Random Acts of Kindness Week

Kindness is more than buying a stranger a cup of coffee. Learning how to be kind to ourselves will help us be authentic and kind to others.

Why Dedicate a Week to Kindness?

Science finds that positive effects of kindness are experienced in the brain of those who receive or witness an act of kindness. Experiencing kindness improves mood and makes people significantly more likely to “pay it forward.”

Participate in the 7 Day Kindness Challenge, Starting February 16, 2020

Take part in our 7 days of science-based strategies to boost kindness, happiness, and social connection. The challenge will encourage you to step out of your comfort zone and do some things that maybe you haven’t done before or have wanted to do but weren’t sure how to get started. Each day’s practice offers a new science-based practice to help give your kindness a supercharge.

Challenge Themes

Random Acts of Kindness  Gratitude
Courage  Focusing on the Good
Assertiveness  Self-Compassion
Strengths and Perseverance

Start Your Kindness Journey
unh.edu/health/kind

Reflect and Share

After you have completed the 7 day kindness challenge, visit unh.edu/health/kind to tell us how it went for an opportunity to win a free 50 minute massage therapy session at Health & Wellness.
Courage to Be Social

We feel better emotionally and are more engaged in all aspects of our lives when we experience authentic and trustworthy connection with others. But sometimes the fear of taking risks, being awkward, or social rejection can stop us from saying “hello” to the person next to us in class, smiling at the stranger on the street, or asking that person we have been curious about to have lunch. Feeling fearful can keep us isolated, lonely, and possibly motivate us to engage in unhelpful behaviors that may temporarily help us feel comfortable in social situations. For example, the desire for comfort in social connection is a key motivator for why college students may choose to use alcohol/other drugs in social settings. Unfortunately, this coping strategy is temporary, can lead to undesirable consequences and doesn’t actually create authentic and meaningful social bonds.

Today’s challenge asks you to use your courage to face your fears in ways that are healthy and helpful to experience authentic social engagement and connection with those around you.

How to Do It

• **Expose yourself to small doses of fear-inducing activity in a safe context with low-pressure.** Think about what would be a low-pressure context for you. This may be saying “hello” to someone, putting your phone down before class and making warm eye contact.

• **As you prepare to face your social fears, notice how your body is responding.** You may feel butterflies in your stomach, sweaty hands, or racing heart. It’s okay. Acknowledging how fear shows up in your body, instead of trying to ignore it, will help you create mental space so that you can keep moving forward.

• **Take deep and slow breaths.** Breathing helps regulate the body’s stress response so that you can feel ease in the body and clarity in the mind. Repeat as needed.

• **Make a choice.** In this moment you can decide to stay in your comfort zone or you can decide to use your courage and take the leap forward. If you decide to take the leap forward you may notice natural reactions of feeling awkward or losing your words. Be gentle with yourself—you are trying something new and that you fear.

• **Repeat until you start to feel the fear dissipate.** Over time, repeated exposure to a safe, non-harmful version of what you fear can reduce the negative association. Keep practicing your small doses. This will continue to boost your confidence and courage.

• **Gradually use your courage to increase the challenge.** After you begin to feel more comfortable with the small doses, try taking it up a notch.

• **Let go of the expectation of perfection.** Your fear may never go away completely, but hopefully it will hold less power over you and not prevent you from achieving goals and enjoying life.

Why It Works

Fear may be natural, but it’s not always helpful. Sometimes our brains mistakenly learn to send fear signals even when there is no real danger, perhaps based on one or two bad experiences. Gradually and repeatedly using our courage to expose ourselves to the activities we fear the most can help boost confidence and teach our brains that these activities are not in fact dangerous—and may actually be very rewarding.

Learn More at unh.edu/health/kind