

The 16 Days of Kindness

..... a Glimpse of the Future

Incorporating World Kindness Day, Australia's Kindness Day, UNESCO's International Day of Forgiveness, and National Children's Day.

People often wonder about the future. What effect will it have on our generation, future generations, and this wonderful planet of ours? In a survey conducted in 1999, Australians used the following words to predict future lifestyle - "frightening, confused, chaotic, traumatic, insular, dangerous and decadent" (Colmar Brunton survey). If someone was able to travel through time, and they ventured say, 20 years into the future, what would they tell us upon their return? Would there be stories that would promote happiness within us, or would we experience feelings of fear?

You may not have thought about it, but what we do now can have a profound effect on the future. As Chief Seattle said many years ago, we are caretakers of the planet for our children. What you do (or don't do) now, will have an impact on the future in some way. If you care about your children, and the children of the world, you will want them to have a bright future where they can live their lives with as little hardship and despair as possible.

How then do we achieve the desired 'simple, happy, peace', etc.? By being and promoting these things wherever we are, through the use of kindness, friendliness, caring, and so on. And it's easy. We don't need to learn how to do these things - we already know.

Our November celebration, encompassing sixteen days of kindness, gives you the opportunity to fine tune your skills in this area. It will also give you a glimpse of what a simple, happy, peaceful, safe, community orientated (as well as rewarding, fulfilling, and so on) future is like. If this is the future you desire, we give you sixteen days to practise, after which you can go off and fulfil your destiny - that of making yourself, and others, happy. And if you ever need a refresher course, there's one in November every year.

Kindness is a very personal thing, it is a "heart to heart" experience. And the more personal and spontaneous your kindness becomes, the greater the positive effect on both you and the receiver of your kindness. Planned acts of kindness tend by their very nature to be contrived, but are necessary to develop the conscious response into a habit. In the "16 Days of Kindness" celebration we give you sixteen themes to plan your kindness around. After these sixteen days you will find your kindness has become more habitual and spontaneous, and personally more rewarding. If you can involve a friend or friends to assist you, the positive effect will be even greater. You will find it not only rewarding, but also empowering.

The first day - 6th November - *Australia's National Kindness Day This day has been created to express the pride of living in Australia, and to celebrate our national identity, which has become wonderfully diverse through the assimilation of the many cultures that are now part of our

society. It is also an opportunity to express the ANZAC spirit of 'doing the right thing', regardless of the odds or fears.

The second day - 7th November - Good Neighbour Day. This gives you the opportunity to interact with the neighbours and the neighbourhood. Getting to know and react with the people who live in your neighbourhood, and being involved in small acts of kindness toward your community.

The third day - 8th November - My Day. A day to be kind to yourself, to pamper yourself. Who else is more deserving than you?

The fourth day - 9th November - Special People's Day. A day to acknowledge the special people in your life - loved ones and friends, as well as those who have made a positive impact upon your life.

The fifth day - 10th November - Work Day. A day to be kinder to your boss, your friends and associates at work, and also your customers and suppliers.

The sixth day - 11th November - Teacher's Day. A day to honour our children's educators, to acknowledge their dedication and hard work.

The seventh day - 12th November - Youth's Day. A day to honour youth, a day to concentrate on their many positive aspects such as their energy, creativity, their honesty of expression, and their idealistic endeavours to right the wrongs of the world.

The eighth day - 13th November - *World Kindness Day. A day to celebrate your role as a world citizen, a member of the global village, to discover the many similarities between yourself and people of different nations and cultures.

The ninth day - 14th November - Stop and Smell the Flowers Day A day to consciously step off the whirling merry-go-round of life, to practise being in the moment, or "mindfulness". This allows you to appreciate the myriad of precious moments you miss by your rush to be somewhere else.

The tenth day - 15th November - The Environment's Day. A day for the environment, our eco system. An opportunity to support and give back to the environment, helping to reverse the trend of taking, destroying, and abusing.

The eleventh day - 16th November - *International Day of Tolerance. An opportunity to acknowledge all you meet, of giving people a 'fair go'. A day to tear down the walls that separate, and build bridges that join. A day to make a resolution to practice tolerance in every facet of your life. A day to do more than tolerate others, but to accept them with open arms.

The twelfth day - 17th November - Inner Peace Day. A good day to follow the International Day of Tolerance. World peace depends on peaceful co-existence, which is accepting others who we might perceive to be 'different' from us in some way - in race, religion, culture, and so on.

We have inherited prejudices that are not based on fact, and these separate us from others. As long as these prejudices continue to exist, there will never be global peace. There is also another factor, and that has been identified by the Dalai Lama: "Without inner peace, it is impossible to have world peace."

The thirteenth day - 18th November - Forgiveness Day. A day to forgive and mend any squabbles and misunderstandings, a day to right past wrongs. Both to and from ourselves, groups, and nations.

The fourteenth day - 19th November - Senior's Day. A day to honour senior citizens, who represent the past, and who display the wisdom that age bestows upon people. There is a huge pool of experience and wisdom amongst seniors that has yet to be used to the best advantage.

The fifteenth day - 20th November - *National Children's Day. A day to honour children, who represent the future. A day to begin nurturing their kindness to ensure they will mature to be caring and responsible adults.

The sixteenth day - 21st November - Health Care People's Day. A day to give thanks to those in the caring professions - nurses, doctors, practitioners of all kinds, ambulance officers, carers and so on.

You can, if you wish, celebrate the intermediate days in any way you desire. Intermediate days are those that are not marked thus *.

The Colmar Brunton survey mentioned previously revealed that Australians believed "community and family life would continue to deteriorate, and that their personal and spiritual lives would be poorer . . . The future they wanted was described in terms such as: simple, happy, peace, community, tolerant, a possible return to religion, safe and ordered." These are the words of Richard Eckersley of the Australian National University, commenting on the report.

How do we achieve a future so strongly desired by the Australians who participated in the survey? It is accomplished by incorporating these things into our daily lives, by us being and promoting these things. This involves people like you and me going about our daily activities with a calm, caring and cheerful attitude, unaffected by whatever chaos may be going on around us. We can choose not to be caught up in the frustration, anger and meanness of our surroundings. It will work if I remember the little things - smiling at everyone I make eye contact with, giving my full attention when someone is talking to me, staying calm, not taking negative comments from others too seriously, not focussing on things that may annoy me, counting my blessings, complimenting, doing things that I enjoy,

being supportive, positive, enthusiastic, creative, inquisitive, or anything else that will promote good will and hope for a better world.

If sufficient numbers of people live their lives the way they wish the world to be, the rest of the world population will fall in behind them - the 'critical mass' theory.

If only a small number of people participate in 'The 16 Days of Kindness' celebration, it will be a success. This is because carrying out kind acts for 16 consecutive days will have established a habit pattern of each person being a little kinder each day. But we need as many people as possible participating, because the greater the number of people involved, the greater the positive effect it will have on the community, our country, and ultimately, the world. We need to 'think big', to see the big picture. Not just what we can do for ourselves or our local community, but how we can send this out into the world. There is a great need in many parts of our world for greater kindness. Robert Kennedy told us: Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he or she sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. Crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

Every act of kindness we are involved in validates someone, gives out an 'I care' message, and sends a tiny ripple of hope around the world.

Author Dr Larry Dossey mentions the benefits of kindness in his book Meaning & Medicine. 'Altruism behaves like a miracle drug, and a strange one at that. It has beneficial effects on the person doing the helping - the helper's high; it benefits the person to whom the help is directed; and it can stimulate healthy responses in persons at a distance who may view it only obliquely.'

The more publicity The 16 Days of Kindness receives, the greater the positive effect will have. If it is your wish that world peace and harmony will prevail, the greater the number of people involved, the sooner this will come about. You can assist in creating this publicity by contacting newspapers, radio stations and television channels in your area, informing them about the celebration, and directing them to our Web site. The wider the publicity, the more impact it will have, which will help to improve everyone's quality of life. If you plan to organise something in the community for any of the days, advise the local media as they will more than likely send a reporter to cover the event. Are you involved with any organisation that is associated with the people mentioned in our 16 Days? For example, teachers, nurses, young people, seniors, and so on. If you do, the organisation may wish to advise their members about the celebration, or even play some roll, such as organising a gathering. Do whatever you can, for the benefit of humanity.

Some activities for the sixteen day celebration

In addition to the activities listed below, see also the headings titled "Kind things to do . . ." for further suggestions.

If you are aware of a Web site we could link with any of our days listed, so that people can find out more about that topic, please advise us.

When reading through the following material, if there is something you don't understand, or would like more examples on a particular matter, please send a message to query@kindness.com.au This e-mail address is being protected from spam bots, you need JavaScript enabled to view it

PLEASE NOTE: You don't have to wait for our celebration in November to begin carrying out the activities outlined below. If you commence now, you can begin to enjoy the benefits now!

Day One - 6th November - Australia's National Kindness Day

See also Australia's Kindness Day.

The purpose of this day is to remind ourselves that there is more to life than the acquisition of material things. If we become obsessed with our own wants and needs, the outcome could be that the needs of others are overlooked. One of the basic needs of people is to feel validated. There is a craving to be acknowledged by others. An example is the child who seeks attention by being naughty. Punishment is preferable to being ignored.

National Kindness Day, and any of the other days of the year devoted to worthy causes, can be used to remind us of this need in others. A smile, a nod, a greeting, a reassuring word or compliment, a wave or a wink. These are quick and simple ways to acknowledge others in a hectic world. Another basic need is that of being part of a 'family' or community. Humans are a gregarious lot, and the herd instinct is strong in many people. If, through long working hours, or any other reason, a sense of isolation develops, it can have a negative effect on every facet of your life. Some people work very hard to provide security for their family, yet if the family were consulted, they may opt for more time with the whole family, rather than a more comfortable life style.

Another purpose of this day is to bring Australians together to celebrate our national spirit. It is the day to acknowledge the rich tapestry of our multitude of cultures by laying aside any preconceived ideas that might create divisions within the community, and embrace all you meet with a cheery smile and a kind word. It is the day to think seriously about joining one of the wonderful community service organisations that have done so much for our nation, and about volunteering your services to worthy causes (see other kindness organisations). It is a day to cement your relationship with the community by being part of that community, which helps to give meaning and purpose not only to your existence, but to other people's as well. It is a day of national pride, of embracing a way of life that makes our country and its national and international image even stronger.

While we rely on others to rule the country, to police it and defend it, this doesn't absolve us of responsibility. There are many ways to help, but these all involve some form of action. Edmond

Burke said, All that is needed for the triumph of evil, is that good men and women do nothing. This statement was made many years ago, yet it is still relevant. When people do nothing about a situation that has a negative impact on the quality of life of yourself and fellow Australians in any way, the situation does not remain static - it continues to deteriorate. When people make a conscious decision to do something positive to help the community, they are helping themselves, their community and their country. This positive effect will not only flow on to benefit today's society, it will travel through time and benefit future generations.

National Kindness Day is also an opportunity to celebrate the ANZAC spirit. As our prime minister has said, "[The Anzac spirit is] a heritage of personal courage and initiative, of daring and determination in the face of overwhelming odds. A heritage which requires of each of us a conscious decision to do what is right regardless of the resistance we meet or the fears we hold . . . to draw upon their stirring example of unity and common purpose. To believe that, whatever our differing circumstances, we are companions with each of our countrymen and women, and together we travel a single path."

Use this day to develop your listening skills. In our society, time is considered to be a valuable commodity by many people. It is not uncommon for us to be jumping ahead in time in our mind, and thinking about all the things we need to do. One of the casualties of such thinking is that our patience diminishes.

When engaged in conversation with someone, practise 'active listening'. As the term indicates, this involves listening intently to what the other person is saying. Don't interrupt, don't think about how you are going to respond, just listen! If the person is talking about some problem they are involved in, don't be too eager offer advice unless it is asked for, and don't suggest that you think their ordeal is a trivial matter. Suggest they buy an A4 size book and record all of their thoughts in it. Most of us have the wisdom help overcome life's trials and tribulations, and a journal can be of great assistance in unlocking this wisdom. Once their emotions are written in the journal it introduces a degree of objectivity, and this objectivity leads to clearer thinking and possible solutions.

National Kindness Day is an opportunity to step out of your normal routine and become a roving ambassador of kindness. For those who may have been unable to pursue a more kindly lifestyle because of various commitments, it is hoped you enjoy the encounters and seek out ways to express and experience kindness more often.

For suggestions on kind things to do on National Kindness Day, or any other day, click on kind things to do. There are about 250 ideas under the various headings. If you decide only to smile and say "Hi!" or "Hello!" to people you encounter on the street, in the store, or anywhere you may be, we guarantee that wherever you go, you will create a positive influence.

Day Two - 7th November - Good Neighbour Day

A trend has developed in the community toward a dehumanised society. More people are choosing individual isolation as a way of life. You can witness this in blocks of units, where people keep to themselves and sometimes will not even acknowledge a neighbour. Ironically, in

this situation people are living in closer proximity to each other, yet don't appear to be particularly interested in getting to know one another. The same attitude can be found on the street, where many people deliberately avoid eye contact.

This trend is being assisted by what is known as 'home entertainment' - TV (both 'free-to-air' and 'pay'), video and DVD hire, computer and Nintendo type games, and the Net. Home shopping is now also beginning to become popular. All of these past times keep people at home, thereby isolating them from the community. Kindness can help to discourage this trend. If the stay-at-homes experience a more friendly and welcome community, they will be encouraged to be part of that community more often. People don't intend to be unfriendly - humans are basically a friendly lot, they tend to enjoy each others company. And if the condition are right, they will seek to be part of that community more often.

Good Neighbour Day is an opportunity to counteract the tendency toward isolation. It gives you the chance to get to know your neighbours and your neighbourhood a little better. One of your actions on this day might be to visit the various households in your street to say hello on Good Neighbour Day, and introduce yourself to those people who you have not met. Carry a copy of our '16 Days' program and show them the 7th of November is Good Neighbour Day. Perhaps the person you are talking to has been a good neighbour to you and others in the street, and you could tell them that at last people like him/her are being acknowledged for the wonderful work they do. You may even like to give a small gift, such as a flower, a bookmark, and so on. If you made a few notes after talking with each neighbour, you could compile a list of names, interests, hobbies, and so on. With this information, if you read something that might be of interest to one of them, you could cut it out and pass it on. Such behaviour helps to create a warmer and friendlier neighbourhood, a neighbourhood where trust and co-operation becomes the norm.

A community becomes more friendly when the citizens of that community become more supportive of each other. We become more supportive by helping one another, by expressing our kindness, caring and thoughtfulness in small but significant ways. For example - bringing in the neighbour's empty Otto bin; and when we are putting out a half full bin, advising the next door neighbours of it in case they have a need to get rid of more garbage than their bin will hold; mowing a neighbour's nature strip the same time we do our own; trimming some of their garden edge or fence line when we fire up our Whipper Snipper; offering to clear their letter box and retrieve the local paper when they are away on holidays; informing them of any discounted sale offers in the area; taking their washing off the line if it starts to rain; really listening when a neighbour is talking to you (not letting your mind wander during the conversation); writing to the local paper to (a) inform them about the kind things your neighbours do, or (b) to protest about something that could have an unfavourable impact upon the neighbourhood.

We recommend you also consider joining one of the community service organisations such as Apex and Rotary, so you can become involved in local community projects. The experience will not only be rewarding for you, it will also help your community, and allow you to make friends with other volunteers and members of the community. You could also investigate what neighbourhood groups have been formed in your area, and join any that are involved in issues you can identify with. Your local council or the local paper could give you information on this.

If a new family moves into your street, call on them and introduce yourself, and welcome them to the neighbourhood. Before doing this you might like to prepare a document giving various details they would find helpful - contact numbers for the local electricity authority, water board, council, local doctor, electrician and plumber, the local taxi company, the night the garbage bin goes out, a good local restaurant, where the cheapest petrol can be found, and so on.

If your street plans to have a "Meet the Neighbours" get together on Good Neighbour Day, with a sausage sizzle held on someone's front lawn or the footpath, etc., advise the local paper and they will more than likely send out a reporter and photographer (make sure you feed them!).

Day Three - 8th November - My Day!

See also Kind Things to do . . . for You and for Others.

For your special day there are many alternatives. Some of the more obvious are booking yourself in for a massage, or buying something you like, which you had previously considered as a 'non essential' item. Or renting some 'feel good' movies (we plan to have a list of feel good videos on this site soon), or having a bath with scented oils and candles, or taking time to listen to relaxing music, or whatever form of music transports you into another realm. Or reading a good book, or being with someone who makes you realise that life is an exquisite experience, or perhaps visiting a photo or art exhibition, or finding a piece of nature to enjoy and unwind in, or spending time doing something else you would like, but have put off because of a lack of time. Your day should be directed toward slowing down, enjoying simple things, getting in touch with yourself. The sense of enjoyment from doing such things should encourage you to 'pamper' yourself more often. There are too many days when we ignore our own simple needs.

This is the day to take action on those things you keep telling yourself and others, "One of these days I'm going to . . ." Imagine taking your last gasps at some stage in the distant future, and thinking not about what you had done, but about those things you were going to do 'one day', but never did. How terribly sad that would be!

Day Four - 9th November - Special People's Day

A day to acknowledge the special people in your life - loved ones and friends. You might also like to acknowledge the people whose brilliance, or courage, ethics, dedication, idealism, spirituality, etc. has impressed you and caused you to follow their lead. This is the day to express your gratitude to such people.

You can begin by making a list of loved ones and friends, and beside their name, make a note of how you would like to acknowledge their 'specialness'. It could be taking them to a movie or to dinner, it could be buying them something that you know they would like, or telling them how much they mean to you, giving or sending a card or flowers. There are many ways, and if you

tap into your creativity, it will help to make your acknowledgment as special as your special people.

Another suggestion is to list the people who have influenced you in some positive way, starting from your early days through to the present. Parents, primary school teachers, coaches, secondary school teachers, grandparents, uncles and aunts, other relatives, university lecturers, friends, people you've read about, business people, sporting or other heroes, authors, any person who has had some form of positive influence on you. Make the list as complete and diverse as you can. Beside each name, list the quality that impressed you. When you have finished doing this you might like to contact as many of these people as you can. Your contact can be face to face, or it could be a telephone call, a card or e-mail, a letter, or perhaps convey your thanks through a letter to the editor, so others can learn of your gratitude and admiration for the person involved.

Whatever you choose, you will be doing both the person and yourself a great service. If some of the people have passed away, you could send your message to their spouse or family, so that they may share your gratitude.

The list can also be scanned to establish if you have continued to honour the special qualities of those people, or if you are following a different course. If you find you are on a different course, you could ask yourself why, and whether the new course is following the same values.

Our values guide us through life, give us a blueprint to follow to ensure we 'do the right thing.' However, we live in a rapidly changing world, and to adapt to such a world, we are obliged to change, too. While such personal change is almost imperceptible on a daily basis, over a period of years it can be significant. Sometimes the change is not for our benefit, and we wonder why our relationships break down, and we have a nagging sense of discord. One way to chart our degree of change is to keep a journal. When the journal (an A5 size booklet with ruled lines) is first written up, include the date, and make a record of all of your values and ideals, the ones you gained from your 'special people', as well as any others that you may not recall from whence they came. Also make a note of why these values are important to you.

Your values would be things like honesty, ethical behaviour, high morality, good manners, a kind and caring attitude, virtuous, ethical, fair and decent behaviour, doing the right thing, standing up for your (and other people's) rights, going the extra mile, supporting your friends, being a good listener, loyalty, truthfulness, being genuine, conscientious, maintaining good health, helping worthy causes, and so on. Some people's values are very basic - the fact that they are alive and well, and are grateful for what they have.

Instead of writing the particular values, you might like to write what you do that illustrates those values you hold dear to you. You might also like to make a list of the people you value, why you value them, and whether you maintain regular contact with all of them.

One of your new year practices could be to record your current values in the journal at the beginning of each year, and when completed, to compare these with previous year's lists. If any have changed, ask yourself why have they changed. Do you need to make some adjustments

to bring yourself back on course? Has the course you set been instrumental in providing the values you desired, and if not, how could it be changed to better suit your purposes? (Note: Ethics and morality are diminishing in our society as time goes on. A recent survey disclosed that many people, and principally younger people, thought it was OK to lie, because "everybody lies". Care should be taken that personal values should not be compromised because society values appear to be on a downward spiral. That is, don't 'dumb down' just because others are doing it. We are involved in creating a better world for our generation and future generations - never doubt that you can make a positive difference to society!). As you read through the past records of your values, there is a need to concentrate on strengthening those values during the new year, as they will strengthen your character and ease your passage through life.

Your values can subtly change over a period of time, so subtly that you may be unaware of the change. If the change is negative, these yearly checks will highlight such changes before they can have a debilitating impact upon your life.

Day Five - 10th November - Kindness at Work Day

On this day at work you can be especially kind to your co-workers and associates. If you apply the old maxim of treating people according to how you would like to be treated, it will open some interesting opportunities. There will certainly be a different atmosphere at work.

You could bring along some paper plates and cheese and biscuits, fruit, a cake, or something you feel others would enjoy, to share amongst your work associates at morning or afternoon tea. Or leave anonymous little gifts, such as jelly beans, chocolates, biscuits, etc. where your co-workers can find them. Or perhaps pin some cartoons or humorous stories on the notice board.

Could a few of you get together before the day to organise some little celebration at work, to give thanks to everybody for their help and support, and perhaps give out little awards? (Make sure that everyone gets an award, and the awards should of course all be positive ones.)

If there is someone who you don't get along with, make a special effort to be nice to that person. You have no idea of what personal pain that person may be experiencing. Don't forget the boss is one of the people at work, and this day can be used to show your appreciation through the presentation of a card signed by all the employees, or some other gesture that shows he/she is appreciated.

If you have contact with suppliers or customers, use this day to forge new bonds of friendship with them. Go the extra mile, make them feel special. Make them aware of the purpose of the day, and give them our web site address.

Day Six - 11th November - Teacher's Day

Teachers selflessly dedicate themselves to imparting an education to their students, often with little thanks. Teachers strive to instil a sense of value and worth in their pupils, while working in a system that is at times inflexible and imperfect.

Use this day to personally thank your teachers (or ex teachers), and your children's teachers, for their dedication, whether they be in primary, secondary, or tertiary institutions. For those in the workforce, use this day to recall the teacher who comes to mind as standing out, as going the extra mile, as being a shining example of that dedication to compassion. Make the effort to contact that person by phone, letter or card.

Day Seven - 12th November - Youth's Day

Youth's qualities need to be channelled in appropriate ways, otherwise their energy can be deflected into negative pursuits. Care must be taken that their ideals are not lost in a cloud of cynicism. We suggest that adults make an effort to realise and acknowledge the part young people can play in shaping our society.

Youth are idealistic, they are not disillusioned by the realities of the world, and will tackle things with enthusiasm. Youth have an honesty about the way they see things, and for the desire of positive change. It is an age where they see all the wrongs of the world and have an urge to right those wrongs. We have much to gain from using this energy to create positive change, to create a better world. The Higher School Certificate Art Exhibition is an illustration of the talent and vision of the world that teenagers have.

Just as there is a need for society to utilise the experience and wisdom of our seniors, there is also a need to utilise the enthusiasm, ideals and vision of our young people. If we can step aside from our preconceived ideas, there is an opportunity for building a better and more friendly community by utilising the qualities of our youth.

Once again we stress the goodwill a smile can generate.

See also kind things to do (as a parent)

Day Eight - 13th November - World Kindness Day

See also World Kindness Day.

A day to broaden your vision to embrace all people of the world. A day to think of yourself as a

citizen of the world, and not just of Australia. A day to share not only the joy and warmth of humanity, but also to ponder on the misery and brutality our 'brothers and sisters' are subjected to. A day to think about supporting organisations dedicated to minimising 'man's inhumanity to man', such as Amnesty International, and organisations that supply aid in the form of people and supplies when disaster strikes, such as the Red Cross. There are so many wrongs to right, so much suffering to alleviate, if everyone were to help in some small way, progress in this area would be accelerated.

The Cosmos flower was chosen by the World Kindness Movement as a symbol of World Kindness Day. The Cosmos is an annual that blooms in summer and autumn. Hybrids grow to a height of about 60 cm, and the fragrant, daisy-like flowers come in a variety of colours. They are a fast grower, and prefer a relatively dry, sunny spot. They are also a 'bee plant.' Quoting from "What Flower is That?" (Lansdowne Press), "Sow where they are to grow in spring, cover lightly and expect seedlings in 5-10 days, flowers in around 12 weeks." It may be touch and go as far as flowering by the 16th November. However, whenever their smiling faces appear it will remind you to pick a few and give to friends as a token of World Kindness Day. For after all, isn't every day a Kindness Day?

Make a note on your calendar to buy some Cosmos seeds, and when you sow them in the spring, also realise you are sowing the seeds of kindness.

Day Nine - 14th November - Stop and Smell the Flowers Day

Have you noticed that time seems to be shrinking? As each year goes by there appears to be less time to do what needs to be done - or perhaps it's because we have more things to do. The world is speeding up, and despite all those wonderful inventions that are designed to save us time, we seem to be running faster than ever before to keep up. The expression, "so much to do, so little time" could be the mantra of our time.

The consequence of this 'rush mentality' is a diminished sense of meaning and satisfaction from life, and a depletion of our moments of joy. In the book 'The Pleasure Prescription', author Paul Pearsall tells us of a new plague that, "directly or indirectly contributes to early death more than any other factor." This killer is a lack of joy in our lives, which is a vital element for psychological and physiological health. When we attempt to schedule every minute of our day in an effort to gain the most from the time we have at our disposal, our life may simply become a process of organised chaos. A diminished sense of meaning and satisfaction in our lives can promote feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, hopelessness, anger, fear and other negative emotions.

There is a great need to pause from this frenzy, to slow down, enjoy simple things, and get in touch with yourself. To consciously step off the madly spinning merry-go-round of life, and view the world from a different, more relaxed perspective. Because you have stepped out of the speed that binds you to future time, you are able to relate, with clarity and meaning, to the things you encounter within each moment of present time. This condition is known as being in the moment, or to use the Buddhist term, practicing 'mindfulness'. To give an example, suppose

you are engaged in a conversation with someone. It has been found that very few people are totally focused on what the speaker is saying - part of their thoughts are somewhere else. The listener is jumping forward in time, perhaps thinking about how they will respond to what is being said. Or the listener may have heard a few words and then made an assumption of what will be said next, and they have the discourtesy to interrupt the speaker with a response to what they thought the person was going to say (not all that uncommon when a parent is having a conversation with one of their teenage children). Why does this happen? Probably because the listener is thinking about what has to be done in the immediate future and wants to get it done. Their mind is racing ahead and is preoccupied with the future. Another possibility could be that the listener suddenly remembers they have to buy milk on the way home, or something similar, which diverts attention away from what is being said. The lesson is that whenever you are 'in the moment', you will be fully present and have your whole attention on what you are involved in. When your mind is fully absorbed in the moment, it cannot escape into the future.

Sometimes you might compare your life to a video tape running at 'fast forward'. You find yourself in frantic and chaotic situations, and this is particularly relevant to work situations. How often have you heard someone say, "It was like a mad house at work today"?

We have called this day 'Stop and Smell the Flowers Day' because the meaning of the expression is well known - to slow down and appreciate the good things in life, to develop a healthy curiosity, to become aware of the small, simple things that abound in your close environment, yet become invisible when your mind is racing ahead at top speed. The easiest way to practise this is when walking. Keep your pace to a slow stroll, and pay attention to your surroundings. Wouldn't it be wonderful to go back to a time when you were small and were seeing things for the first time? Have you seen a toddler walking with a parent? They are fascinated with everything around them, constantly pausing to look at things, at times squatting to examine something on the ground more closely - a fallen leaf, a lolly wrapper, and even dog poo. This is a good example of what 'being in the moment' is all about - totally aware, adventurous and curious. We were all like that as toddlers, it's something we need to reclaim for the sake of our spiritual and physical well-being.

The next time you are aware of flowers in your vicinity (it could be when you walk by a florist when shopping), stop and take the time to examine them closely. The colours, the textures and the aromas. After becoming involved in this little exercise you will hopefully realise that you DO have the time for such things, that your world didn't fall apart when you paused from your 'busyness'.

Initially, such periods may be brief, because a sense of urgency keeps drawing you back into your hectic world again. This is generally what happens when you begin to break a habit pattern - the habit will be easy to fall back into, even though it may be detrimental to your enjoyment of life. However, as your moments of 'escape' become more regular, you will feel more comfortable in your tranquil setting, and will stay there longer.

For some people, the thought of visiting a slower, more tranquil world could be sabotaged by a feeling of guilt. Or perhaps from a feeling of being trapped in their frantic world, and there is no chance of being freed from the tyranny of time. Fortunately, this is a myth. No matter what the

situation, there is always at least one option available to you. It's just a matter of mentally stepping out of the situation, and looking at it as an observer, rather than a participant. Mentally separating yourself from yourself, and observing.

Nature is an ideal environment in which to escape the rat race. In nature you can relax and release the tension and stresses created by the constant rush from 'here' to 'there', whether it be physical or psychological. In a natural setting it is easy to take a close look at the many textures and colours on display, and nature can be as close as your backyard or the local park. Rest your hand on a tree. It has been said by people who should know, that trees act like a sponge in absorbing our stress. The trees then channel the stress into the earth.

It's amazing how that little thing strapped to your wrist is able to have such a powerful influence over you. Did you know that clocks originally only had an hour hand? People weren't interested about minutes in those days, just the hours. But as time passed, the world slowly increased its pace. The clock was given a minute hand, and the demand to know the time became so great that people wanted to be able to 'tell the time' whenever they chose, and so the fob watch was invented, and later the wrist watch. Then came the second hand, as time became more and more important to us.

We can become a servant to time, and when this happens, we realise what a terrible master time can be. The outcome can be observed in our growing impatience. Many of us don't want to wait in queues, in traffic, for service in shops and restaurants, to be put on hold during a telephone call, or anything else that erodes our 'valuable' time. Even if we have all the time in the world, the artificial sense of urgency our interpretation of time creates can be the source of many negative states, such as anxiety, hostility, anger, and rage.

While we have devoted a day to the stop and smell the flowers philosophy of living, we realise that for the majority, the day will not be a continuous process of 'flowing' in the moment. As mentioned previously, there will be a conscious effort of slowing down and observing, then shortly thereafter, a lapse back into the rapid movement/tunnel vision style that we have become accustomed to. So it will be a few minutes of being in the moment, then perhaps half an hour or more of the rush mentality, and then back into the moment. It is similar to when you begin to meditate. You relax and calm your mind, then a thought or two will distract your reverie. As your mind has been habitually creating thoughts during your lifetime, it is perfectly natural that it will continue to do this. However, if you persevere, you can train your mind to switch off. It's the same in slowing down the speed of life. If you persevere you will be able to 'switch off' for as long as you wish. The outcome will prove to be such a pleasant experience that you will choose to carry it with you for the rest of your life - into your home and work place, and everywhere you go. You may feel that this will result in less productivity. In fact, it will usually have the opposite effect - your calmer attitude will allow you to achieve more, your thoughts will be more creative, and you will tend to do whatever it is with more acceptance. The 'stop and smell the flowers' way of living will not only bring more moments of joy into your life - it will also bring joy into the lives of those around you, as well as creating positive health benefits for you. And all it takes is a decision, and a little perseverance.

Day Ten - 15th November - Environment Day

A day to commit yourself to the on-going responsibility of disposing of your own litter appropriately, and reducing the need for a Clean up Australia Day. Isn't it marvellous how for one day we can become so pious about 'doing the right thing', and within a week or two we're back to our old habits. There are few people who haven't done something detrimental to the environment during the last twelve months. We are sure that Ian Kiernan would be ecstatic if a Clean up Australia Day had to be cancelled because of a lack of rubbish!

This is a day to seriously ask yourself how you could help the eco system. Can you use less petrol? Not just to help pollution, but to help delay the exhaustion of our oil reserves (helping future generations). Predictions are that oil reserves will only last a few more decades. You could also think about how we can join together to stop the destruction of the world's rain forests. These forests convert carbon dioxide into the oxygen that we breathe. The forests are being decimated so that people can eat beef, particularly beef burgers. And how can we reduce the use of chemicals? Every day throughout the world, huge amounts of toxic chemicals are released into the environment. We don't hear about such things very often. Perhaps it's because we don't want to hear about them, that we prefer to live in ignorance. That's something like sitting on a railway line - sooner or later, a train is going to hit you. It's also understandable that the corporations who benefit from such practices don't wish to see a down turn in sales. Greed does disturbing things to people's ethics.

Could you make some sacrifices for future generations? Could you walk or use public transport more often? Just consider the immediate benefits - you can read, write, do crosswords, or snooze, while travelling to and from work. You don't have to worry about speeding fines or accidents, finding a parking space, or parking fines.

Could you put on something warm instead of turning on the heater? Could you spend less time under the shower? Is it necessary for you to wash your hands with warm water? This would not only save fuel and money, but also save water. Do you have an efficient shower head? An inefficient shower head can use up to three times the amount of water as the more efficient varieties. The fact that there are major problems looming in relation to fresh water may be hard to grasp when all it takes to have water is simply turning on a tap. Many of us are living in ignorance about the health of our planet.

Use this day to make a list of realistic things that you and your family could do to help the environment. We would be happy to place your suggestions on our site, so that others could follow your good example. If everyone on this planet of ours were to make a small and ongoing commitment to help the environment, it could make an immense difference to the way future generations live.

Plant a tree. If everyone were to plant a tree in their backyard, it would serve to help offset the carnage that is taking place in the world's rain forests. You could also form a group and plant trees in public places. A discussion with the CSIRO revealed that all species of trees convert carbon dioxide at about the same rate, but young trees are more efficient at this than mature trees. It is probably best to concentrate on planting native species. Also be careful not to plant

the tree to close to your house, as the roots could disturb the foundations and drains, and the leaves will fall in the gutters. When you are buying the tree, ask how high it will grow, and whether the root system is likely to find its way into your storm water and sewage pipes.

In the book "The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight" (Bantam Books, 1999), author Thom Hartman writes, In the last 24 hours since this time yesterday, over 200,000 acres of rainforest have been destroyed in our world. Fully 13 million tons of toxic chemicals have been released into our environment. Over 45,000 people have died of starvation, 38,000 of them children. And more than 130 plant or animal species have been driven to extinction by the actions of humans. And all this just since yesterday. Information such as this needs serious thought and action, don't you think? Hartman also goes on to say that according to a 1996 report funded by the World Bank and the U.N., 72 acres of rainforest are destroyed every minute, mostly by impoverished people who are cutting and burning the forest to create agricultural or pasture lands to grow beef for export to the United States. . . This deforestation of Latin America for burgers is particularly distressing when you consider that this very fragile area contains 58% of the entire planet's rainforests. As mentioned in the foreword of the book, rain forests are the only substantial source of oxygen, and absorbent of carbon dioxide, on the planet. For anyone who is interested in the welfare of the children now being brought into the world, this book tells of facts that have not been widely published. The book is recommended (and essential) reading. One step in the right direction is to involve the creative minds of young people to help bring about the necessary life saving changes. They need to be consulted - it is their future we are destroying.

TIME magazine published a special April-May 2000 edition, for 'Earth Day 2000.' The message is clear, and is typified by the statement in a sub heading, "We have to change our ways - and fast". The magazine carries an article on a report by the U.N. on the environment. One of the categories of the five ecosystems studied, fresh water, gives the most alarming news. Fresh water consumption is rising at double the rate of population growth. It seems stocks in water companies will be a good long term investment. As water availability shrinks, the cost of water will increase. What if the price was to reach such ominous proportions that it would become out of reach for some households? Just imagine, homes in the suburbs without water or sewerage facilities. Unless positive action is taken, and quickly, there will be little to pass on to future generations. While nature will survive, will the human race be added to the list of endangered species??

The water table is dropping, and as new bores are drilled they have to go deeper to find the water. In some countries, there are areas near the coast where so much water has been pumped from under the ground, there has been an ingress of sea water to fill the void. This makes the water undrinkable. We have recently experienced a severe drought in Australia. It is thought that droughts will become more frequent, due to the changing weather patterns. Yet our rivers still flow into the sea.

You may not be aware that over 9 billion cigarette butts are discarded annually in N.S.W. alone. Too many of these end up as litter, and when it rains, they are washed down the street gutters, into the storm water system, and then into our creeks and other fresh water areas. Cigarette butts are toxic, and take up to 5 years to break down.

Many of us have received a communication from the organisation we buy our water from, offering a service to fit a more economical spray head to our shower, and adjust the flush on our toilet, in an effort to conserve water. There may have also been advice from the organisation we buy our electricity from, outlining how we may reduce our consumption of electricity. If you stop to think about this, you may find it odd that a seller of a commodity is actively attempting to reduce the volume of the product they sell. If you think about it a little more, it should set the alarm bells ringing. The message is, that we must not waste our resources. If we do something about this now, there is hope for the future, for our future generations, for our children, their children, and so on. There is a need to circumvent the apathy, selfishness and ignorance about what we are doing to the planet. While our mortality restricts our visit to planet Earth to a certain length of time, we also have a responsibility to those who will come after us. We need to make sure that when we leave, we have left the planet in a little better state than when we arrived. This is what we can give back for the privilege of being here.

Make a commitment NOW to do all you can to conserve our natural resources. If everyone becomes involved in making some minor adjustments (for instance, cutting back on time under the shower, which saves water and fossil fuel; putting mulch on the garden to hold in the moisture; wearing warmer clothing rather than turning on the heater; insulating the house to save on heating/cooling power consumption, etc.), it will have a positive impact and help to preserve our natural resources for future generations.

Click here to visit the Australian Conservation Foundation site - www.acfonline.org.au.

Day Eleven- 16th November - UNESCO's International Day of Tolerance

According to the Macquarie Dictionary, 'tolerance' is defined as the disposition to be patient and fair towards those whose opinions or practices differ from one's own; freedom from bigotry.

Australians have a wonderful opportunity to practise tolerance. Our population comprises of many different races, religions and cultures. As a result, our society has been enriched. However, it is a fact of life that such differences may cause friction. There has been warring between races, religions and cultures for thousands of years. But little has been learnt, as we can see from the pictures brought into our homes via the TV. Though we might feel the human race has evolved to its highest point in history, there is still much to be learned. But the festering continues, and the sore that feeds on hatred from hundreds of years ago, continues to be passed on from one generation to the next.

As Australians we are fortunate in not having to view the horror of warfare between various factions taking place on our own soil. Yet we are not without anger, suffering, and violence, from perceived 'differences' among our citizens. And we are far from the 'freedom of bigotry' that the Macquarie Dictionary mentions.

The irony is that natural disasters break down the barriers between people. If there is a flood, or earthquake or some other major disaster, people from neighbouring countries rush in to assist, even if there has been a long history of conflict. If our country was attacked, our differences would be put aside and we would fight the oppressor as one. If we are good enough to fight together to defend something that we cherish as 'ours,' it would seem there is hope that we could put aside our animosity and bigotry towards others. If we could overcome our fear of others that are 'different' (and surely it must be some form of primordial fear that causes this), and live in peaceful coexistence, wouldn't that be the best outcome for everyone?

If it is the wish of the great majority of the people that there be peace and tolerance throughout the world, then as that great majority, by our sheer weight of numbers, we can bring this about - if we choose to join hands with those of different races, cultures, etc. However, unless we make a conscious effort to keep such an ideal in the forefront of our minds, world peace and harmony will continue to be an elusive goal. Robert F Kennedy said, Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he or she sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. Crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance. Our acts of kindness are not only having a positive effect on the lives of those around us, the ripples created by our kind acts circle the globe, sending out messages of hope for a better and more secure future. Bringing us together, no matter what amount of distance (or 'difference') separates us.

UNESCO is very serious about promoting this International Day of Tolerance throughout the world. It would be wonderful if Australians could throw their hearts and their minds behind this day and prove to the world that we are big enough to build the bridges required to overcome discrimination, bigotry and any other form of separation towards our fellow humans. And we need to move beyond a condition of mere tolerance. We need to accept each other's differences from a feeling of mutual respect, for we are all members of the human race, and should be eager to share any 'differences', because such a learning experience will be to our mutual benefit .

Day Twelve - 17th November - Inner Peace Day

Peace is such an elusive condition, both for yourself as an individual, and for the world. Someone searched through the recorded history of our planet, and found that for every year of peace, there has been fourteen years of war. This is not a very encouraging statement of humanity's endeavour to live in peaceful coexistence. In fact it identifies us as belonging to a race of hostile, aggressive and violent people. We banter about the myth of being 'civilised', yet the only difference between ancient civilisation and the present, is that now we have the potential to murder the total population of planet Earth many times over. To my way of thinking, that means we have regressed, rather than progressed.

Scenario 1.

Our society appears to be creating more rage as time goes on - road rage, supermarket rage,

queue rage, airline rage, surf rage, phone rage, ad nauseam. Do you think that the concept of world peace will be achievable while we are continually 'at war' with people we come in contact with in our personal lives? If we have such a short fuse in our day to day interactions with others in our home, workplace or community, what chance is there of world peace?

Scenario 2.

We have a habit of seeing differences, rather than similarities. Different religion, different race, different colour, different culture, different custom, different level of class, status, income and education, different skill, different talent, different physical features, different age, different country, different state, different profession, different school, different sporting team. If there is a tendency to feel that the group we belong to is better than another group, or if we are envious of another group, such thoughts are capable of creating barriers, ridicule, an 'us against them' attitude, and violence. Dr Larry Dossey, author of the books 'Prayer is Good Medicine' and 'Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practise of Medicine', wrote of his astonishment when researching the healing power of prayer for his books. "Oh yes", he was told, "prayers can heal, but only the prayers of our religion." One group against another, and 'our' group usually has more going for it than the other group (or so we believe). How easily this can develop into the destructiveness of the 'us against them' mentality, creating misunderstanding and separation. If we have a predisposition to seeing differences, and reacting in a negative way to those differences, what chance is there of world peace?

To create a peaceful world we need to be able to find peace within ourselves. The Dalai Lama tells us, "It is essential to know that to be a happy person, a happy family, a happy society, it is very crucial to have a good heart, that is very crucial. World peace must develop from inner peace. Peace is not just the absence of violence but the manifestation of human compassion."

What is inner peace, and how do we achieve it? Inner peace can be defined in many ways - some of them are: appreciating what we have; contentment; the ability to still the chatter of our mind; an absence of turmoil; to flow with life; to be in a state where circumstances don't control our lives. There are many other definitions, but most people seem to have a general understanding of what inner peace is, even if they don't experience it, or are unable to give a simple definition.

Having a basic understanding of what inner peace is, and actually achieving this inner peace, is another matter. Meditation is perhaps the best method of experiencing what inner peace feels like. Some people have difficulty with meditation, they try it a few times and give up because of a difficulty to still their mind. The initial resistance comes about by the fact that our mind hasn't had a great deal of practise at being 'still'. Like a child, it loves activity. We have probably all experienced lying in bed, unable to drift into sleep because of an overactive mind. When we can still our mind to just one thought, and concentrate on it to prevent other thoughts from intruding, we will fall asleep (for example, counting backward from 1000 by threes, or concentrating on our breathing - breathing in to count of three, out to the count of three, and pause to the count of three). But with a little training, the tendency of our mind to play games can be overcome. Meditation improves with practise, and is more powerful when in the company of a group. Some meditation groups offer guided meditations, where a leader guides the group through the meditation, which is probably a good introduction for beginners. Tapes can be purchased that

do the same thing, which allows you to practise at home. Initially a guide is fine, but it is best to graduate to being able to meditate without guidance, for then you can meditate any where or any time you choose. With a little more practise, you may be able to carry out an 'eyes open' meditation.

Inner peace can also be experienced in a natural setting. Listening to the surf (the heartbeat of the planet), the murmur of a stream, the cascading of a waterfall, birds singing in bushland, and so on. In such settings you can stand or sit somewhere, close your eyes, and experience the magic of your mind letting go. You may also like to try hugging a tree, as the tree will absorb your stress and anxiety, dissipating it down into the soil through their root system. There are also tapes and CDs of relaxing music and the sounds of nature. These will tend to mask the endless noise of civilisation, and allow you to relax and just 'be'. Concentration on your breathing helps to centre your mind in such situations.

With practise you can recall the feelings evoked in your moments of bliss, and experience them again without the original trigger. It might be as simple as closing your eyes and taking three slow breaths, and noticing how your body relaxes each time you exhale. You can then visualise a peaceful scene or experience, or a religious icon - expect the emotion, and there you are! If you involve yourself in this several times each day, very soon it will be easy for you to drop into the feeling of inner peace. Each time you do this, remember that you are not only helping yourself, but also helping to create a more peaceful world.

Day Thirteen - 18th November - Forgiveness Day

Robert Muller tells us, "To forgive is the highest, most beautiful form of love. In return, you will receive untold peace and happiness." Those who have entered into an act of forgiveness tell of the weight that has been lifted from their shoulders, and there are also accounts of rather remarkable things taking place. As the word implies, we give of ourself when we for-give, and this giving sets into motion experiences of joy, relief, joining, fulfilment, and many other positive responses. Forgiving also takes courage, it is a true test of our resolve.

In our lifetime we may encounter many situations where we consider that an injustice has been done to us. And we have probably done our fair share of injustices to others. There have also been injustices between cultures, religions, races, and even whole countries. Some of these may go back hundreds, even thousands, of years.

Past injustices can be processed in the following way. If you are the one who carried out the injustice, you can approach the person involved, apologise, and ask forgiveness. This is the ideal way, but if you find this too confrontational, a letter can be written, and if you so choose, the letter need not be posted, it can be burnt as a symbolic gesture of healing (but don't burn the house down in the process!). You will also need to make an agreement with yourself that you will not behave in such a way again. The idea is to learn from your errors, and become a better person as a result. If you don't learn from them, you will keep on repeating the same mistake over and over.

If you have been the object of an injustice, it is unwise to carry it around with you for a lifetime. Such a decision will deplete your quality of life, and also deplete your immune system, making you more prone to disease. Some people gain a perverse sense of morality in holding on to a grudge, unaware of the damage it can cause. It is far better to forgive your transgressor and get it out of your system. This can be done face to face, or as a silent agreement with yourself. Our purpose in life is not to hold on to grudges, life is too short. We have a need to forgive and move on.

Helen McLaughlin tells us, "It's so important people stop seeing themselves as victims." This is true of both individuals and groups.

Day Fourteen - 19th November - Senior's Day

See also Kind Things to do . . . for seniors.

Our society has an odd way of showing appreciation to our seniors. Once a person reaches 60 or 65, there is an idea that such an age somehow renders people unsuitable for work. If a person becomes unemployed over the age of 50-55, it is very difficult for them to find another job. Despite their accumulated skills and wisdom, seniors have little possibility of finding a place in the workforce. The tragedy is that seniors have a multitude of skills to give to the community, yet they are being ignored. If these skills could be utilised it would not only be of value to the community, it would give the seniors a feeling of worth, achievement and direction.

Use this day to be particularly kind to elderly people everywhere, including parents and grandparents. Visit senior citizen's centres, leave flowers, magazines, etc. Also visit local retirement homes and the geriatric ward of hospitals to hand out flowers, books, magazines, newspapers, home made cards with a kindness theme, small gifts and other items. Bear in mind that most seniors will not be interested in magazines such as 'Dolly' or 'Rolling Stone,' and some might prefer books to be mainly pictorial. Be sure the retirement homes and hospitals are expecting you. It may be possible that some establishments could consider such practices disruptive to their routine. Don't despair! Keep ringing around and one of them will be delighted to welcome you and your friends. We spoke with someone from a retirement home and they told us the residents love little bags of mixed lollies. Check how many residents there are so you know how many bags to bring. Also include a few more, in case someone drops theirs. Also buy a bag of hot chips at the local fish and chip shop to hand around to the residents. We are told they like the taste of the salt on their lips. Residents also like tunes from the 30s and 40s, and tap dancing. You might be able to get a group of friends together and practise a few tunes and some tap. You may also be able to involve your local school in a project to make cards for this special occasion, and also paint some pictures that could be attached to walls to create a more colourful and brighter environment. If you could arrange for school children to visit these places, and possibly have them sing a little song, that would mean a great deal to the seniors. Elderly people love children and babies, as they bring back happy memories, which results in a feeling of being younger. If somebody had a puppy or a kitten to take along, most residents would be delighted to pat the puppy or stroke the kitten for a little while (check for allergies to animal hair

with the staff). You may be able to have some of the children's parents assist the teachers in such a visit. Have a camera on hand so photos can be taken of the children with the seniors. The prints can be given out a week or two later. When taking photos, be very careful that every senior present is in a photo with a child. When you deliver the prints it would be sad if one or two of the seniors didn't get a photo, and everyone else did. When talking with seniors, remember that a gentle touch is therapeutic. It has a calming effect, reduces blood pressure, and has other health benefits.

There is another benefit from visiting retirement homes. It will give you an idea of what to expect when your parents or grand parents reach a grand old age. While some are as bright as a pin and can look after themselves until they leave the planet, others suffer dementia and other conditions that can cause relatives distress and anxiety. If you are aware of how people behave with such conditions, it will not be such a shock if they should occur to loved ones.

You might suggest that nursing homes and retirement villages set up a Kindness Group, where the people talk about the various acts of kindness they have experienced in the past. While people with dementia have short term memory loss, they can remember the past clearly. It has been proven that when seniors talk about pleasant past experiences, it has a positive effect on their health. The group could meet regularly, and if they had good mobility, they may wish to involve themselves in community acts of kindness. An ongoing active involvement with the community would give them something to look forward to.

It has been proven that people in nursing homes live longer if they have something to look forward to, or are given some responsibility. Sharon Salzberg, in her book *Loving-Kindness* (Shambhala, 1997), tells of an experiment with nursing home residents. A pot plant was given to each resident, and half were told the plant was their responsibility. They had to water it and do whatever was necessary to sustain life. The other half was told the plant was theirs, but the nursing staff would look after the plant. One year later the researchers made a comparison of the two groups. Salzberg reports the following findings. "The residents who had been asked to care for their plants were living considerably longer than the norm, were much healthier, and were more oriented toward and connected to their world. The other residents, those who had plants but did not have to stay responsive to them, simply reflected the norms for people their age in longevity, alertness, and engagement with the world."

A 1976 survey carried out by the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP - cute!) in Illinois showed that ninety-eight percent (yes, 98%!) of seniors participating in the program had significant improvements in their physical and mental health. At the time, it could only be guessed why this was so, because of a lack of hard evidence. Later research confirmed the guess - it was the act of serving, of helping others, that brought about the significant improvements in health.

Some activities to help seniors could be to organise a 'fix it' group of handy people, who could carry out odd jobs for the elderly, the disadvantaged, and those with disabilities, within the sixteen day period. Jobs like mowing the lawn, fixing a broken lock or hinge, or a leaking tap, changing a light bulb, and so on. You may even be able to have some local tradesmen volunteer one or two hours of their time. To enable the community to be aware of the service it

would need to be advertised in the local paper and radio station. They would normally do this without charge as a community service. They may also be interested in covering some of the activities as a human interest story. It should be stressed in the media advice that advanced bookings would need to be made. You will also have to decide whose telephone number will be used in the advertisement. A local community service organisation may be interested in becoming involved.

Another possibility is providing transport for seniors. For instance, for shopping, for going to the doctor, and so on. Again, this service would need to be advertised.

You may wish to volunteer for Meals on Wheels and other associations that cater for seniors. If you are aware of any groups that are utilising the skills of seniors, please contact us and we will post the information on our site.

For parents, grandparents and senior friends, buy a card on this special day and send it to them. Include a scratchy, or a lottery ticket, a pressed flower, a hankie, a photo of the family, and so on.

Day Fifteen - 20th November - National Children's Day

A day to give thanks to our children. Children are the greatest hope we have of ensuring that the future world is, as David Dunn said in 'Giving Yourself Away', good natured, friendly, and human. If the kindness response is nurtured in children, they will go out into the world and teach adults to be kinder. Children love embracing good causes, which is why environmental education was so successful a few years ago when it was introduced at school. As children spend most of their time at home or at school, the obvious solution is to create a caring and loving environment in both of these places, as far as is practical. There needs to be greater emphasis on life skills, such as kindness, respect for self, others and the environment, conflict resolution, communication skills, negotiating skills, and so on.

Young people have a responsible attitude toward community service, as the following examples illustrate. The first is from 12 year old Katie from Sydney, who lists what kindnesses she feels young people could carry out:

1. I live across the road from a nursing home and I know that spending time with an elderly person would be enjoyable.
2. What about a group of kids of all ages get together at Xmas and Easter and go around to nursing homes and hospitals and stuff and sing songs to them and make them simple little presents.
3. We could walk people's dogs that can't do it themselves 'cause they're ill, or take disabled people out and spend time with them.
4. We could run errands for people who can't do it themselves, or even help people get things home from shopping and stuff.
5. We could befriend a person and visit them regularly, and then it would be a learning

experience as well as a joyful one.

I know lots of kids will and would be willing to participate in stuff like this but no one knows about it.

The second is from 14 year old Lorraine from Melbourne, who suggested young people could become involved in the following ways:

Go to retirement villages and talk, and play cards with them. Go to hospitals and play games, read, talk, etc. to the patients. If someone knows of a person who's had a tough time recently, go there and give them flowers or something to cheer them up. You could send young people to do almost anything.

Both of these examples show the wonderful compassion young people have, and also the great wisdom, for both of the above examples clearly illustrate the young are aware of society's shortcomings in relation to the elderly, the frail, the sick and the handicapped. How much better the world would be if we could allow the young to help us address such needs in society.

Another possibility for both adults and children would be to visit the children's ward of a hospital and bring toys, books, and whatever is deemed appropriate. Check with the hospital first.

We ask any readers who know of organisations who cater for community participation of young people to advise us of this information, and we will post these on our site.

The most simple action you can take is to smile at any young people you encounter, not only on this day, or during the sixteen days, but every day. Young people feel a great need to be validated, and smiling is a very simple form of validation. Many young people sense they are either being ignored or there is a hostile attitude directed toward them by adults. They realise they are 'different' from their parent's generation, and adopt different ways (sometimes bizarre!) to make a statement about this difference. Every new generation has behaved in this way, so it is not an unexpected response, it has been going on for centuries. To give an example: "Children today love luxury too much. They have execrable manners, flaunt authority, have no respect for their elders. What kind of awful creatures will they be when they grow up?" Spoken by Socrates, 469 - 399 BC.

Also remember that as adults we can at times become overwhelmed with our own problems and concerns, and lose sight of the fact that our children are encountering just as many, and perhaps even more difficulties, than we are. However, in many instances they are confronting these for the first time, and have no history as we do, to help them deal with these in an appropriate manner. No matter how busy your lifestyle, you have an obligation to be there for your children. If you are not, then you have failed as a parent. Choose a time where you can have a quiet, relaxed, one-on-one conversation, and don't be afraid to mention in passing some pranks you were involved in when a teenager. This will help you to be identified as somewhat of a kindred spirit rather than just a 'parent'. It's probably best not to mention the bank heist, kids have a tendency to pass these things on.

Kids need to feel loved, so hug them, and make them feel wanted and valuable in every way

you can. As Gerald Jampolsky said, Try finding love, rather than finding fault.

See also kind things to do ('as a parent' and 'as a teacher')

Day 16 - 21st November - Health Care People's Day

Doctors, nurses, practitioners of all kinds, ambulance officers, carers and so on are grouped into a special category known as the 'caring professions'. While we all have a caring instinct, these people have chosen to make caring their calling, which is a very noble and unselfish decision. Sometimes these people give of themselves too much, and neglect their own welfare as a result. We all need to have a balance in our lives, and when this is not present there is a danger that we might succumb to thoughts of hopelessness and despair.

To help counterbalance this anomaly to some degree, send out thoughts of loving kindness to these people on this day, and send warm messages in cards, or by any other means, to those you know or have had contact with in this profession. Or you may wish to send a Letter to the Editor of the newspaper of your choice, two or three days prior to the 21st November, expressing your thanks to people in the caring professions across the nation.

Kindness is a Personal Experience

As stated elsewhere, kindness is a personal thing, a "heart to heart" experience usually shared between two people. We have been asked on many occasions, what needs to be done to become a kind person? The answer is that it involves punctuating your day with small gestures of goodwill toward others, whenever the opportunity arises. A smile, a kind word, a caring touch, being there for someone, praising, being courteous, little things that many people normally carry out in their day to day interactions with others. Some people have contacted us, saying they didn't realise they were a kind person until they found out what was classified as a kind act.

What we are asking is that people become 'kinder' rather than 'kind'. We believe everyone is kind in their own way. Some are obviously kinder than others, and we would like everyone to set themselves a goal of being a little kinder, to carry out a few more kind acts every day. If the majority of the people on earth could make this transition, there would be a noticeable positive change over night.

The Australian Kindness Movement is involved in few organised activities. To begin with, we don't have the facilities to organise and fund such activities. However, there is another reason, and that is that there is little thought or creativity involved when a person participates in a large,

organised activity. There is also the possibility that some who participate in such an event could feel that they have 'done their bit' for the year in relation to kindness. The vision of a kinder world is only achievable when a person has learned, over a period of time, to recognise and act upon the many opportunities there are to be kind in their day to day activities. Once this response becomes habitual, you become a wonderful example for others to follow. As Meher Baba said:

People wait for the big moment, the great event,
And forget that happiness comes from building steadily on the small daily things of life.
People wait for that special moment to express love,
And forget that love springs from thoughtfulness practised every day.
People wait -
But waiting is future,
And NOW is always the time.

Our sixteen day celebration is not about being kinder for 16 days. It is a short course in kindness that you can use as a springboard to be kinder for the rest of your life (and there's a refresher course for you every year). It's about giving an "I care" message to the world every day. It's about being an inspiring example for others to follow. It's about going to bed each night knowing that you have made a difference. That is the true definition of the word 'success'.

We encourage you to become involved in the various days that are promoted throughout the year which highlight some form of commitment or celebration of our fellow human beings, to the animal kingdom, and to the kingdom of nature. We also ask that you consider making a decision to send out a daily wish for the creation of world peace, perhaps just before going to sleep, or upon waking. It will then become an integral part of your life. When peace becomes integrated in your life, you become a beautiful example for others to follow. If sufficient numbers of people can become involved, the peaceful energy produced will expand and circle the Earth, creating a positive influence on everyone's lives. This peaceful energy has the ability to travel through time, thus your efforts will not only benefit current generations, but also future generations. What a magnificent gift to give to the world.

When you have completed your sixteen day 'course', make a commitment to incorporate a little of each of the topics (and any other topic that is special for you) into each day, or each week. Make a list of the subjects and look at your list until it is committed to memory. You will find there are many opportunities to express your kindness each day, bringing joy to you and to those around you.

There has been an on-going wish of many people we have spoken to about 'finding happiness', and a quick browse in any book store will normally find several books with titles or subtitles relating to happiness. While a book may reveal the art of acquiring happiness, we give the following quotations as a guide, if you are one of those in search of happiness:

The older you get the more you realise that kindness is synonymous with happiness.
Lionel Barrymore

I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

Albert Schweitzer

You make people happy and you bring happiness to yourself when you do unexpected acts of kindness without fanfare and without thought of reward.

Marcus Bach

The various features and aspects of human life, such as longevity, good health, success, happiness, and so forth, which we consider desirable, are all dependent on kindness and a good heart.

The Dalai Lama

He who praises another enriches himself far more than he does the one praised. To praise is an investment in happiness.

George Adams

Through our willingness to help others we can learn to be happy rather than depressed.

Gerald Jampolsky

When your happiness comes primarily from the happiness of others, you know you have moved from a 'me' experience to a 'we' experience. And the whole problem-solving and opportunity-seizing process changes.

Stephen Covey

The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of well-being becomes. Cultivating a close, warmhearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. This helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the ultimate source of success in life.

The Dalai Lama

If you have any suggestions relating to our Sixteen Days of Kindness, please e-mail your contribution to info@kindness.com.au