

What does kindness mean to you?

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Abigail is a mental health and wellbeing expert with over 25 years' experience in roles including psychotherapy. At Acas, she works with employers and stakeholders on developing effective strategies and leading on the wider influencing agenda around positive mental health at work.

When I asked my 15-year-old what kindness meant to her, she said very clearly, "Someone putting their own feelings aside and doing something nice for someone else."

Two seconds later, my older daughter walked in the room wearing a new outfit and, without missing a beat, my younger daughter turned to her and said: "Ugh, that looks awful, why on earth did you buy that?"

Which I guess means: just because we know what it is, doesn't mean we always do it.

Most of the responses I received from friends and colleagues were on similar lines to my daughter's first definition:

- someone going out of their way to do something for you
- offering to do something for someone else because you want to, not because you have to
- doing something for someone even though you don't expect anything in return
- being generous, tolerant and accepting

What struck me about these responses was they required an action; being kind isn't a passive state, but requires me or you to 'do' something

Acts of kindness

Researchers have identified 2 different types of kindness:

- the random act – where we see someone in pain or need and without thinking we respond and offer help
- the intentional act – where we know someone needs support and we send them a gift or ring them for a chat

In terms of our mental health and wellbeing, the research confirms that these acts of kindness benefit both the giver and the receiver. From what I can see though, I don't think it stops there. I think the impact of the gesture goes on long after the initial act and ripples on in ways that we don't even know – 6 degrees of kindness, so to speak.

As we move through our own pandemic journeys, I am now hearing of people starting to hit a bit of a downward slump. At times like these it is really important that, as well as being kind to others, we should also be kind to ourselves. Whether that's going for a walk, singing loudly to the radio, having a long bath, or just putting on a clean tracksuit: we need to remember to look after our own mental health so we can continue the kindness ripple and the profound impact it can have.

If you'd like more ideas of how you can support mental wellbeing at this time, head to our [new guidance on mental health during coronavirus](#)

and our [mental health resources page](#), which includes top tips for employers, line managers and all of us as individuals.