

MOVIES TO NURTURE KINDNESS IN KIDS

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

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Like many children these days, your kids may lead busy lives full of homework, chores, and other activities. If their lives feel mundane and routine at times, how can you help uplift and inspire them, and remind them what matters?

We might think of awe as something that we experience at museums, faraway national parks, or awards ceremonies. But we can find awe in everyday experiences, as long as we're mindful and open to noticing when something is impressive or wonderful in our usual routines with our children, even during movie nights.

Research suggests that awe **promotes well-being** in many ways. It can help foster better mental health by decreasing stress, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. What's more, it can nurture better physical health by decreasing aches and pains and sleep problems, and improving cardiovascular health and longevity. Researchers have also found that the **benefits of awe** on well-being extend to children in middle school and high school.

TIME REQUIRED

The time needed varies depending on the experience of awe you and your child share, but it's important not to rush so they can fully savor it.

HOW TO DO IT

Art can inspire a range of emotions, like joy or sadness. It can also inspire **awe**—a feeling we get in the presence of something vast that challenges our understanding of the world. In this practice, we'll be seeking out an awe experience with our child to help uplift them and nudge them toward kindness and compassion.

1. **Pick an awe-inspiring movie to watch.** Look for elements like nature, uplifting music, or amazing feats—like a character's fantastical transformation or a wondrous, gravity-defying journey.
2. **Try to notice and highlight particular parts in the film that are awe-inspiring.** Either during the movie or after, draw your child's attention to those scenes and talk about what you each felt. Did the movie make you both say, "Wow!" or "Whoa!"? Did it take your breath away or leave you both speechless?
3. **Get inspired.** While your child is feeling this emotion that has changed their perspective, you can invite them to consider how they can make an impact in the world to help others. For example, when they feel a sense of connection to something bigger than themselves, they might want to engage in small acts of care for nature—like conscientiously turning off the lights in an empty room—or for people—like organizing a school supply drive to make back-to-school kits for refugee children.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Stamkou, E., Brummelman, E., Dunham, R., Nikolic, M., & Keltner, D. (2023). **Awe sparks prosociality in children.** *Psychological Science*, 34(4), 455-467.

In two studies, eight- to 13-year-old children (mostly Dutch) were randomly assigned to view short movie clips that elicited either awe (from *Song of the Sea*), joy, or a neutral response. After viewing the clip, the children were given

the opportunity to help refugees by processing donations or donating the reward they earned for participating in the study—both entirely voluntary. Children who viewed the awe video were more likely to help refugees and showed greater parasympathetic nervous system activity, which indicates calm social engagement.

WHY TO TRY IT

Awe is considered a self-transcendent emotion: It focuses our attention away from ourselves and toward others and our environment. Experiences that elicit awe can be natural or human-made, but generally they are vast in relation to the self and exceed our current knowledge. These qualities make us feel small, humble, and less entitled as we recognize the mysteries behind our experiences—some of which we may never fully understand—and readjust our way of thinking to accommodate what we are taking in.

As we open ourselves up to things and people around us, we also feel more connected to others and the world, which can explain why awe-eliciting experiences increase our desire to help others.

SOURCES

[Eftychia Stamkou, Ph.D.](#), University of Amsterdam

[Dacher Keltner, Ph.D.](#), University of California, Berkeley

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](#).

