

## **38 Ways to Be Nice and Improve the World Around You**

Thirty-eight almost effortless ways you can do a little good in the world

(Taken from "48 Ways to Be Nice and Improve the World Around You" from Real Simple)

### **How to Be Nice to Your Friends, Family, and Those Who Need a Little Extra**

1) Channel your second-grade teacher and playfully give out gold-star stickers to all the people in your life — young and old — who somehow make your day a little easier.

2) If you know someone is going out to dinner to celebrate a special occasion, call the restaurant in advance and say you'll pick up the cost of dessert.

3) When someone is moving to a new city, supply friends and family members with stamped, preaddressed postcards. (Hand them out at the going-away party.) By the time the family pulls into the new driveway, there will be warm wishes awaiting them.

4) When you run across a newspaper or magazine article you think someone you know would find interesting, take a moment to clip it out. Attach a Post-it note that reads "Thought you'd enjoy" and drop it in the mail. This takes less time than writing a letter, but the gesture still shows the other person you're thinking about her. Laura Noss, who owns a public-relations firm for nonprofits in San Francisco, says her father, who lives in Cleveland, does just that. "It means so much that when he's reading something, he'll rip it out, fold it, attach a message, put the postage on it, and send it to me," she says. "I save almost all of them."

5) Similarly, when a young person in your hometown does something to merit a mention in the newspaper (the high school quarterback saves the big game in overtime or your neighbor gets elected student-body president), clip out the photo and article and send it to the person's family. Chances are, they'll want to collect every copy they can. (One notable exception: the police blotter.)

6) Every day for a year, jot down one thing you love about your child/husband/friend (he has a crooked smile; she snorts when she laughs). At the end of the year, give the person your one-of-a-kind, 365-item list.

7) When you develop photos from a vacation or a major life event that an elderly relative missed, get an extra set of prints and send them to her.

8) en guests are leaving, escort them to their car, not just to the front door. If you're driving someone home, wait until she's inside the house before you pull away.

9) Hide messages for your family to find throughout the day, like "Thanks for doing a load!" in the dryer, or a silly joke in your child's lunch box.

10) If someone you know is going through a difficult time, call to let her know that you're thinking about her, but make sure your message doesn't leave her with a sense of obligation: "Just wanted you to know I'm thinking about you, but don't worry about calling me back." When a friend was being treated for breast cancer in a hospital outside her home state, Sandy Donaldson, a community-relations coordinator in Newport News, Virginia, rented her friend a beeper and entered the names of the woman's friends in its contact list. Whenever her friend got beeped, she could look and see who was sending kind thoughts her way. "The only rule was that she was not allowed to call anyone back," says Donaldson, who didn't want her friend to feel any more burdened during her illness.

11) When a neighbor is grieving, leave a basket on her front porch, filled with blank thank-you cards she can send to people who have brought flowers or made donations.

12) When stocking up on school supplies, pick up a few extras and give them to your child's teacher to pass on to students whose families might not be able to afford them.

13) Donate two tickets to a major sporting or theatrical event to an organization like Big Brothers Big Sisters. That way, a Big Sis can take her Little Sis to something out of the ordinary that she otherwise might not be able to afford.

### **How to Be Nice to Your Neighbors**

14) Take a dozen fresh-baked cookies to your local fire or police station. Bring the kids along to say thank you for their constant service.

15) When someone leaves a pie plate or a casserole dish at your house, return it with something tasty inside.

16) Send a note to a former teacher, telling her how much she inspired you. (If she's no longer at the same school, the office may be able to tell you where she is now.)

17) Invite someone who has moved here from another state or country to share your holiday feast. Pinky Vincent, who came to New York City from India three years ago, still remembers how lonely she was at first. "I had no family members here or family friends," she recalls. "But people I met invited me over for Christmas or Thanksgiving and made me a part of the family."

### **How to Be Nice to People on the Job**

18) If someone goes beyond her job description to help you, call or send an e-mail to her supervisor praising her. The employee will get a small career boost, and the boss will probably be thrilled to hear something other than complaints.

19) Avery Horzewski, a communications consultant in San Jose, California, likes to give chocolates or Starbucks gift cards to grocery clerks, delivery people, and others who are especially friendly or helpful.

20) Bring in a box of doughnuts for your building's maintenance staff. Just don't consume all the jelly-filled ones before you pull into the company parking lot.

21) When you make an in-person donation to a nonprofit organization (such as an animal shelter), also drop off something to brighten the day of the people working in the trenches.

22) Lindsey Schocke, an administrative assistant in Atlanta, knows how stressful starting a new job can be. So whenever her company hires somebody, she makes a point of extending a lunch invitation. "I can answer some questions for them," she says, "and then they have a friendly face to say hello to until they get to know everybody."

23) Overtip your breakfast waiter. He probably put forth just as much effort as someone on the evening shift would, but his take-home pay is probably lower.

## **How to Be Nice to Strangers and the World Around You**

- 24) At a tourist spot, ask people if they would like you to take their picture in front of a beautiful view or a historic monument.
- 25) Subtly alert people when they have food in their teeth, an undone zipper, or toilet paper stuck to a shoe. They'll be far less mortified than if they find out two hours later.
- 26) Pay for the drive-through order of the car behind you.
- 27) Leave your extra change in the soda machine for someone else to find. Better yet, leave enough change for a soda.
- 28) Athena Williams-Atwood, the president and CEO of Inspired Action, a consulting firm in San Francisco, carries rolls of quarters with her for parking. "If I see someone else's meter running low," she says, "I just pop a couple of quarters in. I may have saved that person \$30 or \$50 — all for 50 cents."
- 29) Stop your car to let someone merge into traffic from a side street, or wave someone into the parking spot you were both eyeing.
- 30) When an elderly person is crossing the street slowly, walk alongside her at the same pace the whole way across. She'll feel less embarrassed when the light changes if you're in the intersection with her.
- 31) Trade your low ticket number at the deli counter for that of someone who seems to be in a hurry (or is shopping with children).
- 32) If you're at an event or a party where you know lots of people, look around to see if anyone is there alone. If so, introduce yourself — and then introduce her to others.
- 33) When someone looks lost, stop and ask him if he needs directions. "I'll never forget the people who have helped me when I was traveling," says Real Simple staffer Melinda Page. "One man in Italy saw me looking at a map in confusion, asked if he could help, then walked five minutes out of his way to show me the place I was looking for, because it was hard to explain."
- 34) Give blood. To find out where to donate, go to the website of the American Association of Blood Banks, at [www.aabb.org](http://www.aabb.org).
- 35) Carry plastic bags when you're hiking or camping, and pick up litter that you find along the way.
- 36) Instead of tossing magazines and old books into the recycling bin, drop a stack off at a local women's shelter or your gym.
- 37) If you use public transportation on your commute to work, offer a fellow passenger your newspaper rather than tossing it in the trash.
- 38) Plan a "kindness field trip," such as driving around town handing out cold drinks to people working outside, or sending flowers through the deposit tubes at drive-through banks.