

The soft power of kindness

May 22, 2020 08:00 BST

Mental Health Awareness Week: The soft power of kindness

Written by Jolanta Martis, Play Therapist

The current Coronavirus crisis is unprecedented and has placed huge amounts of stress on society and families. Lockdown has presented challenges related to managing work, home schooling and constraints on income or normal routines have resulted in tensions and arguments.

Children may feel trapped indoors often with conflicting wants and needs; others are trying to block out the relentless news about COVID-19, often

resorting to excessive gaming or social media or by complaining and protesting against their circumstances. Inevitably these pressures are impacting on parents and their children's wellbeing.

At ellenor we observe and experience many acts of kindness from the public towards us and our patients, who are grateful for the care and goodwill they receive. Even now at this time of challenge we come together to thank our nurses, we extend our arms to help those who are vulnerable and perceived to be in need.

However, in these unprecedented circumstances, to practice kindness towards those who are seen to be in competition for limited resources or especially those locked down with us can be more challenging.

We believe that kindness is a powerful emotion which promotes feelings of acceptance and connection with others. In the current crisis, kindness can ease our sense of isolation and the pain of social distancing. When we experience acts of kindness, we tend to be motivated to be kinder to others and perhaps to step out even more to help those around us. And like a wonderful chain reaction, kindness too can be infectious.

As parents, during social distancing, we might notice more undesirable behaviours in our children like lying, sneaking, refusing to do their work, fighting, ignoring our advice or being disrespectful. However, underneath this behaviour, children are likely to be experiencing feelings of boredom, helplessness, disconnection, fear or confusion. As adults, we will probably share and recognise these feelings in ourselves.

In these situations, calmly discussing and naming the feelings for the child can help them better understand their emotions. We can extend kindness to others by learning how to respond, rather than react. Our curiosity can help us with this process, wondering aloud with others about the meaning behind the behaviour will help us know that others understand e.g. will you help me understand what it was like for you when Jake said that about your sister?

In these difficult moments we will make mistakes, but with persistence and resilience we can recover. It is how we approach these setbacks that makes a positive difference to our mental health. In order to extend kindness to others, we need to first be kind and forgiving to ourselves.

These unique times have shown us that we need to be resourceful and explore creative ways of working with families. At ellenor we work in partnership with families to smooth their journey through their bereavement. To address the challenges posed by social distancing we are providing our child and family support services online (using telephone, Zoom, Skype and WhatsApp) and are expanding our bereavement services to those who have not previously been involved with ellenor.

We will all have our individual experiences from this period. For some it may be a positive experience but for others there may be 'pain' that needs restoration. Kintsugi is a Japanese art form that seeks to create something even more beautiful than the original from damaged or broken pottery, using what it calls "Golden Joinery". The ceramic is brought back to life using a lacquer resin mixed with gold to mend the cracks. Even though the cracks remain visible, the mended objects are considered even more beautiful than before. In the same way kindness can be the 'golden string' that binds our families and communities together and can enable us to emerge stronger from something that has hurt us all.

We are **ellenor**, a charity funded by the generosity of our local community, offering the best care and support to families facing terminal illness in Kent. We are the **only** charity in the county that provides hospice care for people of all ages – babies, children and adults - and their families. This includes pain and symptom relief, end of life care, respite, bereavement support and emotional and spiritual care.

Our Children's Hospice Care, formerly known as chYps, is provided in the comfort of the family home and spans across North and West Kent and the London Borough of Bexley. Adults living in Gravesham, Dartford and Swanley, receive care in their place of choice, including their own homes, at our Hospice in Gravesend and in local care homes.

Contacts



Basia Wilson

Press Contact

PR Manager

basia.wilson@ellenor.org

01474320007

07932601517