Kindness, Entry #1 of 4

We approach people with love and kindness, carrying within ourselves a deep and abiding respect for the feelings of others (*It Works*, Step 9).

“I’ve never regretted being kind,” the speaker stated. The rest of us in the meeting thought about that for about two seconds and nodded in agreement. It’s hard to argue with that.

Probably for nearly all of us, treating others with kindness, love, and respect was more difficult in active addiction than it is now that we are clean and striving to be better people. Maybe we were burned by others who treated us kindly but wanted something in return. Very likely we had the same manipulative tendency. Playing either role in this dynamic only reinforced our mistrust of others. If we were up to no good, then so was everyone else.

Working Steps Four through Nine is a reality check on our past behavior. By the time we get to the amends process, we’re prepared to face the hurt we’ve caused other people mostly through our selfishness and carelessness. We witness the results of our manipulation, our disregard for the feelings of our loved ones, and the damaging ways we’ve treated ourselves.

The speaker went on: “Treating others with kindness is like an ‘ounce of prevention’ for our chronic condition of addiction. It lowers our risk of doing or saying something we’ll regret. And it has the added benefit that we won’t have to make as many amends.”

While we certainly don’t have to wait for any Step before we show and receive kindness, our relationship to this spiritual principle will deepen as we work on ourselves. We learn to be more thoughtful about what comes out of our mouths. We no longer use people to get what we want. Although we cannot completely prevent hurting or disappointing other people, or stop them from being angry with us, we don’t want to make the same mistakes.

Through our commitment to recovery, we develop a genuine respect for others and maybe a little belief in humankind as a whole. No regrets there either.

I have many choices today. One of them is to be kind. I’ll opt for that.
Kindness, Entry #2 of 4

The lessons we learn in NA about sharing and caring, asking for help, and offering what we have to give are powerful tools we can use outside the fellowship as well (Living Clean, Chapter 4, “Disability”).

Before coming to NA, many of us were clueless about our own needs, much less the needs of others. We may have rejected the whole idea of needing help, needing other people, or having needy people in our lives. Identifying our needs—beyond the next fix—would require introspection. Looking within sounded frightening—“There be dragons,” as the ancients labeled unmapped territory. Others of us sensed a void inside, a deep well of vague longing. We clung to the few people left in our lives, hoping for love but settling for sex.

Recovery invites us to rejoin the human race. We learn to articulate what we think, how we feel, and what we need. Being part of an NA community that looks out for one another is a real asset to our lives. The give and take of kindness knits together our social networks, in and out of the rooms. We benefit from others’ kindness and revel in the good feelings we get from giving back. It reinforces our humanity and our humility as we recognize that we’re no better and no worse than our fellows. “Just another addict doing my best to stay clean and be better,” as one member put it.

A focus on practicing kindness contributes to the “better perspective on life” we strive for, just for today. Opportunities to help come into view more readily when we’re endeavoring to be kind. As one member wrote: “Giving up my seat to an elderly bus rider freed me, momentarily, from my prison of self-concern. When I want to feel good, kindness ain’t a bad hustle.” We become the good neighbor who shovels more than their fair share of snow, the parent who bakes enough cupcakes for the whole class, the houseguest that insists on washing dishes, or the coworker who restocks the community candy bowl.

If we can shake some old ideas about independence and self-reliance, we can practice kindness even as we ask for help. We know the good feeling of helping others; to need help and not ask for it seems selfish. We humble ourselves, ask for what we need, and open the door to let others be kind.

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I will contribute some kindness to my community as I share a smile, give a sincere compliment, or ask for assistance today.
We learn that people see goodness in us that perhaps we don’t see in ourselves. Our fellows reflect us back to ourselves and show us how we have changed (*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to Others”).

In our first days clean, most of us feel utterly horrible about ourselves. We’re sick from withdrawals. We hate everybody we know and every stranger in the room. We’re ashamed, mostly because we got caught. We’re pissed off at jails, institutions, and, in some cases, not dying. Our outlook on the future is just as dark: we have to go to these stupid meetings for the rest of our lives and we can never use drugs again. And we have to give, give, give to the meeting, to each other, to our dad who messed us up in the first place because of his using, to the old lady who lives in the flat downstairs even though she’s mean to us. And we have to be nice all the time and talk about our problems and listen to other people’s problems and help other addicts who are more messed up than we are. Being even slightly positive about our future requires an impossible effort.

Eventually, our resistance cracks. We “do the deal”—meetings, sponsor, steps, service, newcomers (well, we don’t “do” them, we help them). We find an HP and start praying and meditating. We forgive Dad and make sure he has all his meds (and we don’t take any of them). We gratefully accept our elderly neighbor’s terrible holiday fruitcake and pick up her yappy little dog’s poo when she doesn’t. When she criticizes our new tattoo, we smile instead of plotting her death. Sometimes we do these things begrudgingly, but mostly it’s second nature now.

On occasion, people notice. After sharing a few IPs with a newcomer, an oldtimer, who remembers us when we came in, hugs us (longer than usual), looks deeply into our eyes, tears brimming. “What’s up?” we ask. It’s awkward. “You,” the member tells us, “are so different. Soooooo different.”

We protest. “Aww, come on!” All we did was give someone an IP! But our resistance to this also cracks. We do the right thing, just say, “Thanks,” and hug them back.

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*I’ll aim to be kind and generous today. If someone points it out, I’ll say “thanks.” I can acknowledge them and acknowledge that I’ve changed.*
Kindness, Entry #4 of 4

We learn to treat others with kindness and respect and do what we can to support each other and our group (*It Works*, Tradition One).

Few of us come into Narcotics Anonymous with effective social skills; we often acquire them by trial and error...mostly error. When we unintentionally mistreat others, we feel terrible and become teachable. The good news is that some of our best lessons come from our mistakes. We call our sponsors, tell on ourselves, figure out our part, and determine better ways to handle similar situations in the future.

We are at our best when kindness inspires our words and actions. When kindness is a priority, we’re more likely to be supportive and that helps us grow as individuals and as NA groups. Naturally, it’s easier to be kind to those we love. But we don’t have to open our homes and share holiday dinners to honor our mutual stake in Narcotics Anonymous.

Being a homegroup member challenges us to practice kindness with folks who aren’t in our immediate circle. Our investment in the wellbeing of NA is more important than our personal feelings about any specific member. We put the welfare of the group first and treat all of our fellows with respect regardless of baggage or bitterness. Friendship is not a prerequisite for kindness. Rather, we are kind in order to foster unity within the group and to support personal recovery—our own and that of our fellow members.

The simplest gesture of kindness can make a world of difference when we are feeling stuck. “I was isolating and thinking about using. I got a text from a fellow home group member who asked if I was going to the meeting. It was just the push I needed,” a member shared.

Our actions have a profound effect on others as well as an impact on our self-image. By choosing kindness, we improve ourselves as we contribute to NA unity. Our actions make NA meetings safe and respectful places for personal growth. The way that we treat each other and our groups is a reflection of how we put “we” before “me.”

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I will treat other members with respect and kindness today. I will act in ways that support recovery—yours, mine, and ours.