



## TRANSCRIPT

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### Title: Exploring Kindness

Caron Berkley: [crosstalk 00:00:03] He handed another bag of chips to my daughter. He was like, "Here, you have your own bag of chips free of charge."

Tom Tait: He's a baseball coach who believed in me, made me feel like there was no one else I'd rather have out here than you.

Celia Jaffe: A girl invited me over. She became a great friend to this day. Forty years later, we're still in contact.

Sandra Hutchens: And saying, "You know, you're really smart. You can do anything you want in life." She changed my life.

Dr. Al Mijares: Let me talk to you about the power of kindness. Did you know that one single act of kindness can change the world? You don't have to think monumentally. I mean, a simple thank you, please, or excuse me has the power to change lives. When we look at the world today, both locally, [00:01:30] nationally, and globally, it is toxic. Communication is just shut down. I mean, people aren't interested in hearing the opinion of others, and it has affected public discourse. It has affected the home, the family, and the workplace, and we together have the power to change that by practicing simple acts of kindness.

[00:02:00] Hi, I'm Dr. Al Mijares, Superintendent of Schools for Orange County, California. In this episode of the Deeper Learning podcast, I want to take you on a quest to get answers to some important questions about kindness. Among them, why has this one trait resonated through the generations? Why do we keep needing to remind ourselves to be kind? And the big question: what would happen if our entire county, state, or even nation were to embrace kindness?

[00:02:30] So in 2016, the Orange County Department of Education launched its One Billion Acts of Kindness campaign, and we did it to promote a positive school climate, civility, and to build character. Now, you may ask, why one billion? Well, because we wanted a big, large, audacious, inspirational goal. We wanted it to be so big that we covered the entire matter [00:03:00] of toxicity in our society.

If you ask anyone, they will agree that we need more kindness in our society, so why aren't we more kind? And more importantly, how can we create more kindness in our community? To answer that, we decided to visit an Orange County city that has reported dividends from its own kindness campaign. Anaheim, California is where our story begins.

Tom Tait: I first got this idea of kindness, it was back in 2004, [00:03:30] and I had ... I was just winding up my ten years on city council. I was about to be termed out. I noticed around town these signs that someone had put up that said Make Kindness Contagious. It didn't say buy something or it wasn't an ad. It was just these signs, and it lifted me up.

- Dr. Al Mijares: That's Anaheim Mayor Tom Tait. Since becoming mayor, he's run an ongoing campaign for kindness within his city.
- Tom Tait: I got a call from a friend of mine saying, " [00:04:00] I think you should meet this guy who is putting these signs up." His name was Dr. Jaievsky, Edward Jaievsky, and he came to my office. He says, "In medicine, you can either treat the symptoms, or you can stimulate the body to heal itself from within." He said, "That's what I do. I'm a holistic doctor." And then he says, "I think the same applies to a city. You can either treat the symptoms, or you can stimulate the city to heal from within." He says, "I think it has something to do with kindness."
- For me, that [00:04:30] was the moment the light bulb went off. I think because I had ten years of symptom treating, and doing a lot of good things and good folks in Anaheim and our staff doing great things, but it really was symptom treating, and I felt there has to be ... It hadn't really moved, progressed the city forward. So I knew that was right.
- Six years later, this mayor's seat opens up, and I thought I need to run, and I need to run on a platform of kindness.
- Dr. Al Mijares: Getting a whole city to [00:05:00] buy into a platform like this would seem like a daunting task.
- Tom Tait: None of this costs anything. It's about how we treat one another. It's about doing something for someone else with no expectation of return. I call it the low-hanging fruit. If you want to change something, you change the culture. We can all do it. It's easier for leaders to do it. A mayor can, may be the best position to do it in the city, but it doesn't have to be a mayor. Could be anyone who has a leadership. It could be a leader [00:05:30] in a family, a father or mother. It could be a teacher in a classroom, principal in a school, superintendent, member of a club. But you don't have to be a leader, just anybody in an organization. Actually, you'll become a leader if you start talking about this, because people will want to follow, because it will be contagious.
- Dr. Al Mijares: Mayor Tait made us think about who should lead when it comes to setting an example for our society. Mayors and teachers immediately spring to mind, but what about our religious leaders? [00:06:00] They maintain influential positions in many people's lives. What do they think about spreading kindness? How can the religious community help spread this message?
- We first spoke to Caron Berkley, Director of Communications for the Jewish Federation and Family Services of Orange County.
- Caron Berkley: In Judaism, there's a lot of different values that are part of our foundation as a faith and as a community, so when we're talking about kindness [00:06:30] in particular, there are a couple of different value concepts and ideas from the Torah, which is our religious text, that come to mind. One of them is the concept of gemilut hasadim, which means loving kindness. These are acts done in relationship with God. It's not done for a reward from God for the afterlife.
- The concept of gemilut hasadim is that you act with loving kindness towards other human beings to honor your relationship with God, [00:07:00] and because it is the right thing to do as a Jew and as a human being. So service and volunteerism kind of comes

under that same umbrella. You see a lot of people in the community, Jewish, non-Jewish, participating in volunteer activities.

Dr. Al Mijares: In fact, kindness is one of the core concepts of all religions. Why, then, do we continuously need reminding that we ought to make a point about being kind to one another?

Mustafa Umar: I think [00:07:30] we live in a very individualistic, and that translates to a very selfish society. That's very dangerous. When we're teaching the younger generation, we're teaching these students to grow up with certain values that are going to be there to improve the world and make the world a better place. They need to understand that it's not just about them, and that they need to take some time out in order to make sure that they manifest certain acts of kindness so that other people [00:08:00] can benefit as well.

Dr. Al Mijares: Professor Mustafa Umar from Cal Islamic University.

Mustafa Umar: When you hand some food to someone, when you go do an act of kindness for somebody else, you get them a cup of coffee, you go pick up a textbook that they left in the classroom, it will help the other person. But if the intention is not there, it's not going to help the person who is doing the act of kindness. So if you want maximum benefit in order to help other people as well as help yourself to become a better person, [00:08:30] the intention needs to constantly be renewed.

This is a concept we have in Islam, is always renew your intention again and again, because it's so easy to change your intentions. Even if they were right to begin with, they change along the way. But you can always change them back.

Dr. Al Mijares: As William Shakespeare said in Portia's famous "Quality of Mercy" speech from the Merchant of Venice - Kindness goes both ways, it "blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

Bayless Conley: Kindness begets kindness, and if you're kind to [00:09:00] others, it comes back to you. When you're kind and you sow a seed of kindness in someone else's life, they generally will reciprocate, end up doing it. There's just sort of an exponential factor.

Dr. Al Mijares: That's Pastor Bayless Conley from Cottonwood Church, a Christian Ministry located in Los Alamitos, CA. He talks about the pay-it-forward aspect of kindness, but he also wonders if the thought of having to perform life-changing acts like the kind we sometimes hear about in the media is actually too intimidating and keeps [00:09:30] people from fully embracing kindness.

Bayless Conley: I think that's actually what stops some people, is they're waiting for this big moment or this big thing to happen, and frankly, it's just the drama of the simple life and just doing simple things, helping people in simple ways, sharing an encouraging word. It can probably keep somebody from jumping off a bridge. You just don't know it. The world is starved for kindness.

Dr. Al Mijares: You know, it does feel that way [00:10:00] sometimes, and I would imagine that those who are responsible for keeping our neighborhoods safe must feel it on an even deeper

level. To find out if that was the case, we decided to sit down with Orange County Sheriff Sandra Hutchens, whose department handles some decidedly unkind situations. It turns out Hutchens also believes small gestures can make a huge impact.

- Sandra Hutchens: I don't think people realize how just a simple [00:10:30] statement like, "You look really nice today" or "How are you doing?" makes a difference in someone's life.
- Dr. Al Mijares: The simplicity of kindness. It can change a life. In fact, Orange County Sheriff's deputies specifically employ community policing strategies which are based on kindness.
- Sandra Hutchens: Community policing is a concept that instead of us just coming out and being the enforcers [00:11:00] in the community, we need to be a part of the community. Every community is different. Their expectations are different. Their needs are different. So in our line of work, it's especially important to be able to show kindness, because we see people on our absolute worst days, if they've been a victim of domestic violence, if they have had their house broken into. The person who is getting arrested, they may have made a bad choice, may not be a bad person but made a bad choice that day. [00:11:30] It's important for us to, at their worst day, be kind about how ... Do our business, but be kind.
- I think the public gets the impression that, from television, 90% of what we do is to get into fights and make arrests. 90% of what we do is talk to people, defuse disagreements, neighborhood disagreements, domestic disagreements. We deal with those kinds of things. So using kindness, valuing a person, accepting [00:12:00] them. "We're equal here. We're going to work this out." It is very powerful.
- Dr. Al Mijares: Police see all of the negativity in life, but yet believe that kindness can make a difference. That's very motivational. So where do we start as a community? As educators, we tend to focus our efforts on the future leaders of our society, our children, and we aren't alone in this thinking.
- Sandra Hutchens: I think the people that will make the difference are the kids. They have the most [00:12:30] power to do that, and I think back to the tobacco campaigns. The kids were being taught in school that tobacco is bad for you, and they started coming home telling mom and dad, "Tobacco's bad for you." That had an impact. I think the same thing will be true if we have our kids learn about kindness and reaching out to other people. If they start practicing it, that goes into the home. That goes into the community.
- Dr. Al Mijares: [00:13:00] The concept of instilling kindness in children isn't a new one. In fact, organizations like the Boy Scouts of America have been doing it for more than 100 years.
- Marty Cutrone: I believe kindness ultimately defines us as Scouts. It's one of the most visible virtues we see in our Scouts. The foundation of scouting is built on service, doing kind acts to others without expecting any compensation or recognition.
- Dr. Al Mijares: That's Marty Cutrone, Director of Strategic Alliances [00:13:30] for the Orange County Council of the Boy Scouts of America.
- Marty Cutrone: More than being a central component of the Scout law, we view kindness as kind of a defining virtue. It's who Scouts are. Scouts aren't promising to become kind someday. They actually explain a Scout is kind. It's who they are. They kind of own that. Armed with kindness, Scouts can change the world, I [00:14:00] believe that, through the

modeling of kindness. Kindness is one of those action virtues that, when modeled daily, can become contagious.

Dr. Al Mijares: You won't be surprised to find out that I believe our schools are perfectly positioned to be that daily catalyst to spread kindness. Kindness, after all, is the bedrock of character, and character development is among the 21st century learning skills we teach in our classrooms. It's even embedded in our state educational standards.

[00:14:30] I wanted to dig a little deeper into how the education community sees kindness, so I caught up with Celia Jaffe, President Elect of the California State Parent Teacher Association.

Celia Jaffe: Our members and leaders are right there around the kids and the teachers, and everyone treating each other well is part of what makes the whole thing work. It makes people feel safe at school. It makes kids learn better and grow up nicer. All that's really [00:15:00] important.

Dr. Al Mijares: Of course, schools aren't the only influencers. Friends, family members, celebrities, and even political leaders all shape perceptions of appropriate behavior. If we can commit to surrounding our kids with models of respect and kindness, it could have a major impact on our society. But first things first.

Celia Jaffe: Well, the atmosphere that kids grow up in is what they're likely to duplicate or to think is normal, [00:15:30] right? So if they grow up in a world, meaning a family, a school where people are nice to each other and talk respectfully and disagree in rational ways that they talk out and no personal attacks, thinking the best of others and all that, that's a mindset that can go with the child into adulthood and [00:16:00] create, hopefully, a better world. That's what we're all looking for the, always looking for the future to be better than the present. So hoping that the kids grow up in that kind of environment to make the world better in the future.

Dr. Al Mijares: Rosemary Saylor, President of the Orange County School Boards Association, wants kindness to be a basic part of our curriculum.

Rosemary Saylor: Practicing kindness can and should be, in my opinion, part of the whole child education process, because being [00:16:30] kind is a very important aspect of social emotional skills. There's no downside to promoting kindness. Being kind to others should be a part of a school's culture. In that regard, all district and school sites, staff should be role models, not just teaching kindness but living it right in front of the students at all times.

Dr. Al Mijares: This theme was echoed time and again in our conversations about kindness. Here is Dr. Wes Smith, Executive Director of the Association of California [00:17:00] School Administrators, which serves to train and inspire thousands of school leaders across the State of California.

Dr. Wes Smith: We all have a role in ensuring that kindness is a non-negotiable in our schools, in our districts, in our counties, in our homes. But it can't be just the job of public educators. We put so much on public education, on the 185 days or so [00:17:30] that we have these kids. We can be a part of it, we should be, but this has got to be a social movement that expands beyond just the public schools and is a 365-day commitment.

- Dr. Al Mijares: Using our schools as a catalyst for kindness may be the key to reaching all parts of our community, and it can work if it's a shared goal. But is there any research to suggest greater benefits? Again, here's Dr. Smith.
- Dr. Wes Smith: I did my doctoral dissertation [00:18:00] on self-concept and its impact on achievement. Without boring into research, it was clear through my work and what I read that if students feel better about themselves, they feel better about the work they're doing, they achieve more. So when there is this environment of kindness and support, students feel better about themselves. They feel better about the work that they do, and they do better. [00:18:30] So absolutely it's clear that self-concept really improves student outcomes.
- Dr. Al Mijares: His conclusions are mirrored by other scientific studies, but that still leaves some unanswered questions, specifically what is the science behind kindness? Are there physiological benefits to being kind? And what does that say about us as human beings?
- Jennifer Burrell: The EDI is a survey that kindergarten teachers fill out on the children in their classrooms, [00:19:00] and the answers give us a developmental profile of how children in Orange County are doing across all of the domains of child development.
- Dr. Al Mijares: That was Jennifer Burrell, Executive Director of Orange County Association for the Education of Young Children, and she's talking about the Early Development Index, or EDI.
- Jennifer Burrell: Looking at the data, and the data changes a little bit year to year but not drastically, so there were three areas that really stood out and across [00:19:30] the county, regardless of where you were, were sort of the top three ways that children are not ready or sort of struggling. Two of them weren't really a big surprise to me, but the third really was. The first was fine and gross motor skills. Kids are not outside running around as much. There's a lot of use of devices and things, which do not promote a fine or gross motor skill. The second one was communication and general knowledge. It's really can they express what they're thinking? [00:20:00] Can they express their wants and needs? It's a big category, so again, not a surprise. We'd seen that in preschool programs.
- But the third one was pro-social behavior. Pro-social behavior is helping behavior. That's like if somebody's upset, do you comfort them? If somebody drops something, do you pick it up? It's things that you're doing for your classroom or for your community, your friends. That just wasn't on our radar, and it was one of the [00:20:30] biggest areas that children were not ready, no matter where you go, anywhere in the county. That kept me up at night. I just thought about it constantly. What does that mean and why is that happening?
- Dr. Al Mijares: So why are our young children coming up short when it comes to pro-social behavior? Has something changed fundamentally, or has it always been an issue?
- Jennifer Burrell: I do believe that all children are born with the propensity to be kind. I think that is an innate [00:21:00] gift we are all given. However, the relationships in their lives are really important to this development. Children that are nurtured learn how to nurture, right? And children that are comforted know how to comfort. Children are not seeing pro-social behavior being modeled by their own parents, by other community members. We don't stop on the side of the road anymore when somebody has a flat tire, right? We

assume they have a cell phone. They don't need my help, or that's not my job anymore, or they have AAA, right?

Dr. Al Mijares: This [00:21:30] is convicting. It almost seems like we have abandoned the common pleasantries of life. Jennifer has an interesting experiment we can all perform.

Jennifer Burrell: I challenge people to just sort of think about this from the perspective of a very young child. So the next time you're in an airport or a Starbucks or any public place where people have to wait, take a look around and try to find a baby, and just watch them for a minute. Watch what happens, because babies [00:22:00] are innately curious and they're drawn to faces. They're always trying to connect, and they're constantly watching everybody around them. They're genetically programmed to look for faces. So watch the baby as he looks around the room trying to find somebody, anybody to connect with, and you'll see that almost everybody in the room is looking down at their phone, right? And they're not even aware that there's a baby trying to see them.

Babies all over the place are looking out into the world, right, [00:22:30] and nobody's looking back. No one's making a connection. What is the message that we're sending to all these little teeny ones? I don't think we have even begun to see what the impact of this will be on future generations in terms of connectedness.

Dr. Al Mijares: So how can we fix this?

Jennifer Burrell: This is an easy fix, I believe. As educators and parents and community members, we can be those people that smile at babies. If all of us, if everyone listening to this, before they look at their phone [00:23:00] in Starbucks looks around to see if there's a little baby in a stroller trying to make a connection and then just smiles, maybe makes a little wave, we're sending that message out. "You're important, and even though you don't know me, I care about you."

Dr. Al Mijares: It's the simple concept of basic kindness, just humans being aware of other humans, which can have an enormous impact. Perhaps this biological imperative which demands connectedness is the real root of why kindness [00:23:30] can have such an impact. No one would be able to help us get to the bottom of it better than world-renowned neurosurgeon and the Founder of the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research at Stanford University, Dr. James Doty.

Dr. James Doty: As a neuroscientist, what myself and others have learned is that the heart and the brain are connected. In fact, your brain is connected to all the organs in your body, and it's a two-way connection. [00:24:00] We know that when an individual demonstrates kindness, compassion, love, caring, nurturing to another, what happens is to that person, it decreases their stress response, which is modulated via the sympathetic nervous system and the vagus nerve, which is that heart-brain connection, and it shifts them from this fear and threat response to what we call the parasympathetic nervous system, [00:24:30] or the rest and digest system.

When you do even these acts, it shifts you into that mode. When you're in that mode, many magical things happen. Your executive control function works its best. You're much more discerning and thoughtful about decisions you make. You're much more creative. You're much more productive. Other side benefits are that your immune system is boosted, [00:25:00] your stress hormones go down to baseline levels, and their elevation is associated with a lot of negative health consequences. Your cardiac

function improves. The fact of the matter is the evolution of our species is such that that is the mode we were designed to be in, and that mode of caring and concern for others is when our physiology works its best.

- Dr. Al Mijares: [00:25:30] If kindness has this kind of clear mental and physical benefit, why are we needing constant reminders to be kind? Dr. James Doty and Jennifer Burrell seem to concur.
- Dr. James Doty: If you look at communities from ages ago when people lived in multi-generational families, they lived in the same village, everyone knew you. They knew your good parts and they knew your bad parts, and guess what? They still loved you. In modern [00:26:00] society, we are far removed oftentimes from the village where we grew up. We're removed from our parents, our grandparents, even our siblings. So we're in society where there's no natural connection. As a result, this, in and of itself, leads to stress and anxiety.
- Dr. Al Mijares: So back to our initial big question. What impact could we have if everyone were kind? Dr. Doty again.
- Dr. James Doty: [00:26:30] I cannot emphasize enough how connecting, being kind, creating a trust environment has an impact on your physiology. Whether that's in the context of being a doctor, whether that's in a context of being a teacher interacting with students, or just being a human being, when your intention is set to be kind, to be compassionate, it changes your environment. We know that when an individual [00:27:00] observes another individual being kind or compassionate, it dramatically increases the occurrence of similar types of acts in those individuals who observe it.
- Dr. Al Mijares: He's talking about awareness. One person being kind to another can dramatically improve the chances that someone else will, in turn, do something kind. That means getting out there and promoting kindness by example really is the best, most effective thing we can do to make a change, [00:27:30] which in an interesting way brings us back to where we started, in Anaheim. Mayor Tom Tait.
- Tom Tait: I remember I got the call. I was in my backyard. It was on a Saturday, and "Hello, this is Lama Tenzin. I'm an emissary for peace for the Dalai Lama. Want to invite you to Dharamshala."
- Dr. Al Mijares: Did you catch that? Out of the blue, the Dalai Lama had just called Mayor Tait.
- Tom Tait: You know, it just, it kind of caught me off guard. Well, of course it caught me off guard. Anyway, I [00:28:00] went with my wife and a friend of ours. We get there, and I get a chance to meet him. We sat down and talked for about 45 minutes. His Holiness said that he thought ... He told me, he says that he believes the path to world peace is creating a culture of kindness in cities, but particularly schools, particularly schools. He said that's what he's going to dedicate the rest of his life on, for the schools. He says it won't happen overnight, but [00:28:30] 20 years from now, the world could be a peaceful place if we all focus on that.
- Dalai Lama: If that is being materialized, then I think today [inaudible 00:28:44] much peace for life.
- Dr. Al Mijares: In June of 2017, the Dalai Lama made a special appearance in Orange County to visit with Tait and local educators. Over the course of 90 minutes, he talked about the

science [00:29:00] behind kindness and the importance of promoting nonviolence in the 21st century. He said, and I'm quoting, "Modern education should provide some education for inner value based on scientific findings and common experience and common sense."

The Dalai Lama was struck by the fact that in America, municipalities were actually vying to become cities of kindness and cities of compassion. He felt America [00:29:30] was poised to accept the challenge and lead the world.

So a city of kindness? How about a county of kindness or a country of kindness? The widespread positive effects of achieving something like this would be numerous. Here's the mayor.

Tom Tait:

Your crime drops. Things like senior neglect drops. Certainly your bullying at schools drops. Addiction [00:30:00] and all of the vast problems that come from that, that drops. Everything, everything, everything gets better and we live in a kind city. Neighbors care for one another. People are happier when they know that they live in a neighborhood where the neighbors care for them and they care for their neighbors. We're safer. A lot of people will pay attention, if we can make this happen and actually create a true culture of kindness in our City of Anaheim, Orange County, [00:30:30] our schools, because it is contagious and it will be contagious.

Dr. Al Mijares:

Contagious. Infectious. Kindness is viral. It spreads when people see it in action, and it's good for the heart and the mind. But more than all of that, it's necessary for us as people. It's something that as humans we crave and need, and all too often we find ourselves lacking or forgetting about it. [00:31:00] In my office at the Orange County Department of Education, there is a poster near my exit door which a teacher gave me decades ago. It features the picture of a small child bent over, stroking the head of a small, fluffy rabbit with a simple inscription above the child that reads, "Be Ye Kind." This visual has served as a mood elevator for me and has changed my emotional state countless times when leaving the office. It has taught me that a simple act of kindness can alter the destiny of a life.

I hope we've answered for you some of those deeper questions about kindness, its impact, and the possibilities it can provide. I hope you'll join us in sharing acts of kindness and spreading the word at [kindness1billion.org](http://kindness1billion.org). That's kindness, the number 1, billion.org.

[00:31:30] Thanks for joining us for the Deeper Learning Podcast. It's our hope that after this quest, you will feel invigorated, educated, and motivated to get out there and be kind. We'd love to hear your thoughts. You can reach us at [communications@ocde.us](mailto:communications@ocde.us). If you've enjoyed this episode, please share it with a friend.

The Deeper Learning Podcast is a production of the Orange County Department of Education. Thanks to Candy Kern and all our participants, who shared their expertise about the power of kindness. And [00:32:00] thanks to our podcast team, Ian Hannigan, Laura Watson, Greg Lammers, and Shane Klein. We'll see you next time on the Deeper Learning Podcast.

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