

# KINDNESS ART FOR KIDS

Difficulty: **CASUAL** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **VARIABLE**

## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

During childhood, being inclusive of and caring for others—especially those who may be different from us—can sometimes require extra practice. By the age of three, children already determine who is most like them in group settings and tend to show a preference for those children. This preference peaks around middle childhood and is especially obvious in situations that involve competition.

Helping children to focus on acts of kindness leads them to want to help, share, and comfort each other, even those who may be different from them. These are important keys to inclusion and building positive communities. And kindness is good for kids: School-age children who **engage in kind acts** are more well-liked by their peers and have improved well-being. The **benefits** of kindness are even seen as early as toddlerhood—young children are happier when giving to others than when receiving.

Using the creative arts is a fun, accessible, and meaningful way to help kids be more inclusive that also permits self-expression and creativity. With minimal investment in time and resources, kindness art activities can have a lasting effect.

## TIME REQUIRED

Depending on how creative you want to get, this practice can take as little as five or 10 minutes.

## HOW TO DO IT

There are many ways we can inspire our children to be kind, from the way we **talk** and **praise** them to the **stories** we read together. But there is another easy way to encourage kindness in kids: with art.

To connect with kindness more deeply, the first step is for children to seek out stories of kindness in everyday life. For example, your child might encounter stories of kindness on the news, on social media, or from talking to someone they know; or they may witness or experience kindness at school. You can even encourage children to interview people in their community, like firefighters, to learn about stories of kind acts they've experienced or performed.

Next, encourage your child to focus on the act of kindness and absorb it further by making art about it. Children can write songs, paint, draw, create collage boards, or write and illustrate picture books or comic books to tell stories of kindness. When possible, you can encourage children to collaborate with others to create art together.

For example, if your child shares a story about how a classmate helped them on the first day of school when they were lost, or how they helped a friend who hurt their leg on the playground, encourage them to retell the story with art. The time and attention your child gives to painting a picture about what happened allow them to internalize that act of kindness, which may inspire them to be kind the next time they see someone in need of care.

## EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Van de Vyver, J., Abrams, D., Spinner, L., Pelletier, J., Ali, S. Y., & Kapantai, I. (2019). [Participatory arts interventions](#)

[promote interpersonal and intergroup prosocial intentions in middle childhood](#). *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 65, 1-9.

Children between five and 10 years old either made art to celebrate stories of kindness with local artists or learned about kindness from their usual school-based curriculum. Children who made kindness art increased in their intentions to help, share, or comfort another child in need, but this wasn't the case for children who learned about kindness from a curriculum. When children participated in this kind of arts program for seven months, their intentions to be kind increased for up to six months later.

## WHY TO TRY IT

Connecting with everyday stories of kindness in their communities helps children focus on and absorb the kindness of others in a deeper way than just learning about kindness abstractly in routine school lessons. It makes the kindness seem more real. Making art about those kindness stories magnifies children's attention to kindness and helps them internalize it, so they're more likely to act with kindness, in turn.

Researchers suggest that arts engagement promotes kindness through psychological experiences that happen when making art, like feeling carried away, building social and cognitive skills, creating connections and identities, and moral reflection. The arts—including [music](#), as well—naturally support human connection and social cohesion in ways that transcend differences.

## SOURCES

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

