

MUSIC TO INSPIRE KINDNESS IN KIDS

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

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Kindness is good for kids. School-age children who engage in kind acts **benefit**—they 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.

As parents, we want to see our children be kind at home and at school. But the practice of sharing and helping can sometimes be challenging for young children because their perspective-taking skills and impulse-control abilities are still developing.

Making music together can foster connection and kindness between people, even if they have just met. If you facilitate this practice between your child and someone new—like a distant relative they’re meeting for the first time or a new student in class—they may have more positive “first impressions” of each other that could lead to a stronger relationship.

TIME REQUIRED

This practice can take as little as five 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 music.

You can try making music alone with your child, but it might be even better to make music in a larger group. Invite your child and their friends, relatives, or new acquaintances to join in a circle and sing a song together. It doesn’t matter which song you pick; the song can be relatively short and have any theme, or simply be made up in that very moment. You can make music using only your own voices or by playing simple instruments—or **homemade instruments** like maracas or tambourines. You can even encourage a bit of dancing to make it more fun!

Research suggests that joint music-making can inspire kids to be generous afterward. This practice can be particularly helpful when we anticipate that our children will be presented with a request or an opportunity to share and help others (like at a birthday party or a play date with a new playmate) and we would like to see them embrace the occasion to be kind.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Beck, S. L., & Rieser, J. (2020). **Non-random acts of kindness: Joint music making increases preschoolers’ helping and sharing with an adult.** *Psychology of Music*.

Preschoolers between three and six years old were randomly assigned to one of two play activities: In the musical activity, one of the researchers sang a simple song and invited the child and another researcher to sing along and sway to the music; in the other activity, the researcher spoke the same song lyrics like a poem. During both activities,

the researcher invited the child and the other researcher to play shakers. The study found that children in the musical activity more often shared stickers and spontaneously helped the researchers compared to the children who didn't hear music.

WHY TO TRY IT

Across cultures, music is often incorporated into ceremonies of important events, such as weddings or initiation rites. [Scholars](#) suggest that music may have evolved as a tool to foster social bonding and group cohesion. As such, joint music making is a form of interaction that can help bring people together, increasing our willingness to care for and share our resources with one another.

Making music together may also lead to more eye contact, a social behavior that can [promote](#) helping and other cooperative behaviors.

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](#).

