

3 STRATEGIES FOR RAISING KIND KIDS

In a world full of hostility and division, we should raise kind kids who love not only those in our homes but also the world around them. Kindness is high on my list of characteristics I want to see in my kids. I love it when my kids' teachers tell me that my offspring are really kind in the classroom. Raising kind kids takes effort and intentionality.

One of our family's core values is that 'Cooley's are kind.' My wife often reminds our children that there's a significant difference between kindness and being nice. Anyone, even those who may not always be pleasant, can put on a nice act from time to time. Being nice is often about seeking social approval, about acting a certain way for personal gain in specific situations. However, kindness is a deeper, more genuine form of care. It's about the other person, about seeing them the way God sees them. It's about sharing love, grace, and empathy without expecting anything in return.

Here are three strategies for raising kind kids:

1. Model Kind Behavior

Children learn a lot by observing the adults around them. They learn the most from mom and dad. As parents, we must set the example and demonstrate kindness in our daily actions. This can include:

- **Helping Others:** Show your kids how you assist neighbors, friends, or even strangers. This might be through volunteering, donating to those in need, or simply being polite and respectful in everyday interactions.
- **Speaking Kindly:** Use positive and encouraging language, and refrain from gossiping or talking negatively about others. Explain why it's important to be considerate with words.
- **Showing Gratitude:** Express thankfulness for small acts of kindness you receive. Make a habit of saying "thank you" and encourage your children to do the same.

Paul tells us in Ephesians how to model kindness.

Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ (Ephesians 4:31-32).

2. Teach Empathy

This might be a big word for your kids but it's a powerful tool. Empathy is the ability to understand and share another person's feelings and emotions. It involves recognizing someone else's emotional state, imagining how they might be feeling, and responding with care and concern. Empathy goes beyond sympathy (feeling pity or sorrow for someone's misfortune) by incorporating a deeper connection to the other person's experience.

- **Talk About Emotions:** Have open discussions about feelings. Ask your children how they felt in various situations and how they think others might have felt. This helps them recognize and respect different emotions.

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- **Share Stories:** Read books, watch movies, or share things from your day that highlight empathy, kindness, and moral dilemmas. Discuss the characters' emotions and actions and ask your children how they would respond in similar situations.
- **Examine Perspectives:** Encourage your children to consider other people's perspectives. When conflicts arise, help them see things from the other person's point of view and discuss how to resolve the issue with kindness.

3. Create Opportunities for Kindness

Put kindness into practice and help your kids see and feel it in real-life situations. We can't effectively teach anything without practicing what we are preaching. Again, we must lead the way when we give them opportunities.

- **Give Them Responsibilities:** Assign tasks that involve helping others, like setting the table, helping a sibling with homework, or taking care of a pet. Emphasize the importance of contributing to the family and helping each other.
- **Serve Others:** Participate in service projects as a family. Volunteering at a shelter, participating in a charity run, or collecting donations for a cause teaches children the value of giving back to the community.
- **Encourage Random Acts of Kindness:** Motivate your children to perform small, spontaneous acts of kindness, like sharing toys, complimenting others, or writing thank-you notes. Recognize and praise their efforts to reinforce positive behavior.

Let's Be Kind Together

When was the last time you modeled kindness for your kids?

Can you think of a time when you should have modeled kindness and you didn't?

Share that with your family and tell them how you could have handled the situation in a kind way.

Do you have open discussions about emotions with your kids? If not, in the next week try to begin opening the door to chatting about emotions, empathy and feelings. Activity: Go watch *Inside Out 1* and/or *Inside Out 2* together as a family - it's a great discussion starter!

When is the last time you served or did a random act of kindness as a family? Now is a great time to start! Try scheduling a service project within the next month.

In a world where you can be anything, BE KIND!