

3.5.5 Kindness Tree

Brief description, and rules of the implementation of the learning activity

The Kindness Tree is a creative activity for children that promotes kindness, connectedness, and self-control, and through these, resilience. The activity focuses on developing the three fundamental elements of resilience, such as developing and maintaining supportive social relationships, self-control, emotional regulation, and communication. Students write or draw their own kind actions on paper leaves and attach them to a shared classroom tree. As this tree visually grows, it actively reinforces empathy, boosts self-confidence, and creates a highly supportive community.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
 - Resilience
- **Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus**
 - Emotional awareness, regulation, and communication
 - Empathy
 - Connectedness
 - Valuing people and nature

Age group	Student number	Duration
6 + years old	class size	variable

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

Each child adds paper "leaves," "flowers," or "fruits" to the tree, symbolizing their kind actions – such as helping others or sharing something. As the tree "grows," it serves as a visual reminder of positive behaviour and a supportive community. This helps children become emotionally more resilient and enables them to face challenges with empathy and care.

1. Prepare a large tree trunk and branches from paper or cardboard. Cut out leaves, flowers, or fruits from coloured paper.
2. Introduce the activity by starting a conversation about kindness. Explain that every kind action becomes a new leaf, flower, or fruit on the tree.
3. Children write or draw one kind action on each paper shape. (For example: "I helped someone carry their bag.")
4. Attach the completed shapes to the tree. The tree "grows" continuously as new acts of kindness are added.
5. Regularly revisit the tree: occasionally review the new leaves together and discuss how these actions affected others and what feelings they evoked.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

It is primarily an indoor activity. The "tree" can be placed on one of the classroom walls, with branches within the students' reach. It does not require rearranging the classroom furniture. The activity can be carried out at any time, either as planned or ad hoc, when the teacher feels that social relationships need to be strengthened in order to improve the classroom climate.

How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

Learning to be kind to others is an essential part of resilience. The Kindness Tree supports resilience by focusing on the following elements of the skill:

- Emotional awareness, regulation, and communication: As students reflect on their kind actions or receive recognition for them, they learn to process their emotions constructively, building greater self-awareness and emotional control.
- Building positive relationships: Children need to be open to maintain a supportive social network, which will be an important help for them in getting back up again from a crisis situation. As they share kind gestures — such as writing appreciation notes — students develop stronger bonds with classmates, creating a more connected and supportive classroom community.
- Boosting self-confidence and optimism: When students see that their kind actions are noticed and appreciated, they become more confident in their ability to have a positive impact. And vice versa: when they receive kindness, praise, and thanks publicly, they feel valued, which helps build their self-confidence and a sense of "I can do it." The feeling of "I can do it" is essential for setting goals from an emotional bottom-end point, and for believing that they can achieve them.
- Open communication: As students post their kind acts on the tree, they openly express their emotions and gratitude, both verbally and in writing. This exercise helps them develop clearer, more positive communication skills while creating a supportive classroom environment. To respond with resilience to serious challenges requires a combination of inner strengths combined with the ability to access outside resources. It is important that students learn and understand that they can get help from others, but only if they communicate their feelings.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

The goal of the Kindness Tree activity is to help students become more aware of the importance of kind and helpful behaviour, enabling them to recognize, practice, and appreciate it in themselves and others.

As a result of completing this task, students will:

- be able to identify and express acts of kindness;
- be able to initiate positive, prosocial behaviours more frequently (e.g., helping, cooperating, being considerate);
- recognise and understand that their actions have a positive impact on the whole community, which enhances their self-esteem and emotional stability.
- the classroom atmosphere improves, and feelings of trust and social support increase;

The development of student understanding and behaviour thus directly contributes to strengthening resilience - emotional adaptability and coping strategies.

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

- As part of a morning circle or start-of-day discussion, when students reflect on the previous day and share a kind act.
- As a week-ending reflection, when students highlight the positive moments of the week.
- Connected to class events or holidays, such as Christmas or Easter, when attentiveness and empathy are emphasized themes.
- As a supplement to lessons focused on emotional education and social skills development.
- During special educational sessions (e.g., with the school psychologist, special education teacher, or during homeroom classes).

Materials and tools needed for implementation

Materials for the tree: large sheets of paper or cardboard for the trunk and branches; scissors; glue, tape, or magnets for attaching; bulletin board, folding screen, magnetic board, or a blank wall.

Paper shapes (leaves, flowers, fruits): coloured paper (pre-cut or made together with the children).

For writing and decorating: graphite and coloured pencils, markers; stickers and decorative elements (optional).

Guiding questions

- What did you do today to help someone or make them happy?
- How did it feel when you were kind to someone?
- Why is it important to pay attention to how we treat each other?
- Did you see something today that should be added to the Kindness Tree?
- How can someone be kind to others even when they are having a bad day?
- How is kindness different from simply being “polite”?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Students may not know what counts as a kind act.
Tip: Facilitate understanding through group brainstorming or discussing stories.
- **Challenge:** Some students find it difficult to express their thoughts.
Tip: Allow them to illustrate their actions through drawings and offer help with wording if needed.
- **Challenge:** Students are not always honest in their entries.
Tip: Emphasize genuine experiences and feelings rather than “expected” answers – creating a safe atmosphere is crucial.
- **Challenge:** Some students are reluctant to participate.
Tip: Involve them based on feedback from other students (e.g., “I saw you help someone today – let’s add that to the tree.”).

Difficulty level tailoring

The activity can only be progressed in sequence; the difficulty level can be increased only after the previous one has been mastered. It is flexible how quickly the group advances to the next level, which depends on the group’s composition and social sensitivity.

The activity can be adapted flexibly according to the age, maturity, and emotional security of the student group. For younger or less verbal children, expressing the problem through drawing or a single word may be sufficient, while students with more developed emotional expression skills can articulate their feelings and thoughts in greater detail.

The teacher can also decide whether the discussion of problems happens openly or rather in a feedback-supportive manner - for example, by formulating general suggestions for solutions. The guiding questions and the way of processing can be simplified or deepened according to the group's needs.

It is important that children feel safe and that no one feels forced to self-disclose - this is especially crucial for developing resilience.

- **Beginners (6-7 years old):** – Learners with low resilience: The aim of the activity: To increase the sense of safety and support children in noticing and sharing simple acts of kindness. At the beginning of the activity, the teacher provides clear, concrete examples of kindness that can be written on the leaves (e.g., “I helped tidy up.”). Children can use pre-prepared leaves with pictures, which they only need to select or minimally complete. The teacher assists in formulating the acts and places the leaf together with the child, reducing uncertainty. Feedback should be highly supportive and immediate (“That was very kind of you!”). During group discussions, the teacher involves students with simple guiding questions (“Which leaf tells your story?”). It is sufficient for these children to participate less frequently or with fewer leaves.
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** – Learners with moderate resilience: The aim of the activity: To strengthen recognition and expression of independent acts of kindness. Children write or draw the leaves based on their own experiences, with the teacher offering guidance only when necessary (“Did you help someone today?”). They place the leaves on the tree independently, which increases their sense of responsibility. Reflective, simple questions can be used during discussions, for example: “How might the person you helped have felt?” “Why did you choose to do this?” Teacher support can be gradually reduced so that children participate more confidently in the activity. These learners can contribute more regularly with new leaves.
- **Experts (9-10 years old):** – Learners with high resilience: The aim of the activity: To develop conscious, independent kindness and active participation in the social dynamics of the class. These learners can formulate more complex or longer-term acts of kindness (e.g., helping someone over several days). Creating and placing the leaves is done entirely independently, and they may also support others in the process. During group discussions, deeper, self-reflective questions can be used: “Why was this act of kindness important for others?” “How did you handle a difficult situation with kindness?” They can also help keep the Kindness Tree organized and continuously growing (e.g., arranging new leaves). Their contributions can be more frequent and intentional, enriching the positive atmosphere of the class.

Debriefing and Reflection questions

- Which letter or message did you like the most on the tree? Why?
- How has the mood in the class changed since we started using the Kindness Tree?
- What did you learn about yourself during this activity?
- What was the most difficult part of this task for you?
- What new thing did you notice in other people's behaviour?
- What will you take with you from this experience into the coming weeks?