

Mental Health Matters

February 2024



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The Mental Health Benefits of Simple Acts of Kindness

There are many reasons acts of kindness are good for the giver and the receiver. New research looks at the mental health benefits, finding that performing acts of kindness may help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.(1) “Acts of kindness” refer to benevolent and helpful actions intentionally directed towards another person, motivated by the desire to help another and not to gain reward or to avoid punishment. (2)

In the study from researchers at the University of Ohio, people with elevated symptoms of depression or anxiety were randomly assigned to engage in acts of kindness, join in social activities, or participate in a brief intervention based on cognitive behavioral therapy (specifically cognitive reappraisal).

All three interventions were found to reduce symptoms, lessen distress and improve life satisfaction. The acts of kindness, however, showed greater benefits for social connection than either of the other two interventions. The authors note that gestures of kindness have distinct benefits versus general social interaction. “Acts of kindness may more effectively improve social connection and related dimensions of well-being than prevailing cognitive behavioral therapy techniques,” the authors concluded.

The study also provides some insight into the process. Participating in acts of kindness helped the individuals with depression or anxiety to divert their attention from themselves and take their minds off their own symptoms.

Research has also found that kindness can increase happiness and self-esteem, while decreasing stress and emotional reactivity. (2) People may limit their acts of kindness because they underestimate the value, according to a recent study.(3) Researchers found that while a giver looked at the value of the item or action, the receiver saw greater value in the warmth of the gesture and the positive social interaction. Another feature of acts of kindness, supported by research, is that it can be contagious. People who received acts of kindness were more likely to be more generous themselves.(3)

Everyday simple acts of kindness can contribute to boosting your mood, reducing stress, and possibly alleviating symptoms of depression or anxiety. In addition, what might seem like a small kind gesture could have a greater impact than you might think.

Full article found at <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/mental-health-benefits-simple-acts-of-kindness>



KINDNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH



Performing kindness activities for seven days increases happiness.



More acts of kindness = more happiness



Kindness to strangers makes you feel as good as kindness to family.





This newsletter is brought to you by the Mental Health Counselors:

Lisa de la O, LMFT:

805.933.8936

LdelaO@santapaulausd.org

Rachael Forbes, LMFT:

805.933.8937

RForbes@santapaulausd.org

Deborah Ujfalusy, LCSW:

805.933.8939

DUjfalusy@santapaulausd.org

In case of an Emergency:

- **911 For Immediate Support**
- **Ventura County Crisis Team (866) 998-2243 –(24 hours)**

**MENTAL
HEALTH
MATTERS**
#ENDTHESTIGMA

Why Self-Esteem Is Important for Mental Health

Although low self-esteem is not categorized as a mental health condition in itself, there are clear links between the way we feel about ourselves and our overall mental and emotional wellbeing. U.K.-based charity, Teenage Minds, defines self-esteem as “how a person feels about themselves and what they do.” So a person with high self-esteem believes they are a good person; they can recognize their good qualities and will generally strive for a happy and successful life. Someone with low self-esteem has negative feelings about themselves, believing that they are not worthy of love, happiness or success.

With research linking low self-esteem to mental health issues and poor quality-of-life, this is a potentially dangerous way to live. Here are just a few ways that low self-esteem can affect mental health and how you can try and improve yours:

Poor Relationships. As humans, we strive to interact with others and the relationships we have with those closest to us help define us as people. So negative relationships ultimately equal negative feelings and a negative perception of ourselves.

Addiction. Psychological studies indicate that low self-esteem in childhood and early adulthood can be a predisposition to addiction in later life. Many addicts use substances such as drugs or alcohol to help ease the negative feelings they have about themselves. But over time this method of escapism develops into an addiction and of course this has detrimental effects on their already depleted self-esteem levels.

Depression and anxiety. Low self-esteem tends to work in a vicious cycle with other mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. It's hard to say which comes first, only that the combination is both common and troublesome. Someone who already lives with a mental illness may find that low self-esteem develops due to the social stigma surrounding mental illness. Stigma can perpetuate the feeling that they have somehow failed.

Building Self-Esteem

Building self-esteem is crucial. When we learn to love ourselves, we strive for a better life—a happier relationship, a more fulfilling career or recovery from addiction. But changing the deep-rooted feelings we have about ourselves isn't easy and often experts recommend some form of therapy (usually Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) to get to the underlying reasons behind our negative thoughts about ourselves.

The key then is to challenge and adjust these negative thoughts into more positive ones. Learning to value and care for your mind and body through a healthy lifestyle is also important. Good diet, exercise and meditation can be the first stepping stones in reclaiming physical and emotional confidence. Fully engaging with those we love is important. Feeling loved and supported (and being able to offer love and support in return) is a wonderful way to start increasing self-esteem. If you don't have any immediate friends or family then consider joining a support group or even volunteering. Helping others is a great way to help yourself.

Full article found at <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/July-2016/Why-Self-Esteem-Is-Important-for-Mental-Health>