# *The War for Kindness*

# #ECUKindnessChallenge #KindnessChallenge

ECU students are strongly encouraged to participate in the Fall 2020 #ECUKindnessChallenge influenced by the Pirate Read, *The War for Kindness*. By using the ECU-specific hashtag on your posts to social media about your involvement in the #ECUKindnessChallenge, you may win an award of some ECU swag!

## October 26

## Challenge #1: Reverse the Golden Rule

The golden rule demands that we treat others the way we’d like to be treated. Sometimes, though, we blame or derogate ourselves for even the slightest failure—even if we’d be compassionate and understanding towards *someone else* who failed the same way. This sort of [toxic perfectionism](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886915000616) creates anxiety and depression, and can make it harder to connect with others, too.

Today try **reversing the golden rule**—treating yourself the way you’d treat other people. Think back to a recent failure, or time you disappointed yourself. Now imagine that a close friend or family member failed in exactly the same way. What would you say to them, how would you feel about them, and how would you want them to feel? Finally, turn that same lens back on yourself—trying to give yourself the same grace and compassion to yourself that you’d give to a someone you love.

Reflect on this experience. Were you initially harder on yourself than you would be towards someone close to you? Did reversing the golden rule allow you more self-compassion? How could you apply this strategy during hard times in the future?

Activities

* Building Empathy workshop by Center for Counseling and Student Development
* October 26, time 2:00pm or 4:00pm, Link TBA
* A recording will be available after

## October 27

## Challenge #2: Spend Kindly

Kindness can feel like a transfer: one person decides to spend—money, energy, emotional labor—to help someone else. Seen this way, helping becomes like a luxury. When we’re strapped for cash or time, we have no surplus to give away; when we feel stressed or drained, stopping to empathize with someone else seems emotionally unaffordable.

Research suggests this is entirely backwards. People feel [happier](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0963721413512503) and [less stressed](http://ssnl.stanford.edu/download/file/fid/602) and after acting generously, as opposed to selfishly. [Giving away time](http://www.people.hbs.edu/mnorton/mogilner%2520chance%2520norton.pdf) even makes people feel they have more of it!

Today, make a choice to **spend on someone else**. This can be money (buy someone lunch or a coffee) but doesn’t have to be. You can spend time listening to a friend even though you’re busy. You can notice that an acquaintance seems upset and—instead of going about your day—stop to ask them why.

Reflect on your experience. How did you feel after—depleted, refreshed, neither, both? How can you use this knowledge in the future?

Possible Activities:

* Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement Letter Writing Event
  + Letters for MacGregor Downs and Oak Haven senior care residents or elementary school students
  + Virtually and handwritten
  + Submit virtually here: <https://ecu.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/ecu-writes>
  + Main Campus Student Center 208 conference room open that day to take walk-in volunteers (Limited to 5-6 people for social distancing)
* Virtual Purple Pantry donations
  + Amazon Wish List: <https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/LH82LZH62QCI?ref_=wl_share>
  + Purple Pantry Webpage: <https://clce.ecu.edu/purple-pantry/>

## October 28

## Challenge #3: Disagree Better

Politics has become America’s empathic black hole. Individuals on the left and right increasingly regard each other with [fear and loathing](https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034?journalCode=polisci). Empathizing across this chasm can seem like a waste of time, or worse, a betrayal of our own ideological tribe.

But empathy is not the same as condoning someone’s beliefs—it merely entails trying to understand them better. One way to do so is by going beyond an opinion to [the person underneath](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320576104_Deep_down_my_enemy_is_good_Thinking_about_the_true_self_reduces_intergroup_bias): the fears, hopes, and memories that shape what they believe.

Today, find and talk with someone who disagrees with you. Start by asserting your respective positions. But then, **instead of debating your views, tell each other the story of how you came to have them in the first place**. Try to cultivate, and display, curiosity about this person, rather than judging them immediately.

Did this approach led to a more productive discussion than you would have had otherwise? Why or why not? Were you surprised by anything you learned?

Possible Activities:

* Promote Cupola Conversation to be held the following week
  + November 12, 4:00pm
* Social Media: Explain why you feel a way about a certain topic.
* Civil Discourse Video shared on Social Media
  + How Civil Discourse ties into the ECU Creed
  + Lauren Thorn, Dean of Students

## October 29

## Challenge #4: KindTech

Technology—and social media in particular—are the 21st century’s most infamous empathy killer. These platforms reduce rich analog hangouts into strings of text and curated images, and favor narcissism and outrage over genuine connection. But online technology isn’t inherently antisocial. [Recent research](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1745691617746509) suggests it can [increase](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563216303673) human empathy. The trick is using it to enhance, rather than replace, offline interactions.

Today, be intentional about how you use your time online. Instead of seeking approval or shaming others, find someone you haven’t interacted with in a while and send them a message, or find someone who’s struggling and voice your support.

Did this make your internet time feel different than usual? If so, how, and how could you keep this up?

Activities:

* Kudosboard for Student Health to say “Thank you”
* Details TBA

## October 30

## Challenge #5: Be a Culture Builder

People are more likely to exhibit cruelty and indifference when others around us do—and more likely to [flex our kindness and empathy](http://ssnl.stanford.edu/download/file/fid/802) when others do, too. When we encourage callousness or kindness, we lend them social momentum.

The late novelist Amos Oz described combatting hatred as akin to fire-fighting:

*Bring a bucket of water and throw it on the fire, and if you don’t have a bucket, bring a glass, and if you don’t have a glass, use a teaspoon, everyone has a teaspoon. And yes, I know a teaspoon is little and the fire is huge but there are millions of us and each one of us has a teaspoon.*

Today, use the power of social norms for good, by **reinforcing or challenging** others’ behavior. If you see someone acting kindly or empathically, recognize and reward that. If you see someone acting cruelly or indifferently, challenge them.

Reflect on how this goes. Does it feel uncomfortable and intrusive to voice a norm to others, or does it come naturally? Do you think your actions made a difference?

Possible Activities:

* Tweak the following post from Zaki’s Kindness Challenge and post to social media:

Let’s have a kindness thread. What act of kindness would you like to share? It can be kindness from you, or what someone has done for you. Or have you witnessed an act of kindness? Photos are welcome.

* Highlight Give Pulse, enter zip codes-do some good in person (if comfortable)
* Include [Socially Distant Service Project ideas](https://docs.google.com/document/d/13EyTQ3nv1Xk5LzpXY6JecbMh8tOo_aUh51WYaMuOdik/edit?usp=sharing)