

2019 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize]

## **Kindness- The Vaccine Our World Desperately Needs**

(Original)

*Anusha Pillay*

*(Age 19, India)*

*National Institute of Technology, Raipur*

“Tenderness and kindness are not signs of weakness and despair, but manifestations of strength and resolution”- Kahlil Gibran

The dictionary defines kindness as the quality of being friendly, generous and considerate. Kindness, to me, is about living by the principles dear to one’s heart and leading a life of integrity. Ethics, compassion and empathy are the bedrock of kindness. Kindness is also about treating yourself the way you would treat those you care about, because a person’s behaviour and attitude towards herself determine how she approaches other relationships.

Reading this essay topic set me thinking, because kindness is so underrated and hardly talked about these days. In the rat race of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, kindness has been trampled underfoot. And this is sad because, I believe, kindness makes the world go round.

Performing the ten acts of kindness was a real eye-opener for me as I realised that these little things are so simple to do, yet neglected by us more often than not. At the same time, I recalled countless instances of people being kind to me, that I had either not recognised or not been grateful for. The friend who consoled me when I burst into tears after losing a badminton match and was too ashamed to face my teammates. A lady I had never met before, who pinned up my ‘saree’ for me- it was my first time wearing the garment and it was getting undone. Kindness still exists, but we don’t value it as much.

As a society, we tend to place greater emphasis on attributes like intelligence, beauty, wealth, neglecting values like kindness, compassion and understanding. In India, and in other countries, the education system focuses solely on marks. Instead of helping our children grow into thoughtful and considerate adults, school and college test and reward only academic knowledge. This frenzy for higher marks is further whipped up by parents. No wonder that cut-offs for top colleges in India routinely reach 99 and even 100 per cent!

The solution is to integrate value education with the regular school curriculum so that the

children of today are balanced and well-rounded adults tomorrow. What they are taught in childhood leaves an impression on young minds forever. It is we who need to change our attitudes. Wealth and material success are not the only measures of a life well-lived. Very often, it is a little act of kindness, a kind word, the simplest of gestures that can make all the difference. In a poignant Reader's Digest article, the narrator is reminded by an apparent stranger of a long-forgotten incident. The latter had attempted suicide, but was saved by the narrator. Twenty-five years on, he is grateful for that act of kindness.

We can create a kinder society by just slowing down a little, by reflecting on what really matters in life and concentrating on the good around us. There is a lot that is wrong with the world, but there is a lot that is good and beautiful in it, too. There is good in each one of us, and when we recognise that, we may be a kinder society. One cannot really know what another person may be going through- for example, a sales assistant may be rude or unhelpful because he is unwell or has lost a loved one- so one must strive to be kind to everyone at all times. As Plato said, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle".

Another step to create a society full of kindness is to perhaps rely less on technology and more on our basic human instincts. With the astounding technological advances in the new millennium, our world, as we knew it, has changed. However, we humans have not really changed. A little kindness and a bit of warmth are something we still need. Greater connectivity but ironically less actual contact between people is one reason why our society is in dire need of kindness.

We must join hands to create a society full of kindness. Being kind costs nothing. Yet, it can change a person's life forever. In Anne Frank's immortal words-

"No one has ever become poor by giving".