

Ten Tips for Kinder Kids

**Prepared by the Making Caring Common Project
At the Harvard Graduate School of Education**

1. Tell them kindness is most important – no matter what

Kids pay attention to your words, even when it feels like they don't. But let's face it, they need to hear you say the important stuff more than once – a lot more. So tell your child over and over: "The most important thing to me is that you are kind." Remind her every day with a phrase like "Have a good day and be kind." When she asks for advice about how to handle a tough situation with a friend, encourage her to take the high road, even if it's hard. And remind *yourself* that being kind is more important than getting straight A's or an athletic award.

2. Expect them to honor their commitments

When your child promises a friend or neighbor that he will do something, show that you expect him to follow through, whether it's mowing a lawn or going to a party. Sooner or later, your child is going to want to quit something – a sports team, band, or a friendship. When he does, ask him to consider his obligations to the group or the friend and encourage him to work out problems before quitting. This teaches your child to consider others' perspectives and to take responsibility for his actions.

3. Nudge them out of the comfort zone into the courage zone

It's easy to be kind to people in our comfort zone, like close friends and teammates. It's harder – but just as important – to be kind to people outside our circle or those who seem different from us. Ask your child who she is and is not friends with, and why. Talk to her about how it feels to be ignored or left out (it has probably happened to her, too) and encourage her to have the courage to reach out to someone outside her circle of friends. Give her some simple ideas for stepping into the "courage zone," like paying someone a compliment or privately comforting a classmate who was teased.

4. Insist that they speak respectfully

You know that tone they use, especially with you: annoyed, flippant, snide. When your child talks this way, always say, "That's not kind. Please say it again using a different tone of voice." When you hear him speaking disrespectfully to friends and peers, talk to him about it later – tell him you're disappointed and that you wouldn't want to hear anyone talk to him like that. Never allow your child to use language that make someone feel bad about who he or she is – like "you're a retard" – even if it is said as a joke. Disrespectful language is not "just kids being kids" and it's not acceptable.

5. Encourage them to be grateful

Tell your child why you are thankful and ask her to share what she is thankful for. You can make this a daily ritual at dinnertime, bedtime, in the car or on the subway. (Hint: It's important to be thankful for the little things as well as the big ones, like someone who made you laugh or a good home-cooked meal.) 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.