



May 18-24th is Mental Health Awareness Week, run by the Mental Health Foundation and this year's theme is kindness, which seems all the more pertinent right now.

For those who can remember life before lockdown, it was only 3 months ago that Caroline Flack ended her life. Off the back of an Instagram post she had written a few months earlier, where she had written, "In a world where you can be anything, be kind," the internet was flooded with #bekind messages and a whole range of #bekind merchandise. Be Kind T-Shirts, Be Kind posters, Be Kind coffee mugs or even Be Kind cupcakes if you really fancied.

But how do we make this vision a reality?

Professor Banjee, Director of Kindness Research at Sussex University says that "Kindness is more than behaviour – it's the motivation as well. Any campaign has got to be more than simply 'telling' people to be kind. It's about changing the contexts in which we live and work so that there is a genuine investment in people and their relationships."

Little did we know that weeks later, we would find ourselves in the midst of a global pandemic, confined to our houses with no school or work for many of us and a temporary pause on life as we know it. But out of the darkness always comes light and even at a time of such difficulty, kindness has once again prevailed.

People's willingness to help and to put others' needs above their own has seemed to know no bounds. There's baking and cooking for the NHS and for the vulnerable, there's an army of people making visors, huge numbers of people volunteering in a whole host of places, youngsters befriending the elderly by phone and a community spirit not seen before every Thursday when we go outside to clap for our Covid 19 heroes.

Any wellbeing book will tell you that the benefit of being kind and helping others can have a hugely positive impact on our own mental health. Being kind can be a great stress reliever and brings with it a sense of connection and belonging, strengthens relationships and fosters a real sense of community. Even a single act of kindness like collecting some shopping or cooking a meal for someone who needs it can be an enormous help in the strange times we are living in.

What we mustn't forget though, is that in all of this being kind to others, we also need to be kind to ourselves, perhaps kinder than we have ever been before. None of us are experienced in how to handle this and we are all just doing our best to get through it safe and well. We need to remember that our best is good enough and not be too harsh on ourselves on the days we feel that we just aren't getting it right. If in doubt, ask yourself "What would I say to a good friend in a situation like this and remember that you never speak to anyone more than you speak to yourself in your own head, so always be kind.