

## Random Acts of Kindness for Your Mental Health

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In the therapy world, it's commonly understood that doing good deeds for others can help increase self-esteem. In turn, good self-esteem contributes positively to so many other areas of our lives; physical/mental health, sociability, and healthy risk taking, to name just a few. Most people who are good Samaritans (the kind that often engage in random acts of kindness) say that they do it for the sheer joy it promotes. I have the privilege of working with a wonderful group of people who often, whether they realize it or not, engage in acts of kindness on a daily basis. Sometimes, they do it anonymously; sometimes their name is attached. All of the time, though, they promote kindness without expecting thanks. I polled my fabulous co-workers on the best random acts of kindness, and a list of their answers follows:

- Bake something for someone. Baking obviously takes time and thoughtfulness, especially if you make a person's favorite thing and surprise them with it. One of our wonderful interns pointed out that this could be a low cost way of making someone's day!
- Surprise someone with something they like. Not that long ago, I was having a really bad day. One of my colleagues noticed and surprised me with a fancy cup of coffee (one of my favorite pick-me-ups). It totally made my week!
- Surprise someone with a small, thoughtful gift. For instance, one of my co-workers collects bears and would most likely be pleasantly surprised by a new one for their collection.
- Another no-cost act of kindness is the simple compliment. Many of us forget the power of a genuine compliment to turn a day around or start it off on the right track.
- Randomly pick up friends' kids and baby sit so the hardworking parents can take some time for themselves. Another one of my co-workers explained that she and her husband often take their nieces and nephews on a moment's notice to give the adults a break - another low-cost/no-cost random act of kindness.
- Make it anonymous. During this poll, someone mentioned that acts of kindness have a whole new dimension of fun when they are done anonymously. She said that she's had anonymous gifts left in her mailbox and this gives her an optimistic feeling about the good in all people.

- Unexpectedly take care of someone when they least expect it. One of my best examples of this is de-icing and “de-snowing” the cars of co-workers or patrons. It’s so comforting to leave work after a long hard day, enter the dark cold parking lot, and realize that there’s one less chore to do before you get home.
- Treat someone who really needs it. I just heard the story of one of our mentors who was out in the community with a young person and accidentally stuck without the means to buy a treat at Dairy Queen on a really hot day. A lady overheard the problem and insisted on purchasing ice cream for both the mentor and the young person. They are currently planning on paying the random act of kindness forward to someone.
- Pass it on. Similar to the theme in the movie *Pay it Forward*, wouldn’t it be awesome if we started an epidemic of random acts of kindness in our communities and beyond? It’s pretty simple...someone goes out of his or her way to do something nice for us and we pass it on to someone else, until kindness begins to spread. Seems like we could all use a little more of that type of contagion!

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