

A chart for kindness

It's easy to get into the habit of noticing only what's going wrong in the family, the things that annoy us, the times children try our patience. The children do it too – telling us when their brother or sister or friend has done something they feel upset about but not when someone has been kind to them or they've been having fun. It can be hard for all of us to remember to spot the everyday kind and helpful things, rather than taking them for granted.

Here's a way of making this easier. Have a simple, colourful kindness chart. Whenever anyone spots someone else doing something kind or helpful, the person being kind is invited to add to the chart. Adults can nominate each other as well as children; children can nominate each other and grown-ups too. Visitors can be invited to join in. When you all get good at noticing for each other, you can start nominating yourselves as well.

Parents tell us that when they start looking out for all the good things that are happening in the family, they often notice that there are more of them than they thought! At first we may need to play a kindness “I Spy” game. Explain the idea to other family members – and then get it going yourself by noticing as much as you can. They'll soon follow your example (and if anyone doesn't, don't bother too much – just keep going).

The chart is not meant to be a competition. There shouldn't be individual lines of stars or smiley faces, as this is likely to result in one child getting smug and another with their nose out of joint for “losing”. Everyone does their best and contributes to a general chart – just as they can contribute generally to having a positive atmosphere in the family.



What might we look out for? Here are some ideas.

What else can you think of that people do for each other in your family?

helping a sibling with their shoes

feeding pets

putting away the shopping

tidying up without being asked

being patient

cooking a nice meal

helping to lay the table

remembering to be quiet when someone is ill

taking out the rubbish

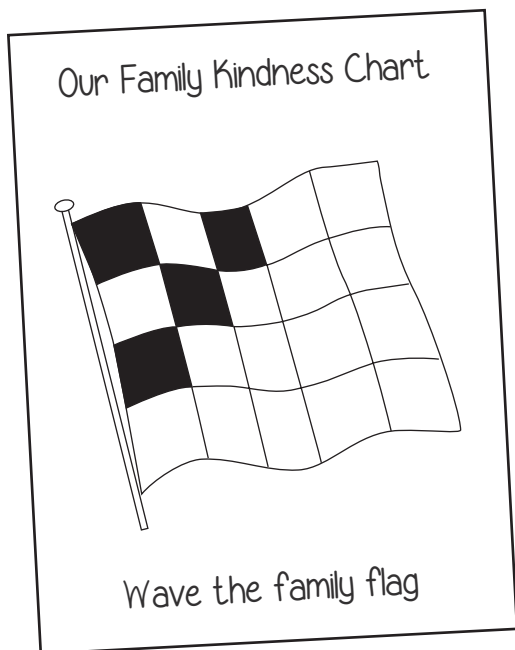
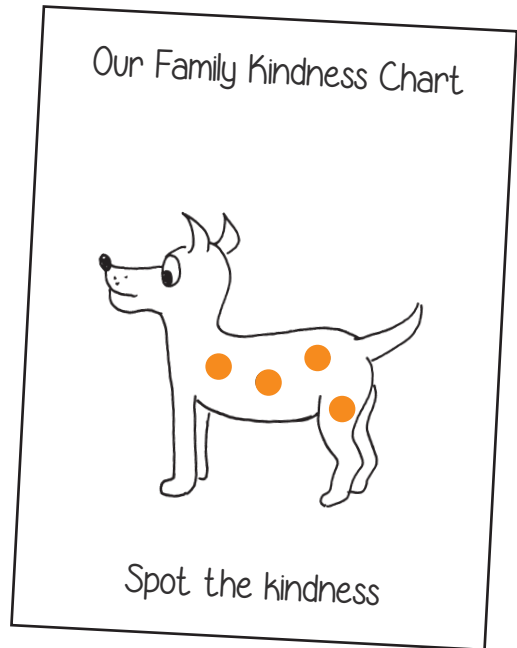
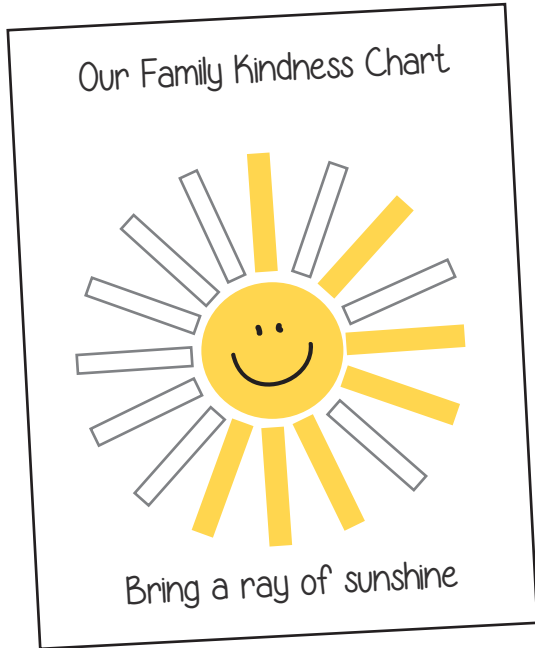
reading a story to/playing a game with a younger brother or sister

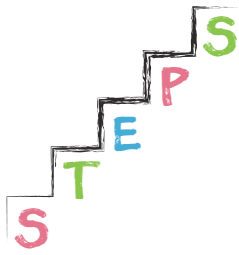
making you a cup of tea

remembering to buy something for someone

being grateful or appreciative

Here are some ideas for kindness charts. Keep them simple – and they don't have to be works of art! If you have children who enjoy drawing, they could take it in turns to design the chart for everyone to colour in. You can also buy stars and stickers quite cheaply in stationery shops.





The Pebble Pot: Top Tips for a successful family reward system

Whole family reward systems encourage family time together and family cooperation.

The Pebble Pot is an example of a whole family reward system which is fun, colourful, tactile, visual and noisy.

You will need a clear jar and some glass pebbles/marbles. Pasta shapes would work well too. If using a glass jar, with little children, you might want to use a screw top that is secured to avoid temptation to 'fiddle' the reward until they understand about trust.

- 1 Include the whole family in setting up the system and agreeing a simple family reward such as spending time together playing, watching a family DVD, having a picnic, etc.
- 2 Encourage everyone, adults as well as children, to give each other rewards for specific behaviour, kindness, etc., by putting a pebble into the jar. Be specific about the behaviour, activity or quality you are noticing, really describe what you like. It feels good to give praise as well as receive it!
- 3 Think about how you give the praise, mean it, look pleased and share their pleasure! If children hear us giving praise, they will copy us and will learn how to say what they like in other people
- 4 Invite family members to add their own reward to the pot when they have been offered praise, so that they experience the positive feeling themselves and want to earn more. Adults are included too remember!
- 5 Remember to reward effort as well as achievement and ask the child for their thoughts too
- 6 Remember to give rewards for being – e.g. *“What a kind boy you are to think of helping me to clear up,”* as well as for doing – e.g. *“Thank you for helping clear up the toys”*
- 7 Never take a reward away once it has been earned and use another strategy to deal with unwanted behaviour, e.g. Choices and consequences or maybe Time out to Calm Down
- 8 Once everyone feels confident with the process, you could introduce the idea of putting in pebbles to praise yourselves, to encourage positive feelings of self-esteem, e.g. *“I took a lot of care over cooking a nice lunch today,”* or *“I helped mum to tidy up the room”*
- 9 Keep a short time scale at first to set the pattern of reward and treat and to keep it fresh and motivating. Changing the system regularly will help keep it novel too. Children have great ideas for reward systems that can tie in with the treat at the end, so ask them for their ideas