



CLIPPINGS a weekly column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

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For Immediate Release

Be Kind and Feel Better, Research Shows

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I wanted to take the opportunity to share research by Science of Parenting (www.scienceofparenting.org) co-founder, Douglas Gentile. Gentile was instrumental in launching ISU Extension and Outreach's Science of Parenting. In 2011, Science of Parenting began with audio podcasts and a blog, and we have now grown to a one-stop, online source for trustworthy research on popular parenting topics.

Gentile and his team recently published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies*.

Kindness means being friendly, generous and considerate. The definition focuses on what an individual can do to make someone else feel better. However, Iowa State research shows that thinking kind thoughts about others can improve your own mood.

Gentile, professor of psychology, senior lecturer Dawn Sweet and graduate student Lanmiao He tested the benefits of three different techniques intended to reduce anxiety and increase happiness or well-being. They found that simply wishing others well for 12 minutes could improve a person's mood.

"We asked students to walk around campus and either wish for others to be happy, to consider how they might be similar and connected, or to think about how they might be better off than others. Any of these could possibly make people feel happier, but there were clear differences," Gentile said.

"Wishing others well reduced anxiety and increased happiness and feelings of social connection. Considering how connected we all are increased feelings of connection but had no effect on happiness or anxiety. Thinking about how we might be better off than others had no benefits at all," Gentile said.

Gentile noted that this study didn't require people to do anything other than to think how they wish for others to be happy, so it can be done without requiring any actions or even for the other person to know about it.

As families, we can practice kindness in many ways — with our children, other family members, our friends and other people with whom we interact each day.

- **Practice simple manners.** Saying please and thank you are easy ways to teach young children the beginnings of kindness.

- **Send short notes to others.** Leaving short notes of affirmation at random can be done quickly and create opportunities for connecting with others when they least expect it. Younger children can decorate a note, while early writers can practice their language skills.
- **Offer random acts of kindness.** Doing random, unexpected, small acts for others can bring children into an action that teaches social skills and connects positive feelings to their emotional development. Simple things, like sharing or helping, show children how to be kind.

Find additional ideas in our Dare to Excel newsletter – March “Service Learning” (<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/13676>).

Help your children grow through service learning as they apply classroom knowledge to meaningful and needed services in the community. Includes ways to give kids a chance to experience personal responsibility and positive social behavior while developing a closer bond with their school and community.

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