

Health and Wellness: Being Kind Has a Multitude of Benefits

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“Working within the specialized environment and culture of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) demands a multifaceted approach that extends beyond mere technical competence. The correlation between health and wellness for newborns under our care and those who interact with them is best supported with a pleasant demeanor and kindness. Kindness and empathy underscores the significance of maintaining a ‘nice disposition’ in a critical healthcare setting.”

Working within the specialized environment and culture of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) demands a multifaceted approach that extends beyond mere technical competence. The correlation between health and wellness for newborns under our care and those who interact with them is best supported with a pleasant demeanor and kindness. Kindness and empathy underscores the significance of maintaining a “nice disposition” in a critical healthcare setting. Aristotle defined kindness as “helpfulness towards someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself, but for that of the person helped” (1). Friedrich Nietzsche considered kindness and love the “most curative herbs and agents in human intercourse.” Kindness evolved from the old English [circa 1300], meaning being well-born or well-bred. **Kindness** is a behavior marked by generosity, consideration, rendering assistance, or concern for others without expecting praise or reward. It is a subject of interest in philosophy, religion, and psychology.

In the context of the NICU, where intricate medical procedures intersect with delicate emotional dynamics, the adage that the nicest person in the room is often the most intelligent resonates profoundly. This principle speaks to the nuanced understanding that intelligence encompasses cognitive prowess, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal acumen. In navigating the complexities of neonatal care, possessing the ability to convey information and comfort to patients’ families with empathy and compassion is indispensable. Often, acts of kindness are what is most remembered by parents.

The notion of being kind underscores the importance of recognizing the potential equivalence of solutions within the NICU setting. While medical interventions may vary, the overarching goal re-

mains consistent: the optimal health and well-being of the neonate [and their parents]. Engaging in fruitless debates over minutiae detracts from the primary focus of delivering quality care, may impede collaborative efforts among healthcare professionals, and is neither nice nor necessary.

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Truly intelligent individuals within the NICU context eschew the temptation to engage in intellectual one-upmanship. Instead, they possess the innate ability to distill complex medical concepts into digestible insights accessible to a broad audience. Their gift lies not in flaunting their knowledge but in empowering others through education and understanding.

In interpersonal communication, embodying “niceness” entails mastering the art of tone and cadence, particularly during crucial conversations within the NICU. Maintaining a measured and composed demeanor, even in the face of adversity, fosters an environment conducive to collaboration and problem-solving. Effective leadership in the NICU is characterized not by authoritarianism but rather by kindness, empathy, and presence of “niceness.” While firm boundaries are essential to ensure patient safety and operational efficiency, disciplinary actions focus on constructive redirection rather than punitive measures.

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In the realm of neonatal care, the presence or absence of cruelty and indifference is influenced by a myriad of psychological, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Our initial inclinations towards indifference to others' suffering, often stemming from fear or judgment towards those perceived as different, find their roots in our evolutionary past as a mechanism for survival. However, in the context of modern society and particularly within the delicate environment of neonatal care, it becomes imperative to transcend these primal instincts by fostering empathy and compassion.

It is crucial to recognize that some individuals may struggle to cultivate empathy and compassion due to various factors such as upbringing, cultural beliefs, or societal pressures. In certain competitive environments, where success is often equated with ruthless behavior, acts of indifference may be perceived as strategic, while kindness is unfortunately viewed as a weakness. Not being nice, in essence, is a manifestation of a lack of empathy hindering the ability to truly understand and connect with others, including vulnerable neonates and their families. Conversely, kindness is indicative of higher emotional intelligence, facilitating the formation of meaningful relationships and fostering collaborative problem-solving within the neonatal care setting.

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By acknowledging these complex factors and actively promoting kindness, we can strive towards creating a more enlightened and harmonious society. This endeavor requires a concerted effort toward education and fostering empathy and inclusivity. Empowering individuals to overcome instinctive responses and prioritize understanding can pave the way for a world characterized by compassion, where acts of cruelty are diminished and harmony prevails, particularly within the delicate realm of neonatal care.

In conclusion, within the context of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, cultivating kindness and a nice disposition is not merely a matter of etiquette but a strategic imperative. By embodying *kindness*, *simplicity*, and *emotional intelligence*, healthcare professionals can navigate the intricate terrain of neonatal medicine with grace, empathy, and effectiveness. Indifference should not be tolerated.

References:

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche
3. The Dean's Commencement speech from Northwestern given by Illinois Governor Pritzker: <https://youtu.be/5uFwyPP5GOQ?si=yNddrcQ-Y0YRw9P2>



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