

Practicing Loving Kindness

By Meena Srinivasan



Practice Loving Kindness

An Empathy Activity for Teachers and Students

“Looking at people and communicating that they can be loved, and that they can love in return, is giving them a tremendous gift. It is also a gift to ourselves. We see that we are one with the fabric of life.” - Sharon Salzberg

Let's engage in an experiment. Hold a thought with your awareness.

What's bigger, the thought or your awareness of the thought?

This simple exercise can be a great reminder that our awareness is often larger than our thoughts or what we are feeling. Our awareness of what we are experiencing in any moment can be expressed as “the ultimate embrace.” The ultimate embrace of holding and labeling our strong emotions, thoughts, and sensations as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral helps us identify with them less as ourselves and more as just what we are experiencing now in the moment.

By loosening our identification with our experiences, we are able to look more closely at them; this investigation leads to understanding what's happening in the moment, which in turn harvests insight. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches us to soothe our strong emotions through invoking the image of a mother holding her crying baby. Just as the mother embraces her crying child with love, we too can hold our strong emotions with tenderness. For many of us, teaching is driven by love. Leading with love is revolutionary, but it isn't something explicitly talked about in our academic preparation to become educators. Yet, without love we feel disconnected and alone, and this causes so much suffering. Love is essential to the classroom.

Practicing Loving Kindness



The Practice of Loving Kindness

Before you leave for school in the morning or before students arrive to your classroom, try to send yourself loving kindness. You can do this by following these steps:

1. Bring awareness to your breathing and calm your body with each breath.
2. Visualize a warm, glowing light in your heart and connect with an image of yourself in your mind's eye hugging yourself, while saying silently with each breath "You are loved" at least five times.

Send Kindness Through Your Heart

Then when students enter the classroom, try to make eye contact with each one of them and send them loving kindness energy from your heart. You can even silently say their names like: "Grace, you are loved. Jacob, you are loved. Ruby, you are loved." This may sound dubious, but in fact this practice can help you get into a warm, loving state before you greet your students, and it does wonders to really humanize and harmonize your relationship with them.

Try to radiate love from your heart when you teach, especially when you have a student that's going through a tough time, whether it's their parents' divorce, a sick parent, or a lost soccer match.

Reflect on Kindness Received

If you think back to your own childhood and try to remember your own school experiences, you might see that this warm bond of loving kindness was present between yourself and the teachers you liked best. You can even expand the practice to your colleagues and the parents of your students. We all just wish to feel happy and loved and through sending loving kindness we are able to lessen this sense of being separate. We are all partners in this work of touching the hearts and minds of our young people.

Send Kindness Through Writing

Finally, more and more schools invite teachers to write narratives about each child to complement their grading. Try to look at this as an opportunity to send loving kindness to your students. The process of writing these "love letter" reports can become truly enjoyable. You can be honest in your assessment of each student and reflect on areas that needed strengthening, but the process can also make you look deeply at each child, recognize their gifts, and highlight their uniqueness.

Practicing Loving Kindness



Practice Loving Kindness with Your Students

1. Ask students to define kindness. Write up the definitions they offer and try to come up with a shared classroom understanding of what kindness is. You may want to share what kindness means to you and be sure to speak to how we can be kind to others and not just ourselves.
2. Now invite students to engage in a kindness reflection. Have them start by first sending kindness to themselves by repeating the following phrases:

May I touch happiness

May I live in peace

May I always feel embraced by love

(Now ask them to choose one person to send kindness from their heart to)

May my loved ones touch happiness and feel joy

May my loved ones live in peace

May my loved ones always feel embraced by love

If you think it's appropriate and you have time, you can engage them in a discussion of whether it is possible to love someone but not their actions. Talk about how everyone just wants to be happy and how this desire connects us. You can also encourage them to partake in stealth kindness, where you send kindness to individuals you may not know personally, to the passengers in the car next to you while driving, in line at the grocery store, and so on.

Use the following pages to guide your students through a discussion about practicing loving kindness.

Practicing Loving Kindness



Practicing Loving Kindness: Guided Discussion

Student Edition (Elementary)

How do you define kindness?

After the class decides on a shared definition of kindness, copy it below:

What are some examples of how we can be kind to others?

- _____
- _____
- _____

When your teacher says it's time, say these kindness reminders aloud as a class:

May I live in happiness and peace

May I always feel love

May my loved ones feel happiness and joy

May my loved ones live in peace

Practicing Loving Kindness



Practicing Loving Kindness: Guided Discussion

Student Edition (Middle & High School)

How do you define kindness?

After the class decides on a shared definition of kindness, take a moment to reflect: How did the discussion change your understanding of kindness?

Questions to explore in your small group or pair:

- What are some ways we can be kind to one another in our daily lives?
- Is it possible to love or care about someone but not love their actions?
- How does our desire to be happy connect all of us?
- How might thinking kind thoughts, and sending kindness to each other simply through our awareness, help influence our actions and the way we treat people?

Kindness Reflection:

May I touch happiness

May I live in peace

May I always feel embraced by love

May my loved ones touch happiness and feel joy

May my loved ones live in peace

May my loved ones always feel embraced by love