

5 Tips On Being A Kinder Neighbor And Fostering A Sense Of Community

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Do you know your neighbors? Like really know them? Their first names, the types of cars they drive, what holidays they celebrate? If you ever get locked out of your house, could you go to your neighbor's to grab a spare key?

According to a [2018 Pew Research study](#), roughly a quarter of adults under 30 report that they don't know any of their neighbors.

But there's a sense of comfort and safety that can come with knowing them — and building a safe and caring community is a valuable way to stay connected to the place you live.

Learning how to be a kind neighbor is a skill that's good to learn at a young age, and Chris Loggins knows all about that. He's the supervising producer of the animated children's show *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* from Fred Rogers Productions. "The show is for two to four year olds and it is directly inspired by *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*," he says.

"In each episode, there's a strategy song. Each of them has a catchy tune and easy-to-remember lyrics that help kids develop important social and emotional skills."

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We spoke with Loggins and other community building experts about ways we can strive to be kinder, more caring neighbors. While many of these tips are for young people, they are also applicable to the parents and adults in the room.

Get to know your neighbors

It may seem obvious, but getting to know your neighbors is the first step to becoming a kind neighbor. Get out of your comfort zone and make an effort to learn their names and what they do for work. And if you feel comfortable, let them know that you're there to help, if they ever need another hand.

Loggins shares that after a recent move, his new neighbors helped him and his family feel welcome by making sure that his family had things set up. He emphasizes that it doesn't take a lot of money or a grand gesture to be an active neighbor. "You don't have to show up with a fresh apple pie or anything like that," he says. It's truly as simple as saying hello, introducing yourself and asking an open-ended question.

Make small kind gestures a daily practice



Daniel Tiger welcomes new neighbor Jodi Platypus to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. The animated children's show *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* is directly inspired by Mister Rogers neighborhood, which ran on PBS from 1968 to 2001.

Courtesy of Fred Rogers Productions

Another way to take care of your neighborhood, and to show your neighbors that you care, is by making small acts of kindness a daily practice. This can be cleaning up litter or even cleaning up after the pets on your block.

Use the skills and resources available to you — maybe you aren't a baker, but you have an amazing garden. You can ask your partner or kids to help you pick flowers from your garden to give your new neighbor a bouquet. Remember, every small gesture counts.

Remind yourself that being connected feels good

It can feel so easy to just go home, close your door and turn on the TV without having to make small talk, but connecting with others is worth the effort. As nerve-wracking as it is, reaching out to new people can actually boost your mood in the long run. According to an article by [Emma Seppälä](#), "social connectedness ... generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being."

[Marta Zaraska](#), who is the author of *Growing Young: How Friendship, Optimism and Kindness Can Help You Live to 100*, shares that once in 2013, "there was an instance in Winnipeg at a local Tim Hortons, where one driver decided to pay for the meal or the coffee of the driver behind him at the drive-thru. And that driver was so grateful, he

decided to pay for the driver behind him." According to [reports](#) on this incident, the chain of kindness went on for more than 200 drivers!

Meet and engage with different people

Encouraging your kids to get out there and engage with your neighbors is important, but it isn't always easy to balance this with conversations on safety and the so-called stranger danger. Like every parent, [Zach Norris](#), who's the executive director of the [Ella Baker Center for Human Rights](#) in Oakland, Calif., had to work on this with his daughters.

"We need to call into consciousness that this idea of the so-called bad guy and the way in which the so-called bad guy has been leveraged in ways that actually make us less safe," he says. "Most often, harm is done by people that we know. And that includes for children who are some of the most vulnerable folks in our society."

Being told you can't trust the people around you doesn't exactly inspire community, and children pick up on that. One way to combat this stranger danger outlook, he says, is by reaching out of your comfort zone and engaging with different people in your neighborhood alongside your kids.

Norris, for instance, takes his daughters to events where they hear from "amazing leaders who are incredible and empathetic, and also who are formerly incarcerated, who have committed some acts that may have caused harm, that they have made amends for. And I think those are some of the experiences that we expose them to that I think helped them to understand safety in a more dynamic way," he says.

Check your implicit bias

Looking out for your neighbors is an important part of being in a community. But before you go all "neighborhood watch" on someone, if something is making you feel unsafe, Norris suggests you take a deeper look at the power dynamics at play: Why do you feel like someone doesn't "fit in" your neighborhood? Why are you inclined to call the police on someone?

Remember to check your bias, and ask yourself why *you* feel uncomfortable and unsafe, rather than putting the blame on your neighbors.

When asked what someone should do before calling the police on someone in their neighborhood, Norris advises asking themselves whether another person is being "actively harmed."

Getting to know your neighbors and taking care of your community are valuable ways to feel safer in your neighborhood. Actions speak louder than words, and your attitudes towards marginalized and vulnerable people also set an example for your kids. So be mindful of the different people in your community and actively remind yourself to treat everyone with respect and care.