible for survival of homo sapiens.” Evidence clearly shows that investing in social relationships is a potent tool in becoming happier.

Scientific research has shown that doing acts of kindness on a regular basis makes people happier for an extended period of time. “If you want to be happy, practice compassion”, and true happiness consists of making others happy.”

Being kind and generous leads you to perceive others more positively and more charitably and fosters a heightened sense of interdependence and cooperation in your social community (e.g. “it takes a village to raise a child.” Doing acts of kindness relieves guilt, distress, or discomfort over others difficulties and encourages a sense of awareness and appreciation for your own good fortune. In other words it makes you feel advantaged and thankful, and can provide welcome relief from your own troubles and ruminations. It also benefits your self-perception, creating a new identity resulting in increased confidence, optimism and usefulness. It also develops creativity and can develop new skills. Finally kindness can jump start a cascade of positive social consequences.

Activity 1 – Timing is everything: It is best to select some acts of kindness and then work out how often and how much. If you do too little you will not get the kindness benefit, if you do too much may feel overburdened, angry or fatigued. Try picking one day per week and on that day only, commit to a special act (s) of kindness.

Activity 2 – Variety is the Spice of Life: Try to mix them up, be creative and spice them up, vary what you do. This will prevent you “getting used to it” as we adapt to these acts.

Activity 3 – Chain of Kindness: Remember that kindness has a ripple effect. The recipient maybe cheered, surprised, or comforted and your thoughtful act may trigger him or her to return the favor. E.g. after watching heroic acts of kindness by New York firefighters in the aftermath of 9/11, TV viewers donated blood up to five times the normal rate.