

MODULE

1

**THE SCIENCE
OF KINDNESS**



MODULE 1

The Science of Kindness

MODULE OVERVIEW

In addition to the student learning objectives listed below, the intended outcome of Module 1 is to activate students' curiosity about kindness by framing it in the context of scientific inquiry. Knowing that all students have unique experiences and associations with the concept of kindness, evidence-based, scientific inquiry provides an objective and safe environment for students to consider and test kind acts. Being able to separate a kind act from identity allows students to experience the benefits of kindness with lower risk and vulnerability.

In Module 1, students are introduced to the concept of kindness from a scientific, evidence-based perspective and have the opportunity to identify their own associations, beliefs, and experiences about kindness. Finally, they're empowered to add their own research when they're prompted with a real research question (the Big Question) to close the module.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand that there is a scientific basis for understanding kindness.
- Students will understand that certain skills and attitudes can increase or support kind acts.
- Students will understand that different individuals have unique associations and experiences with the word "kindness".
- Students will understand that scientific inquiry can lead to new discoveries.

STANDARDS AND CORE COMPETENCY MAPPING

- (CASEL) Self-Awareness: Identifying Emotions
- (NGSS) Ask and/or identify questions that can be answered by an investigation.
- (NGSS) Read grade-appropriate texts and/or use media to obtain scientific and/or technical information to determine patterns in and/or evidence about the natural and designed world(s).



Estimated Total Time

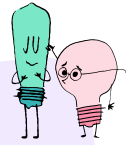
30-40 minutes

Module 1 consists of two parts that can be completed in one session or broken out over a few days.



Materials

- Student Journals
([pdf download](#) | [copy Google Slides](#))
- The Science of Kindness Slideshow
([pdf download](#) | [copy Google Slides](#))
- Whiteboard/Smartboard or Digital Presentation Tool (for slideshow)
- Chart Paper and Markers for Anchor Chart (if in person)



FACILITATION TIPS

Most of Module 1 is designed to be facilitated with the whole group, with opportunities for small group discussion and individual reflection and response noted throughout.

If you are facilitating virtually, Parts 1 and 2 can be completed:

- *Synchronously:* Over two to three whole group virtual sessions.
- *Asynchronously:* Facilitated through video introduction and presentation, with discussions through platforms like Flipgrid, Google Docs, or other discussion board or video platforms.
- See the “Natural Breaks” included throughout the module for additional implementation flexibility.

Note: See *Teacher Rx, Section 2* for student accessibility tips.

Reflection Options: Throughout the module you will see a number of opportunities for students to reflect on their learning. These opportunities are included in the Student Journals, but you may choose to facilitate reflection in a variety of ways. Consider small group discussions, exit tickets, recorded responses, discussion boards, and others. Consider the major takeaways you want your students to have, and facilitate reflections accordingly.

PART 1

What Does Kindness Mean to You?



Estimated Total Time
5-10 minutes

SEL Skills: Self-Awareness (Identifying Emotions)

1. INTRODUCTION (Whole Group if possible)

Introduce Learn Kind to students, and tell them that over the next several weeks or months your class will be exploring kindness in classrooms from a scientific perspective, even researching the effects of kindness themselves (if you choose to do Module 6), just like a real scientist!

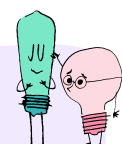
Discuss: Begin with a class discussion about who scientists are, what they do, and what it means to research something.

FACILITATION TIP

As students share, create an anchor chart about scientists and research based on their responses.

VIRTUAL FACILITATION TIP

Post these prompts ahead of time so students can share their responses before you start the lesson (written or recorded responses). Display their responses before the class discussion on *kindness*.



Tell students: “We’re going to look at current research in a moment, but before we do, let’s talk about this word *kindness*.”

2. DISCUSSION

The word *kindness* means something different to each student. Some students will have very positive associations with the concept, while others may hear the word and shut down. This discussion is intended to help you uncover the existing associations, misconceptions, and potential barriers that will inform your students’ initial and ongoing response to their learning experiences. It will also validate their voice and experience and continue to cultivate a safe classroom community.

First Response: Have each student answer the following two questions in their journal. Students may write or sketch their responses in their journals. Before you ask each question, tell your students to close their eyes so they can really concentrate on their actual responses (not the ones they think they should have). Let them know that no response is wrong. Then ask them:

1. What’s the first thing you think of when you hear the word *kindness*?
2. How do you *feel* when you hear someone say “you should be kind”?

(Optional) Wrap-up: *This portion of the student journal can serve as the “Wrap-up”, helping you gain insight into students’ understandings and perceptions of kindness before to the Learn Kind curriculum. You will have the option to [share this data](#) with [kindness.org](#).*

Natural Break: If needed, the learning progression can naturally break here, and be continued starting with “Share Out” at another time. If time allows, continue the activity through “Wrap-Up”.

3. SHARE OUT

In the whole group, small/breakout groups, or discussion boards, have students share their responses with each other. Some suggested follow-up questions are:

- Were you surprised by your responses?
- What do you think is behind that response? (beliefs or experiences)
- What do you think kindness means?

4. WRAP-UP

Close the discussion by validating students’ experiences and opinions, and tell them that it’s interesting how diverse life experiences (and even personality) can contribute to different associations with the same concept. Fortunately, we don’t have to rely on just our experiences or beliefs. Kindness is something we can actually study from a scientific perspective. Research tells us how kindness affects our brains, bodies, and feelings, which we also call “emotions”.

PART 2

The Science of Kindness and the Big Question



Estimated Total Time
20-25 minutes

1. INTRODUCTION (Whole Group if possible)

Now that students have had the opportunity to access their own perceptions of kindness, it's time to explore what scientific research has revealed.

2. REVIEW AND DISCUSS

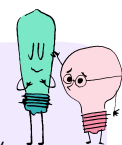
Remind students of their discussion in Part 1 and ask several students to share how they would define kindness.

3. PRESENT SCIENCE OF KINDNESS

Remind students that kindness is something that can be/has been studied using scientific inquiry and research. Using the provided [slideshow](#), walk students through an overview of the scientific perspective of kindness and what scientists have discovered about kindness from research.

FACILITATION TIP

The Science of Kindness Slideshow is designed for grades K-8, but will not be covered in its entirety with younger grades. Use the provided Slideshow Notes to introduce the main ideas to your class.



Slideshow Notes

- **What is kindness?** *Slide 2*
 - Kindness can involve giving, helping, listening, and more.
- **Kindness is ancient** *Slide 3*
 - Lots of animals are kind to others (usually their family members).
 - Kindness kickstarts cooperative relationships, the supportive social networks that were crucial to our survival.
- **Kindness is part of human nature** *Slide 4*
 - Acts of kindness and generosity trigger activity in happiness-related areas of the brain (such as the ventral striatum) (Park et al. 2017).
 - Kindness is exhibited and celebrated all around the world, irrespective of culture. In a survey of 1,063,921 people in 75 countries, honesty, fairness, and kindness were among the most highly endorsed character traits (McGrath, 2015).

- **Kindness is cool** *Slide 5*
 - “Nice guys finish first.” In a series of social experiments, people who were kind were more likely to gain the respect of their peers, and more likely to be chosen as leaders, than selfish individuals were (Hardy and Van Vugt, 2006).
- **Kindness is contagious** *Slide 6*
 - Witnessing another person perform a good deed increases the desire to help others (Schnall et al. 2010).
- **Kindness makes you happy** *Slide 7*
 - A review of 27 experiments found that people who helped others were happier than people who helped themselves or did nothing (Curry et al. 2018).
- **Kindness is good for your (mental) health** *Slide 8*
 - Kindness can reduce stress. A 14 day study found that people engaging in helpful behaviors had less stress than when the study began (Raposa et al. 2016).

4. STUDENT DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

(Written Response is Optional depending on the grade-level): Lead students through an individual reflection or group discussion using the following questions. If appropriate, students will record responses in their journal.

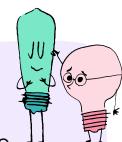
- Which of these facts surprised you the most?
- What else could we research about kindness?
- Do any questions come to mind now that you’ve seen these facts?

Natural Break: If needed, the learning progression can naturally break here, and be continued starting with the “*Student Discussion*” at a later time. If time allows, continue the activity through “*The Big Question*”.

5. THE BIG QUESTION (Whole Group if possible)

FACILITATION TIP

Students will be introduced to the phrase “kind acts” during this discussion. If your students need to discuss the meaning of the word “act” in this context to avoid misconceptions, take a few minutes to establish its meaning through discussion and examples.



Discussion: Tell students that while there’s a lot we’ve discovered about the impact of kindness from a scientific perspective, there’s still more to explore. For example, studies have shown that kind acts not only have a positive impact on the person receiving the act, but that it also creates happiness in the person *doing* the act.

Say: “But we don’t have many studies that show **if kindness affects the happiness of kids.**”

Tell students that they are going to take on the role of scientists and conduct experiments that will help discover whether or not it does.

Say: Here’s the Big Question we will answer together: “**Does being kind make us happy?**”

Have students record this question in their journal.

Congratulations! You’ve reached the end of Module 1.

Choose Kindness Now

When it comes down to it, kindness is a choice – and a choice we can make over and over again. Use this simple step-by-step tool at the end of every module, or as often as needed to help students strengthen their internal kindness muscles. Since science tells us kindness is contagious, every choice can create ripples of positive impact.

① **CHOOSE** your kind act from the list below (or choose your own!)

② **PLAN** the WHO, WHEN, and WHERE for your act

WHO – Do it for a friend, family member, teacher, or yourself

WHEN – Choose when you will do the act (maybe it's right now!)

WHERE – Where will you do it? School, home, or somewhere else?

③ **DO** your kind act!

④ **OBSERVE** what happened and how you feel

⑤ **(Optional) SHARE** with the class next time you meet

☐ Ask someone to play

☐ Help someone in school

☐ Pick up litter or trash

☐ Smile at someone

☐ Give someone a compliment

☐ Thank someone for something

☐ Draw a picture for someone

☐ Help with a chore at home

☐ Go outside and enjoy nature

☐ Take a mindful moment for yourself