

## COMPLICATING KINDNESS

Slide 1 (Title) – Hi, I’m Dr. Shapiro, and I’m going to share a few thoughts about kindness.

Slide 2 (Alaska) – I’d like to start by sharing a story about a physician’s kindness. Since this story is not primarily about me, I have permission to share it. When he was 15, my son was diagnosed with ankylosing spondulitis, a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the spine and sacroiliac joints, as well as some peripheral joints. He was in severe pain that did not respond well initially to medication, and had to give up basketball which he loved and which he was very good at. He quickly grew depressed, and spent long hours in his room staring at the ceiling. He felt, understandably, that his life was over. Then one day he surfaced and told me he wanted to go to Alaska. He’d found an outward bound-type program that took teens into the Alaskan wilderness for 3 weeks. I was appalled. This kid could barely walk, much less hike for miles. We consulted his rheumatologist, he rolled his eyes and suggested yoga. My son rolled his eyes and said yoga was for old people. Then we went to see our family doctor, who didn’t know a ton about SA but knew a lot about my son. He listened to my son talk about all the wonders he expected to encounter in Alaska. Finally Josh said, “So what do you think, Dr. H?” Dr. H was quiet for a moment. Then he smiled and said, “Alaska is God’s country. You haven’t lived until you’ve seen Alaska.” My son did go to Alaska. It was hard, especially when two girls ended up carrying most of the weight in his pack. At one point they considered medi-vac-ing him out. But he made it to the end, and it gave him confidence that he had a future.

I thought our family doc was kind and still do. But then again I wonder, was he kind? Out of caring for my son, did he risk too much? Maybe it was really the rheumatologist who was kind, but trying to set a limit. Kindness can be more complicated than we think.

Slide 3 (Rainbows) - Is kindness really worth 4 sessions of your time? Is it too touchy-feely, too much rainbows and kittens. Although unlikely we can memorize our way to kindness, maybe we can practice our way in that direction. I want to emphasize here that I am saying “we” and “our,” “not “you” and “your.”

I want to make very clear that we are not trying to teach you how to be kind, because we assume you are already kind people. What we are trying to do is create a culture at this institution in which kindness is an important value, and people think it is worthwhile to think about kindness and talk about kindness with each other.

Slide 4 (We All Know What Kindness Is, Right?) – What is kindness? (examples from class)

Slide 5 (Constructs Related to Kindness) It might be helpful to distinguish kindness from related constructs.

**Pity:** implies tender or sometimes slightly contemptuous sorrow for one in misery or distress; self-centered

**Sympathy:** a relationship between two people where whatever affects one similarly affects the other (emotional resonance); errors of projection (self-centered); errors of over-identification (self-centered)

**Pity and sympathy, although well-intended, can undermine kindness despite our best intentions.**

**Compassion:** “to suffer together”; sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it

**Empathy:** the ability to understand and feel another’s perspective, concerns, and experience; ability to communicate that understanding to the other; focus is on other; distinction between self and other is preserved; not dependent on similarity with the other

**Compassion and empathy we could say provide the cognitive and emotional underpinnings for kindness.**

**Slide 6 (Kindness):** Kindness emphasizes action

**Slide 7 (When Does Kindness Devolve into Pity)**

- Helping vs. service (Rachel Remen)
  - Helping based on inequality; can diminish sense of worth of helpee, while maximizing self-satisfaction of helper; fixing; distance
  - Service based on recognition of mutual vulnerability, fragility; spirit of awe and humility
- Top-down kindness = pity
- Horizontal kindness = what one human owes another human
- Buddhist saying: “Life is so difficult, how can we be anything but kind?”

**Slide 8-14 Not Always So Easy to Figure Out) what kindness looks like... 7 Poll examples**

**Slide 15 (Barriers to Kindness) – ask students about barriers**

- Depletion
- Not everyone deserves my kindness

**Slide 16 (Replenishing Kindness) – ask students, what do you do to replenish your kindness reservoir?**

- Self-care
- Other care
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**Slide 17 (Building Kindness) – Although kindness may be more complicated than we think, we can still be guided by certain moral principles in evaluating our own kindness.**

- Treating others (and their ideas) with respect; listening attentively; helping others; being able to say you’re sorry

**Slide 18 (van Gogh Pieta) – Think about how you will treat your patients with kindness in the future; think about how you will treat everyone around you with kindness starting today**

**Slide 19 – We are now going to hear from our final speaker, who will help us understand kindness from the ground up. We’d also appreciate it greatly if, when she has finished speaking, you can go to this site to complete a very brief evaluation of today’s session.**

