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2023 High School Scholarship Essay Contest
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Kindness Matters

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It is easy to feel unimportant and insignificant in today's complex world — that our actions don't matter. Or even that we don't matter. However, Jane Goodall reminds us that our actions, whether big or small, have an impact on the world around us. Each of us has the power to make a difference every single day.

Small acts, especially acts of kindness, can have a thoughtful impact on ourselves and others. Positive social interactions, even with strangers, counteract loneliness, anxiety, and depression. These acts can take many forms, such as holding the door open for someone, offering a compliment, or simply listening to someone who needs to talk. This is borne out in a story I heard on the radio about a lottery winner who quit his job and moved out of the neighborhood he had lived in for years to buy a house in a gated community, but then found himself descending into loneliness and depression.(1) Winning the lottery was the worst day of his life, because it led him to isolation and caused him to miss out on positive daily interactions with coworkers and neighbors. A recent study determined that, "the amount of social interaction in an individual's daily life is one of the most consistent predictors of psychological well-being," and that, while interactions with those who are closest to us are the most effective indicator, "interactions with weak ties (i.e., distant others) can generate surprisingly positive experiences too."(2)

Moreover, kindness is contagious. When we engage in acts of kindness, we can inspire others to do the same. The invisible impact of small acts can reach across the planet without us having any idea. It may seem too good to be true, but acts of kindness directed towards others are also beneficial to ourselves. Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy,(3) who recounted the story of the lottery winner, suggested in the same interview that "service is one of the most powerful solutions when it comes to loneliness," because it "reaffirms for us that we have value to bring to the world and to somebody else's life."

In conclusion, Jane Goodall's quote reminds us that our actions, no matter how small, have an impact on the world around us. By engaging in acts of kindness and fostering personal connections, we can make a positive impact on others and on the world. These small acts can help us build a sense of community, foster a sense of belonging, and improve our own well-being. So, let us all take a moment to consider the kind of difference we want to make and start with a simple act of kindness.

References

1. <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/838757183>
2. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2120668119>
3. Currently serving as Vice Admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and author of the bestselling book, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*.