

Kind

To be kind is to approach other persons, creatures, or nature itself with the attitude of improving it, making it happy, or supporting its needs. A kindly person helps people in need, but also sustains a benign everyday relation to friends and children and animals. It is of course not true that once kind, always kind. Kindness may well change, as a person ages, or loses the confidence required in order to reach out to other people. A kind young man may turn out to be an ill tempered and disappointed outcast, without much room for others.

Examples

1

I have generally been taken for kind, and in a sense that is correct. But I have learned that my kindness is intimately involved with my self-protectiveness, and is not quite what it seems. True it is, that as I age, and face the ultimate mysteriousness of the human condition, I feel increasingly deep empathy for my fellow humans, and my care for them grows profound. Throughout most of my life, though, I have been kind enough—it was I who spent hours talking with a friend in trouble—but also self interested enough to avoid all kinds of conflict by being kind instead of critical. Example: to this day, when I read a friend's fresh poem, I praise it. That praise spares me the chance that he/she will be angry, and also saves me the trouble of a genuinely critical attitude. When I tell Joe his poem his good, in order to encourage him, I may well be misleading him; on the other hand, if I slash in with a knife from the get go he may abandon the idea of writing a poem altogether.

2

My instinct—like that of most people—is to help people in need. I help older people to pick up their spilled groceries, younger people to sort out their love lives, and fellow colleagues to plan good strategies for professional development. All this I do from my heart, or gut, and as if it is a basic human value. There comes a point, though, at which my inner monitoring device senses it has gone as far as it can go. I will help you pick up your groceries but I won't pay your grocery bill. I will advise you on professional issues, but I won't spend the afternoon reading your article. Where is the boundary between kind instinct and withdrawal?