

Part B: Now, listen to the speakers again and complete the table with ticks in the correct box.

Who ...	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3
(a) lost their money?			
(b) helped an elderly person?			
(c) believes you need to help strangers to be truly kind?			
(d) received help from someone at night?			
(e) performed a physical task for someone?			
(f) knew the person who they helped?			
(g) lives with their mum and dad?			

Random acts ...

What we know about kindness

- A. On the 6th April, 2020, Captain Tom Moore began walking in his garden to raise money for British hospitals. The world was at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and hospitals were having an extremely difficult time. His aim was to do ten lengths of his garden per day which may not sound like much, but Captain Tom was 99 and needed a walking frame to get around. He aimed to complete his goal before his 100th birthday on 30th April and raise £1000. He gained international attention and was hailed as a hero. He ended up raising over £32 million. His efforts symbolised the kindness towards others that were needed at such a difficult and frightening time for the world.
- B. But kindness isn't just good for the people on the receiving end. Studies show that it is good for the person bestowing their kindness on others. Volunteering, for example, can lead to the chance of an early death being 24% lower than if you don't give up your time to help others. It reduces the type of swelling which causes heart disease, arthritis, cancer and diabetes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, volunteers spend roughly 38% fewer nights in hospital, according to studies conducted in Spain, Jamaica, Uganda and Egypt. Kindness can also reduce pain. People who were giving blood were shown to feel less pain than those who were having their blood extracted for a test, even though a larger needle was being used for the former.
- C. Despite this, acting kindly can be difficult for many, particularly with people we don't know. A lot of people worry that acts of kindness will be misunderstood or perceived as weakness. Take for example, offering someone a seat on a bus. Some people will infer that you are seeing them as more fragile and may respond in a hostile way. The embarrassment of offering a seat to a pregnant woman only to be informed she isn't pregnant has happened to more than a few good-hearted people. Yet we all welcome acts of kindness. A BBC survey reported that 16% of participants had received an act of kindness from others within the last hour, 43% within the last 24 hours. Words such as 'grateful', 'happy', 'loved' and 'pleased' were used to describe the experience.
- D. Neuroscientists have found that doing things for others lights up the same parts of our brain which respond to reward. It may explain why, during times of crisis, people can be more motivated to help others. In the UK during the first six months of 2020, the British donated £800 million more to charity than they had during the same period the previous year. In Germany, the percentage of people who said that they cared about the well-being of others increased by 22% between February and June. Those whose job it is to help others, medical professionals around the world, became the focus of much public gratitude. In France, a florist left bouquets of flowers on the cars of 400 workers at the local hospital. It was a difficult time, but the sense of shared crisis led many to find joy in helping others. So, if you're in need of a boost to your mood, perhaps you should go and do a random act of kindness for someone. You'll both feel better for it.
- Source: The BBC

First, look at the following titles and match them to paragraphs A - D. There are two titles that are not needed - mark them as *Not used*.

1. The joy of kindness _____
2. Kindness around the world _____
3. The kindness of strangers _____
4. A kind hero _____
5. The trouble with kindness _____
6. The benefits of kindness _____

Reading comprehension

Now, read the article again and complete the following sentences with one, two or three words.

1. Captain Tom's efforts to raise money for hospitals _____, resulting in more than £32 million being raised.
2. Studies have found that _____ can lower the chances of serious medical issues such as arthritis, cancer and diabetes.
3. It's been noted that giving blood hurts patients less than when it is taken for a test, with the conclusion that doing things for others can _____.
4. Concern that kindness will be confused with _____ causes some people to hesitate to help others.
5. Others don't want to cause _____ to themselves or others by offering help when it isn't required.
6. The way we respond to reward corresponds with the same sensations caused by _____ to people.
7. The pandemic created an increased concern for the _____ of others in Germany.
8. It has been noted that a _____, such as a pandemic or a war, can increase the frequency with which people commit acts of kindness.

Talking point

In pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. Do you know of anyone in your country who raised a large amount of money for a cause? What happened?
2. Have you ever raised money for charity or a cause? What did you do?
3. Are you, or anyone you know, involved in volunteering? What do you/they do? Who is it to help and why?
4. What are the most popular charities in your country? Why are they the most popular?
5. Do you think people feel that being kind can be seen as a weakness? Why/Why not?
6. Do you think young people should have to volunteer to help a charity or cause when they are younger? Why/Why not?

Happiness is rather a vague notion having a lot of subjective definitions. Some researchers regard it as “experiences of frequent positive emotions and relatively infrequent negative emotions” (Della Porta, 2012, p. 1), while others define it as “a skill that can be cultivated” through the development of such important human qualities as benevolence, altruistic love, and compassion (Richard, 2011, p. 275). For the convenience of research, it will be understood as a state of mind characterized by a person’s total satisfaction with his/her current well-being, which makes him/her adopt an optimistic way of thinking (Lyubomirsky & Dickerhoof, 2011).

According to the construal approach to happiness, this condition is not self-regulated and can be achieved through positive emotions and cognition as well as various acts of kindness that are defined as positive behaviors. According to Richard (2011), such kindness-oriented behaviors are primarily based on the creation of appropriate inner conditions that allow diminishing self-centeredness and increase altruistic intentions in individuals. It is worth mentioning that such acts have to be neither random and spontaneous nor classified into a particular category (e.g. an anonymous act of charity). Kindness is rather a continual and intrinsic orientation towards ethical and human values that makes people more emphatic and stimulates them for the engagement in “prosocial, generous behaviors that promote goodwill and the well-being of others” (Richard, 2011, p. 277).

The most important and sole condition of kindness is that “the giver” must be selfless in his/her intention to do good to “the recipient” (Rudd, Aaker, & Norton, 2014). However, to enhance the effectiveness of acts of kindness, a person should try to engage in different activities instead of repeating the same actions regularly. For example, Lyubomirsky and Dickerhoof (2014) observe in one of their studies that when a person performs different acts of kindness throughout an enduring period, e.g., “do a new household chore one week, surprise their pet with a treat another week,” he/she attains a greater level of well-being than those people who continuously perform similar acts of kindness (p. 13). Therefore, it is possible to say that when kindness is expressed spontaneously and is triggered by intrinsic motivation rather than prompted by the external situations, it leads to more positive outcomes including happiness and promotion of both individual and common welfare.

From the Buddhist perspective, happiness is not given to a person as a gift but must come as a result of a particular behavior (Richard, 2011). From the perspective of positive psychology, happiness is directly linked to individual positive emotions, behaviors, and perceptions which can be formed either by the external life events and circumstances (the “bottom-up perspective”) or by a person’s biological and temperamental factors (the “top-down theory”) (Lyubomirsky & Dickerhoof, 2010, p. 230). In this way, based on the bottom-up principles of positive psychology, happiness can be achieved through performing pleasant activities (e.g. communicating with a company of close friends). However, from the Buddhist perspective, the satisfaction derived from such actions is incomparable to the condition achieved by committing a selfless act of kindness. Thus, happiness is understood as an active process rather than a final result. Active happiness implies that a person can contribute to shaping his/her well-being through various actions including meditative practices (Ricard, 2011), expression of gratitude (Della Porta, 2012), and development of optimistic thinking (Lyubomirsky & Dickerhoof, 2010).