



**THE KINDNESS
HANDBOOK**
A Practical Companion

Sharon Salzberg

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EXCERPT: Rules for Kindness

I was leading a meditation group in the DC area, and we had rented an elementary school auditorium for the day. All along the walls of the corridors were posted rules of being kind. During the breaks in the day, I would just stand and read them, again and again. They seemed so simple, yet like many simple truths, if we were to live them rather than merely admire them, they could change our life, whatever our age. The rules posted there rest on principles like dissolving the rigid boundaries we hold between ourselves and others, including rather than excluding, recognizing that our actions (and words) are consequential, and being thoughtful.

Carderock Elementary School rules for being kind:

- Treat people the way you would like to be treated.
- Play fair.
- Respect everyone—other students and all staff.
- Everyone can play.
- Help others when they need help.
- Don't hurt others on the inside or the outside.
- Honor all of the pillars of ethics.

I decided that every week I would take one of these rules to hold as a touchstone — a guideline — to remember, to make choices by, to experiment with deepening, to enjoy. One of the most provocative and poignant for me was “Everyone can play.” When I first read it I imagined a child who was left out, who was staring at the in-crowd, feeling unwanted or unseen — then being beckoned forth, invited to join in, affirmed.

As I practiced this tenet, I noticed more hints of loneliness in those I encountered than I had seen before, more subtle echoes of that forlorn child than I expected. Including others was often like watching something unfurl and begin to flower within them. In making a point of including others in conversation, in regard, in a fullness of attention, I felt some subtle walls within me dissolve as well. There was a growing sense of rightness, of balance, because after all everyone should get to play.

Experiment with these rules; try one a week, or one a month, to emphasize. Even if you do live your life according to these tenets, consciously choosing to emphasize them can be enlivening, opening, and at times surprising.

CONTACT: Beverly Yates
303-665-3151 ext. 153
publicity@soundstrue.com

Sounds True
413 South Arthur Avenue / Louisville, CO / 80027
www.soundstrue.com