

Making the Case for Kindness

Challenge #1: In Virginia, approximately 15 percent of children have had at least one major depressive episode ([VA Youth Survey, 2019](#)).

Can kindness help? Physiologically, kindness can positively change your brain. Being kind boosts serotonin and dopamine, which are neurotransmitters in the brain that give you feelings of satisfaction and well-being, and cause the pleasure/reward centers in your brain to light up ([Siegle, 2020](#)).

Challenge #2: Teachers are reporting a decrease in student motivation and their ability to concentrate.

Can kindness help? It is well documented that kindness increases serotonin levels in the brain. This important chemical affects our mood, health, and even our digestion. However, scientists have delved deeper and uncovered another benefit of serotonin: boosting learning and memory. Research found that serotonin boosts neural plasticity by influencing the rate of learning ([Iigaya, K., Fonseca, M.S., Murakami, M. 2018](#)).

Challenge #3: Students and staff are reporting increased feelings of stress.

Can kindness help? A growing body of research is demonstrating that being kind can counter stress. A study done in 2019 investigated whether daily help-giving has unique benefits for adolescents experiencing emotional distress. For ten days, the participants reported their acts of kindness (prosocial behavior) as well as their mood. Participants experienced increased positive mood on days that they were more prosocial; which highlights the unique benefits of prosociality in adolescents' daily lives, suggesting that everyday help-giving can improve adolescents' ability to cope with stress ([Schacter, Margolin, 2019](#)).

Similar results were found to be true with adults. In a Yale University study, participants filled out an online assessment each day for two weeks where they logged acts of kindness that they did as well as stressful life events. The key finding of the study was that on days where participants engaged in acts of kindness (i.e. helping others), they experienced less stress; on the other hand, on days where they engaged in less acts of kindness, they experienced more stress ([Raposa, Laws, Ansell, 2016](#)).

In summary, let's circle back to our initial question: *With everything educators are responsible for, do we really have time to teach kindness?* Considering all the benefits of kindness, it may be more important to ask, can we truly afford not to?

