



United States of Kindness

The Research Case for Kindness

Researchers across disciplines have studied the effects of prosocial behavior in schools, workplaces, and communities. The evidence links everyday acts of kindness with measurable outcomes in wellbeing, engagement, and trust.

Across settings, the findings are consistent. When kindness is visible and practiced regularly, people function better and institutions are more stable.

Executive Summary

Research across psychology, education, and business has examined how everyday behavior shapes outcomes. Studies show that acts of kindness are associated with improved mental health and lower stress.¹² In schools, students who perceive their environment as kind report stronger belonging and peer connection.⁵ In workplaces, supportive leadership and psychological safety are linked to higher engagement and lower turnover.⁷

Research from Stanford shows that people often underestimate how much others care. When kindness is made visible, social connection increases.⁴ For organizations, culture influences results. Environments grounded in respect and recognition are associated with stronger retention and increased consumer trust.⁷⁸

Summary Insight

- Prosocial behavior is associated with improved wellbeing and lower psychological distress.¹²³
- Students who perceive kindness in school report stronger belonging.⁵
- Supportive leadership is linked to higher engagement and lower turnover.⁷
- Psychological safety predicts stronger team performance.⁹
- Consumer surveys show a preference for companies perceived as ethical and community-minded.⁸





United States of Kindness

The Research Case for Kindness

Key Findings

Mental Health and Wellbeing

A meta-analysis of 27 studies found that performing acts of kindness increases reported wellbeing.¹ Intervention studies show similar results, including reductions in depressive symptoms and stress.² Research also indicates that helping others supports emotional health over time.³

Key Takeaway: Repeated acts of kindness are linked to better mental health. Healthier people are more engaged in school and at work.

Workplace and Organizational Performance

Research in business settings links supportive leadership and psychological safety with stronger engagement and lower turnover.⁷ Google's study of more than 180 teams found that psychological safety was the strongest predictor of performance.⁹

Consumer research shows that 81% of U.S. respondents prefer to buy from companies they perceive as kind.⁸ Many report avoiding brands they view as unkind.

Workplace intervention studies show that kindness spreads within teams. Employees who receive acts of kindness are more likely to extend it to others.¹⁴

Key Takeaway: Workplace culture affects performance, retention, and customer loyalty.

Social Connection

Research from Stanford shows that people underestimate how much others care. When that belief is corrected, people are more likely to engage and connect.⁴ Long-term research shows that daily prosocial behavior predicts stronger trust and more stable relationships.¹⁰

Key Takeaway: Visible kindness influences how people interact. Trust builds through consistent behavior.





United States of Kindness

The Research Case for Kindness

Key Findings

Education and Youth

Students who practice regular acts of kindness show higher peer acceptance and stronger positive emotion.¹¹ Large reviews of school-based social and emotional learning programs show improved behavior and academic gains.¹²

Students who feel connected to school are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.¹³

Key Takeaway: A positive school climate supports both student wellbeing and academic progress.

Bottom Line

Kindness is associated with measurable outcomes in wellbeing, school climate, social trust, and workplace performance.

It does not replace sound strategy or operational discipline. However, research suggests that when respect and recognition are part of daily behavior, people perform more consistently and organizations operate more effectively.

Footnotes

1. Curry et al., *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2018).
2. Palacios-Delgado et al., *Social Sciences* (2025).
3. APA PsycNet, *Prosocial Behavior and Wellbeing* (2017).
4. Pei & Zaki et al., *Nature Human Behaviour* (2025).
5. *Journal of School Psychology* (2021), *Perceived Kindness and School Belonging*.
6. Campbell Systematic Review, *School-Based Bullying Prevention* (2021).
7. *Harvard Business Review*, "Why Kindness at Work Pays Off" (2023).
8. Baringa, "Consumers Choose Kind Companies" (2023).
9. Google Project Aristotle (Multi-Year Study).
10. Cash et al., *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2024).
11. Schönert-Reichl et al., *PLOS ONE*.
12. Durlak et al., *Child Development* (2011).
13. CDC, *School Connectedness Research*.
14. UC Riverside / Coca-Cola Iberia Workplace Study (2018).

