

11-16-19

REMARKS: I am here today to advocate for added focus and strategic promotion of Alexandria as a City of “kindness and compassion.” The added focus assumes actualizing our City’s public identity will help enhance our City’s overall health and wellness. The added strategic promotion assumes there is informed reasoned buy-in from public and private entities as well as individual residents.

Three years ago, in response to a negative situation, the Mayor and City Council responded by transforming that negative situation into a positive (1) first by quieting the fears of many Alexandrians and (2) second, at the risk of being misunderstood, Council signed a statement identifying Alexandria as a City of Kindness and Compassion that has yet to be publicly endorsed by public or private entities in the City. Why not is not clear. For the record, I do not know why the City Leadership choose kindness and compassion as the City’s identity but I believe it was a wise action. Why? Because individually and collectively, we now have increased incentive to be who we say we are with verifiable action - socially, politically, and economically.

The good news is we are not alone in promoting the common good by way of kindness. Nationally, *People Magazine* has dedicated this month’s issue to kindness (see attachment 1). Also, several years ago, Harvard School of Education conducted a study and the results were published in the July 18, 2014 Washington Post (attachment 2). It revealed parents valued their children having good grades over being caring people. The good news is Harvard and other centers of learning are now encouraging their students to actively help promote the common good of all with wise informed kindness. Locally, we are blessed to have many residents and groups doing likewise. Enhanced encouragement and support from all segments of our City is desired and needed.

I think we can all agree that a one-time statement is insufficient in promoting who we now say we are publicly. We need reminders and while words do matter, actions speak louder than words be they in the form of good deeds, good public policy and correcting injustices-past and present. Faced with mounting social, political and economic challenges, I believe “we Alexandrians” will be able to transform them into opportunities as was the case, 3 years ago [this month] with wise informed kindness and compassion.

In summary, I am suggesting-starting with the City Leadership-elected and appointed; go tell it east side and west side, Alexandria is a City of Kindness and Compassion because its people make it so. And unlike the Madison Ave folks who promote it with talk, let us encourage one another to promote who we are *in public & private with action*. Thank you for listening.

Welcome to Our Kindness Issue

The world has become very divisive in the last few years. I'm not talking just about politics; so many of us have retreated into our own worlds, lost in our phones and talking online rather than in real life. That can spark a vicious cycle. "The anonymity of the Internet brings out bad behavior," says Daniel Fessler, a professor of anthropology who is heading up a new, \$20 million Kindness Institute at UCLA. "People turn inward and become distrustful of outsiders." He's been studying kindness for 15 years and says today's climate is unmatched: "Things have definitely taken a turn for the worse in regards to wellness, health and tolerance. What we're facing is unprecedented in the history of humanity."

I believe we can all help break that cycle. Instead of absentmindedly picking up your phone or scrolling social media, make a conscious effort to connect with someone. Think about what we have in common, not about our differences. Recognize that everyone is going through something—and that a little kindness goes a long way. There truly is a ripple effect: "The spread of positive behavior is contagious," says Fessler. "And science shows that practicing kindness and compassion has direct emotional, psychological and medical effects."

With this issue we hope to start a few ripples, if not a tidal wave. Starting on page 62, we're launching our first-ever Kindness Awards, celebrating people who have gone above and beyond in spreading good in their communities. To help them continue their efforts, *People* surprised each of them with a \$1,000 donation. You'll also read the stories of stars like Julia Roberts and Tiffany Haddish—both of whom say they wouldn't be where they are today without an act of kindness. It was a social worker who helped Haddish decades ago, and now she's trying to pay it forward for kids in foster care. "If the right person comes into your world even for just a moment, they can help you reset and restart," she told *People*. "Why not be that person?" I couldn't agree more.

Easy Ways to Be Kind

Our cover stars, Chip and Joanna Gaines, created flyers (download them at magnolia.com/we-believe-in-human-kindness) to inspire people to consciously choose acts of kindness. Here are some of my own favorite things to do:

Ask someone, 'How are you?'

Instead of texting, call. And really be open to hearing their answer.

Offer to buy someone a cup of coffee.

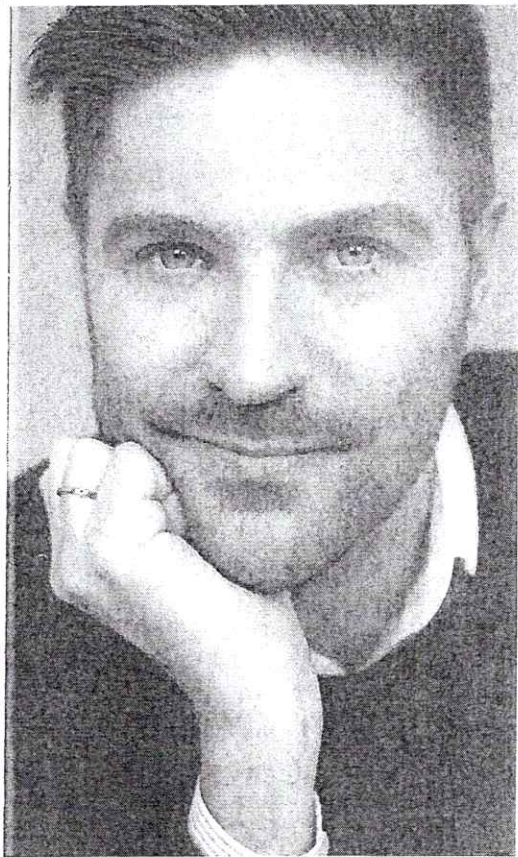
"When we're watching people scream at each other on cable news, our minds treat it as if it's happening in our front yard, and it isn't," Fessler says. To counteract all that, find easy ways to have human interaction. And who doesn't want a free coffee?

Open the door for someone or hold the elevator.

Someday you'll be the one running late and feeling grateful.

Help a neighbor.

Right now our friends and neighbors devastated by the fires in California need support more than ever. The Red Cross (redcross.org) has established multiple shelters throughout the state, and the California Fire Foundation (cafirefoundation.org) is providing immediate assistance to victims and frontline firefighters. Please give what you can.



Chip and Joanna Gaines have a multimillion dollar empire to run, but they always find time for *People*'s senior writer Emily Strohman. Emily has worked with the inspiring couple for more than three years and this week talked to them about their kindness initiative for our cover story. "From the very first moment I met Chip and Jo at their farm in Waco, Texas, they welcomed me with open arms," she says. "People always ask me, 'Are they really that nice in person? Are they really that happy?' The answer is yes! They are two of the kindest, most genuine, caring people I've been lucky enough to come across during my career at *People*."

I surprised Stephanie Bowman with her \$1,000 Kindness Award on Kelly Clarkson's Nov. 6 show!



Dan

DAN WAKEFORD,
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Are you raising nice kids? A Harvard psychologist gives 5 ways to raise them to be kind

By Amy Joyce Washington Post Writer/editor, July 18, 2014 at 11:47 a.m. EDT

Earlier this year, I wrote about teaching empathy, and whether you are a parent who does so. The idea behind it is from Richard Weissbourd, a Harvard psychologist with the graduate school of education, who runs the Making Caring Common project, aimed to help teach kids to be kind.

I know, you'd think they are or that parents are teaching that themselves, right? Not so, according to a new study released by the group.

About 80 percent of the youth in the study said their parents were more concerned with their achievement or happiness than whether they cared for others. The interviewees were also three times more likely to agree that "My parents are prouder if I get good grades in my classes than if I'm a caring community member in class and school."

Weissbourd and his cohorts have come up with recommendations about how to raise children to become caring, respectful and responsible adults. Why is this important? Because if we want our children to be moral people, we have to, well, raise them that way.

"Children are not born simply good or bad and we should never give up on them. They need adults who will help them become caring, respectful, and responsible for their communities at every stage of their childhood," the researchers write.

The five strategies to raise moral, caring children, according to Making Caring Common:

1. Make caring for others a priority

Why? Parents tend to prioritize their children's happiness and achievements over their children's concern for others. But children need to learn to balance their needs with the needs of others, whether it's passing the ball to a teammate or deciding to stand up for friend who is being bullied.

How? Children need to hear from parents that caring for others is a top priority. A big part of that is holding children to high ethical expectations, such as honoring their commitments, even if it makes them unhappy. For example, before kids quit a sports team, band, or a friendship, we should ask them to consider their obligations to the group or the friend and encourage them to work out problems before quitting.

Try this

- Instead of saying to your kids: "The most important thing is that you're happy," say "The most important thing is that you're kind."
- Make sure that your older children always address others respectfully, even when they're tired, distracted, or angry.
- Emphasize caring when you interact with other key adults in your children's lives. For example, ask teachers whether your children are good community members at school.

2. Provide opportunities for children to practice caring and gratitude

Why? It's never too late to become a good person, but it won't happen on its own. Children need to practice caring for others and expressing gratitude for those who care for them and contribute to others' lives. Studies show that people who are in the habit of expressing gratitude are more likely to be helpful, generous, compassionate, and forgiving—and they're also more likely to be happy and healthy.

How? Learning to be caring is like learning to play a sport or an instrument. Daily repetition—whether it's a helping a friend with homework, pitching in around the house, or having a classroom job—make caring second nature and develop and hone youth's caregiving capacities. Learning gratitude similarly involves regularly practicing it.

Try this

- Don't reward your child for every act of helpfulness, such as clearing the dinner table. We should expect our kids to help around the house, with siblings, and with neighbors and only reward uncommon acts of

kindness.

- Talk to your child about caring and uncaring acts they see on television and about acts of justice and injustice they might witness or hear about in the news.
- Make gratitude a daily ritual at dinnertime, bedtime, in the car, or on the subway. Express thanks for those who contribute to us and others in large and small ways.

3. Expand your child's circle of concern.

Why? Almost all children care about a small circle of their families and friends. Our challenge is helping our children learn to care about someone outside that circle, such as the new kid in class, someone who doesn't speak their language, the school custodian, or someone who lives in a distant country.

How? Children need to learn to zoom in, by listening closely and attending to those in their immediate circle, and to zoom out, by taking in the big picture and considering the many perspectives of the people they interact with daily, including those who are vulnerable. They also need to consider how their decisions, such as quitting a sports team or a band, can ripple out and harm various members of their communities. Especially in our more global world, children need to develop concern for people who live in very different cultures and communities than their own.

Try this

- Make sure your children are friendly and grateful with all the people in their daily lives, such as a bus driver or a waitress.
- Encourage children to care for those who are vulnerable. Give children some simple ideas for stepping into the "caring and courage zone," like comforting a classmate who was teased.
- Use a newspaper or TV story to encourage your child to think about hardships faced by children in another country.

4. Be a strong moral role model and mentor.

Why? Children learn ethical values by watching the actions of adults they respect. They also learn values by thinking through ethical dilemmas with adults, e.g. "Should I invite a new neighbor to my birthday party when my best friend doesn't like her?"

How? Being a moral role model and mentor means that we need to practice honesty, fairness, and caring ourselves. But it doesn't mean being perfect all the time. For our children to respect and trust us, we need to acknowledge our mistakes and flaws. We also need to respect children's thinking and listen to their perspectives, demonstrating to them how we want them to engage others.

Try this:

- Model caring for others by doing community service at least once a month. Even better, do this service with your child.
- Give your child an ethical dilemma at dinner or ask your child about dilemmas they've faced.

5. Guide children in managing destructive feelings

Why? Often the ability to care for others is overwhelmed by anger, shame, envy, or other negative feelings.

How? We need to teach children that all feelings are okay, but some ways of dealing with them are not helpful. Children need our help learning to cope with these feelings in productive ways.

Try this

Here's a simple way to teach your kids to calm down: ask your child to stop, take a deep breath through the nose and exhale through the mouth, and count to five. Practice when your child is calm. Then, when you see her getting upset, remind her about the steps and do them with her. After a while she'll start to do it on her own so that she can express her feelings in a helpful and appropriate way.