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Kindness in Teens: What It Means and Why It Matters

Research from Lifespan Members, Sandra Bosacki and colleagues
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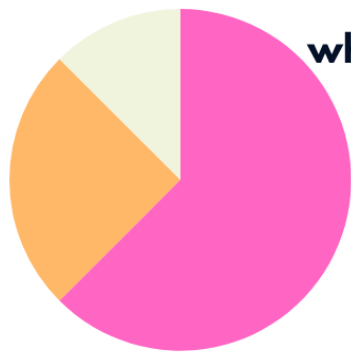
Kindness in teens changes depending on who it is for and the situation they are in.

Theory of Mind: Like empathy, it is the ability to understand that other people have their own thoughts, feelings, and perspectives that may be different from your own.

How adolescents understand and express kindness in different situations and relationships, and how kindness relates to their empathy (**Theory of Mind**) social and emotional well-being.

Research Questions:

- What does kindness mean to teens?
- Does who you're being kind to matter?
- Does your environment matter?
- Is there a connection between kindness and well-being?
- Does empathy (Theory of Mind) influence kindness?



Emotional tone of what teens say about themselves

- Positive (96%)
- Neutral (33%)
- Negative (17%)

Methods:

Participants included 300 adolescents (Grouped into early, middle and late adolescence).

Study consisted of:

- Open-ended questions about what kindness means and how they show it to: friends, strangers, themselves, at school and at home.
- Surveys that measured kindness and compassion, social well-being and psychological well-being.
- Empathy tests to measure Theory of Mind, watched silent videos and read short stories, then explained the characters thoughts or feelings.

Conclusions:

Kindness grows with age: older teens give more emotional responses. Teens show emotional support to friends, respect to strangers and self-care to themselves. Kindness at home means helping out, at school it means supporting peers. Teens with stronger empathy are kinder and have improved friendships and reduced loneliness, although this does not lower stress or boost happiness.

- **Teens with strong empathy skills (Theory of Mind) were kinder and more compassionate.** This connection grew stronger with age.
- Teens defined kindness more as *helping others* and not themselves.
- **Kindness depended on who it was for:** friends (emotional support), strangers (respectful actions), themselves (self-care)
- Kindness looked different between environments: at school (supporting peers emotionally or socially) vs. at home (doing helpful tasks or chores)
- **Kindness boosted teens' social lives: they had better friends and felt less lonely**