



The Day of Compassion

"Keep feeling the need for being first. But I want you to be first in love. I want you to be first in moral excellence. I want you to be first in generosity."

–Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

When I started thinking about the Day of Compassion and was asked to define compassion, I concluded that compassion is the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another person's suffering and feel compelled to relieve it. I also see compassion as tuning in to other people in a kind and loving way. Some of the feelings and actions I associate with compassion are love, consolation, understanding, comforting, kindness, and a willingness to be there for others, share their sorrow, show tenderness, and side with those who are suffering.

A group known as "[Life Vest Inside](#)" has a video called [Kindness Boomerang: "One Day"](#) that inspires people to see the potential they have to make a difference in the world through simple yet powerful acts of kindness. The video shows that when you are kind, it really does have an effect and spread. Thinking of this video gave me an idea for my Day of Compassion.



I am a teacher, so for my Day of Compassion, I decided not only to act compassionately myself but to spread compassion to as many people as possible. My first step in carrying out this plan was to print small cards with the symbol of the Day of Compassion heart taken from the assignment page, distribute the cards in my classes (I teach young children as well as adults who want to learn English), and ask students what compassion means to them. Typical answers were "Compassion is when we help someone not wanting anything in return" and "To love with understanding."

I also showed students some quotes that I had printed on the topic, and I asked students about their own latest or greatest acts of compassion. Then I told them that August 15th was the Day of Compassion, and I invited them to be compassionate that day and call me back later telling me what actions they had been able to carry out.

To my surprise, many students called to tell me about their compassionate acts. Here are just a few activities they reported:

1. One student, who is a dentist, told me that she had looked for the city convent and offered free dental treatment to nuns (she had, in fact, started helping them that very same day!).

2. Another student, who also happens to be a dentist, gave free treatment to a homeless boy who had been suffering from a toothache.
3. One of my adult students volunteered for several hours at a local drug addiction clinic.
4. One student who is a professional dancer decided to start teaching ballet to economically disadvantaged kids in her community.
5. One student decided to start volunteering at a cancer hospital, and another invited her classmates to join her as "doctors of joy" in a local hospital.
6. Students aged 4 to 9 brought good quality second-hand toys to school to be donated.
7. Teenage students offered to help classmates who were having trouble completing their homework and studying for tests in math, biology, and Portuguese.



I must say, these reports felt like acts of compassion toward me, too, because I felt comforted and loved by my students! I have no doubt that the benefits of compassion outweigh any psychological costs.

Although this was a wonderful wave of compassion, it was not the only part of my project. I wanted to be compassionate myself, so on August 22nd I didn't eat any meat or eggs, spent time gardening, took a mug to work to avoid using disposable glasses and cups, tried to save water, and devoted part of the day in my community church listening to people. The priest in my church has a goal to set up a pastoral ministry for comforting and listening to people. He believes—as I do—that people need someone who is willing to listen to them, and that listening to people can change their life for the better. I also offered to teach English to kids at an orphanage that the church runs and to other kids who can't afford English classes.

Social Psychology Connections

I believe that social psychology can be used to foster a more compassionate society by providing us with better knowledge about how to bring changes and harmony to ourselves and others. Learning various principles, dynamics, and concepts from social psychology has made me more aware of human nature—of what we can become and why some people act the way they do—and this knowledge has already had an effect on me (and by extension, will influence others around me).

A month from now, I think my behavior will be different as a result of participating in the Day of Compassion. The experience has already changed me inside by showing that I was able to help people move and be moved by a simple invitation to behave compassionately. I intend to teach kids in a way that broadens their horizons, to practice the art of listening, and to offer a shoulder to cry on when needed. If I can do these things, I will feel that I've succeeded in my life project and in the kindness revolution we have begun with this course.

