

Small acts of kindness make most Americans feel better, poll finds

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As the holiday season approaches, most Americans say that small acts of

kindness make them feel better, and that is true for both giving and receiving those acts. And acts of kindness were happening: in the past three months, 93% of Americans reported having done something kind, including 69% who had said hello to a stranger, 68% who reported holding a door open for someone, and 65% who had given someone a compliment. Among other options surveyed:

- 39% had checked in on someone who seemed down or depressed.
- 33% had donated goods to a charitable cause.
- 24% had donated money to a charitable cause.
- 19% had given up their seat for someone.
- 17% had paid someone else's tab.
- 11% had volunteered or participated in a charity event.

These are among the results of the American Psychiatric Association's most recent Healthy Minds Poll, fielded by Morning Consult among 2,210 adults Oct. 16–19, 2023. Among those surveyed, 89% said showing someone else an act of kindness made them feel either significantly, somewhat, or a little better, and 90% said receiving an act of kindness made them feel those ways.

This comes at a time of heightened worry about international conflicts. Two-thirds of Americans (67%) reported being somewhat or very anxious on the topic—up 12 percentage points from the last month's survey, which was taken before the onset of the crisis in the Middle East.

"When we are feeling stressed or sad, doing something for others, no matter how small, boosts our mood," said APA President Petros Levounis, M.D., M.A. "Whether it is an innate response that rewards [altruistic behavior](#) or a mental reframing that puts positivity in the world, doing something for someone else makes us feel better. That's so helpful as we deal with life's complications, whether it is the news or personal

challenges."

When on the receiving end of an act of [kindness](#), respondents were most likely to report feeling happy (56%) and grateful (51%), and least likely to feel indifferent (3%) or suspicious (3%). The poll also asked Americans the three most likely places where they see [acts of kindness](#), and the top answer was the [grocery store](#) (with 44% selected) followed by places of worship (25%), at home (25%) and in their neighborhood (25%) among other selections. Among the least likely selected were the gym (6%) and schools (9%).

"The next time you are in line to pay for food, tell the cashier to take care of the next person's bill, say "I am paying it forward for the person behind me," and leave. Then, consider what you have just done to make that person's day, and the smile it will bring them," said APA CEO and Medical Director Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A. "Especially now as we enter the holiday season, and especially as we encounter so many disturbing horrific events in the news, little gestures become meaningful in bolstering us in the day-to-day."

The [poll](#) also asked what Americans were most grateful for in this [holiday season](#), and most answered their family (70%), their partner (33%), their home (32%) and their [physical health](#) (31%) with fewer citing their community (3%), their hobbies (6%) or their job (10%).

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

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