



Secret SANTA— Small, Anonymous, Nice & Thoughtful Act(s)—to Enhance Student Learning & Engagement



Every act of kindness benefits the giver as well as the receiver.
Kathrina Mayer

Kindness: “the pervasive tendency to be nice to other people – to be compassionate and concerned about their welfare, to do favors for them, to perform good deeds, and to take care of them.”
Peterson & Seligman (2004)

- ◆ Having students perform **acts of kindness** and reflect on it develops perspective-taking, social belonging, critical thinking, and a structured way of encouraging kindness, which has many empirically-supported benefits:
 - ◆ improved **well-being** (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005)
 - ◆ improved **peer interactions** (Post, 2005)
 - ◆ more **engagement** (Kurtz & Lyubomirsky, 2008)
 - ◆ **less social avoidance** among socially anxious undergrads (Trew & Alden, 2015)
- ◆ “**Secret SANTA**” Activity: adaptation of the successful positive psychology exercise “*Secret Good Deed*” so that students experience *both* anonymously performing and receiving a small act of kindness by a classmate for comparison to enhance their learning and engagement and also confer the psychosocial benefits of giving and receiving kindness (e.g., Hackel, Zaki, & Van Bavel, 2017; Peterson, 2006).

KINDNESS WORKS!

Kindness is one of the most significant contributors to **positive school climate**. Being kind makes others happy, makes you feel good¹, and helps **prevent bullying**.^{2,3,4,5}



Interesting Facts about Kindness

- Kindness is contagious⁶
- The benefits increase as the number of kind acts increases⁷
- Practicing intentional kindness can help reduce stress when under duress⁸



Ways to Show Kindness at School⁹

- Support
- Optimism & Positivity
- Happiness
- Collaboration
- Connection & Empathy



¹Curry, O. S., Rowland, L. A., Van Lissa, C., Zlotowitz, S., McAtney, J., & Whitehouse, H. “Happy to Help? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of performing acts of kindness on the well-being of the actor.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, (2016).

²Ross, S. W. & Homish, P. H. “Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support.” *Sage Journals*, (2013).

³Random Acts of Kindness Foundation, “Did You Know? There are Scientifically Proven Benefits of Being Kind” (2018).

⁴Layous, K., Nelson, S. K., Oberle, E., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lyubomirsky, S. “Kindness counts: Prompting prosocial behavior in middle-schoolers boosts peer acceptance and well-being.” *PLoS One*, (2014).

⁵Buchanan, K. E., & Bard, A. “Acts of kindness and acts of novelty affect the satisfaction.” *Journal of Social Psychology*, (2010).

⁶Hamilton, D. R. “The 5 Side Effects of Kindness.” www.dravidhamilton.com, (2011).

⁷www.Kindness.org, “Oxford University Studies Find Performing Acts of Kinness Boosts Wellbeing and Positive Social Emotions.” (2017).

⁸Kandror, G. S. “Nurse: Helping others dampens the effects of everyday stress.” *Yale School of Medicine – Psychiatry*, (2015).

⁹Winkler, J. L., Walsh, M. E., de Boies, M., Mare, & Carvajal, S. C. “Kind discipline: Developing a conceptual model of a promising school discipline approach.” *Evaluation and Program Planning*, (2017).

1



ASSIGN SECRET SANTAS

- ◆ Randomly assign each student another classmate (out of a smaller subset of classmates in a large class) to do 1-2 secret good deed(s) for during 1-2 classes (with another classmate’s help if needed)
- ◆ Can also have students give clue(s) to help students guess their Secret “Santa” and get to know each other better to improve cohesion.

2

ACTS OF EFFORT NOT \$



To ensure this activity is *most* beneficial & *doesn’t cause financial stress*, emphasize that students are NOT expected to spend ANY money on their small acts of kindness, and set a *maximum* spending limit of \$2-5.



GUESS & DISCUSS

3

Students discuss (in small groups for larger classes) *how it felt to perform small act(s) of kindness in secret and then be recognized for it in class* along with research on kindness & altruism.

Learn More about bullying and its prevention at [www.](http://www.stopbullying.gov)

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