

Alpine County Choose Civility Campaign

(An initiative of the Child Abuse Prevention Council and County Superintendent of Schools)



March Focus:

Acknowledge Others

In his book, Choosing Civility: The Twenty-Five Rules of Considerate Conduct, author P.M. Forni writes, “Acknowledge others’ existence, their importance to you, their feelings, and the things they do for you. Acknowledgment comes in many forms: remembering someone’s name, paying a thoughtful compliment, summarizing what was just said for a newcomer to the conversation, holding a door open to let someone through, welcoming, thanking, and just plain saying hello.” We help others feel good when we acknowledge their existence such as saying good morning to the bus driver, asking the waitress how her day is going or moving slightly aside welcoming someone into a discussion we’re having with others. Acknowledging others is a powerfully civil thing to do while ignoring others is an uncivil act. “A greeting”, says Dr. Forni, “is a minimal yet meaningful conferral of honor on a person for just being a person. With it, not only do we acknowledge and validate, but we also put at ease and wish well.”

I’ve learned about a wonderful example of acknowledging others. The African Zulu greeting, “Sawubona” means “I see you” and the response “Ngikhona” means, “I am here.” Inherent in this Zulu greeting is not merely a literal “seeing” of the other but rather a deep acknowledgment of the other person. You actually say to the other that you see them; you see their personality, humanity and dignity. You respect all that you see in them. That’s the idea of the civil act of acknowledging others. Just contrast that with how you feel when you move into a group of friends who are talking and they ignore you, or you notice a friend approaching you in the grocery store and he or she walks by without so much as a glance. How do you feel when you say an enthusiastic “Good Morning” to a colleague who just grunts or ignores the greeting all together? Have you ever done something nice for someone and they don’t acknowledge your efforts with a thank you?

When you acknowledge others, it’s like giving water to a thirsty plant. Both of you will feel nourished, uplifted and inspired. Try some of these acknowledgements and see for yourself:

- When the voice behind the speaker in the fast food drive through asks how you are, ask him or her the same question.

- Greet the store clerk and even offer a compliment about what he or she is wearing or how helpful they've been.
- Add a simple "thank you for all you do" to a memo, email or written directive.
- Be specific in a thank you or compliment to show your sincerity.
- Extend your hand when you meet someone new and look right at them with a smile as you introduce yourself.
- Strike up a pleasant conversation with a regular helper at the cleaners, coffee shop or other place you frequent.
- Remember your thank yous!
- Acknowledge all members of a group so no one feels left out or ignored. If you're speaking to a large group of people, be sure to look in all directions of the audience. I still remember a time I was sitting on one side of the room where a presenter never looked. It was the strangest feeling like our half of the room didn't even exist!
- Teach young children the polite way to respond to others such as reciprocating when someone says "Hello".

Books about Acknowledging Others:

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes is about a little girl named Chrysanthemum who is teased about her name but finds acknowledgement from a teacher with an unusual name too.

If Everybody Did by Jo Ann Stover is a fun read aloud for ages 2 and up.

For teenagers, The Cat Ate My Gymsuit by Paula Danziger is a great book for understanding being different and feeling left out.

Another book for teens, Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me (and other concerns) helps youth deal with exclusion and see the importance of acknowledging others.

Parents will appreciate Taking "No" for an Answer and Other Skills Children Need by Dave Garbot.

An inspiring, action-oriented, quick read for adults is The Power of Acknowledgment by Judith W. Umlas