



# Teaching kindness

**Promoting kindness starts at home and can be continually reinforced through books and stories for children of all ages.** *By Holly Tiret, Michigan State University Extension*

Anyone can turn on the television or radio, or visit the internet throughout the day or night and find massive amounts of negative stories depicting the potential cruelty of mankind. It may seem like a losing battle. However, we do have the option of trying to change things for the better. We can start with our own choices of what we pay attention to or click on. We can also work to make changes in our own families and the children we are connected.

**Here are some ways to help build kindness in your family.**

**Practice kindness:** One easy way to start is to be more intentionally kind when interacting with children. Instead of barking commands and expecting immediate compliance, try the soft approach first. “Can you please go wash your hands for dinner?” or, “Wow, your room looks really cluttered; it must be hard to find things. How about I help you and we can get it organized together quickly!” This type of behavior can quickly spread in a good way!

**Model kindness:** Think about opportunities you can bring your kids along while you do something kind for someone else. For example, bring your kids along with you while you deliver those home baked cookies to your friends or elderly neighbors. “Mr. Jones doesn’t have any family in town. I bet he would love some homemade cookies for a treat. Let’s go surprise him with cookies and a visit.”

**Help your children help others:** If you have teens old enough to drive, enlist their support in running family errands and carpooling brothers and sisters to activities. “It would really help out if you could take Marisa to her basketball game, and pick up some milk for dinner on your way back.” This helps teens feel a sense of freedom along with a sense of responsibility. The message they get is that, “families work better when we work together as a team.”

**Read books:** Reading books about kindness and acceptance can help reinforce positive messages about how you want your children to treat others. MSU Extension recommends some of the following titles to check with your local library for. Remember, if your library does not have them, ask – many times they will add them to their collection.

*Be Polite and Kind*, by Cheri J. Meiners.

*Accept and Value Each Person*, by Cheri J. Meiners.

*Words Wound: Delete Cyberbullying and Make Kindness Go Viral*, by Justin W. Patchin and Sameer Hinduja.

**William James (1842 – 1910) a pioneering American psychologist and philosopher is quoted as saying:**  
**“Human beings by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.”**  
Being intentionally kind can spark a change for the better in your life, your children’s and in our communities.



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