



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

MUSIC TO INSPIRE KINDNESS IN STUDENTS

"Making music together is the best way for two people to become friends."

—Hermann Hesse

OVERVIEW

Students will make music with others (e.g., classmates, teachers, larger school) to encourage generosity and helping behavior.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To encourage kindness, generosity, and helpfulness
- To cultivate strong peer relationships at the start of the year
- To inspire kindness before offering students the opportunity to help out at school
- To foster inclusivity when introducing students to a new person

TIME REQUIRED

- <5 minutes

LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary

MATERIALS

- Optional: Musical Instruments
- Optional: Materials to make musical instruments

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Create music together

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Kindness
- Generosity

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social Awareness
- Relationship skills

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Non-Judgment
- Focused Attention

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Try this at home: Take a moment to sing a song or make music with your family or friends. How do you feel after this experience? Do you feel a greater sense of connection? Did you notice a change in how your family or friends related to one another? Did you experience a greater desire to be kind or helpful to your friends or family during or after this experience?

INSTRUCTIONS

There are many ways we can inspire our students to be kind—from the way we talk to them to how we acknowledge them to the stories we read together. But there is another easy way to encourage kindness in children: with music.

- As a class, as a school, or as part of a larger school event, invite your students and their friends, relatives, or new acquaintances to join in a circle and sing a song together.
 - It doesn't matter which song you pick; the song can be relatively short and have any theme, or it can be made up in the moment.
 - You can make music using only your own voices or by playing simple instruments—or handmade instruments like maracas or tambourines.
 - You can even encourage a bit of dancing to make it more fun!

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did students respond to the activity? Were they excited to participate or shy about participating? How might you help all students to feel comfortable singing and making music together?
- What songs did you all sing and how might you consider songs from diverse cultures?
- Did you notice students being more willing to help after this activity? Did you notice students being kinder to one another?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research suggests that joint music-making can inspire children to be generous afterward. In one [study](#), preschoolers between three and six years old were randomly assigned to one of two play activities. In the musical activity, one of the researchers sang a simple song and invited the child and another researcher to sing along and sway to the music. In the other activity, the researcher simply recited the song lyrics as a poem. During both activities, the researcher invited the child and the other researcher to play with shakers (percussion instruments).

Researchers found that children who participated in the sing-along activity shared their stickers more often—and spontaneously helped the researchers when compared to the other group of children.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Kindness is good for kids. School-age children who engage in kind acts [benefit](#)—they are more well-liked by their peers and have improved well-being. The [benefits](#) of kindness are even seen as early as toddlerhood—young children are happier when giving to others than when receiving.

As teachers and school leaders, we want to see our students be kind at school. But the practice of sharing and helping can sometimes be challenging for young children because their perspective-taking skills and impulse-control abilities are still developing.

Singing and making music together can foster connection and kindness between people, even if they have just met. And if you facilitate this practice with someone new to your classroom or school (e.g., a new student or a new teacher/school administrator), they may have more positive “first impressions” of each other that could lead to stronger relationships in the future.

SOURCE

[Sara Beck, Ph.D.](#), Randolph College