



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

The kindness challenge

Earlier this year, I wrote a blog post about kind girls that went crazy viral. While I was very grateful for the response, I secretly wondered if maybe, just maybe, it shouldn't have been such a sensation.

I wrote "Raising a Kind Daughter" because I get so tired sometimes of hearing mean girl stories. Don't get me wrong; I know mean girls exist, and the problem undoubtedly needs to be addressed. All the venom in the girl world today truly frightens me for my daughters.

But there are also a lot of really sweet girls out there, girls who love their friends and understand what friendship means. But since their stories hold no shock factor, they tend to not make headline news.

So in my article, I talked about the kindness my daughter's friend showed her when they competed for a class election, and my daughter won. I then noted the correlation I've seen, time and time again, as the mom of four girls: That the kind friends my girls bring home always have kind mothers. Kindness among girls doesn't start on the playground or in the locker room — it starts at home. It starts with mothers showing their daughters how to love other females like sisters, not threats and competitors.

I believed in my story and felt good about publishing it. However, I never expected it to be shared 165,000 times on Facebook and pinned 85,000 times on Pinterest. I had no idea it would make The Huffington Post, become a top trending story and lead to a live interview. The whole thing was exhilarating and nerve-wracking, and while I couldn't thank God enough for the opportunity, I felt a little sad when I thought about why people found this story so special.

Because a story about kind girls should be normal, not exceptional. It should make us smile and feel good as we move onto the next story. One thing I learned from this story's success is how rare kindness must be among young friends. There's so much meanness among kids today (adults, too) that we're hungry for hope that things can be different and thus eagerly share reminders that kindness does exist.

This month I release my first book for teen and tween girls. *10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know* covers all the relevant issues, and in the first chapter, I kick off with one of the most important truths: Kindness is more important than popularity.

The quest for popularity often leads girls to meanness. It's the desire to impress others — particularly the cool crowd — that can make a girl compromise her values and what she knows is right to achieve social status. If we, as parents, really want kind daughters, we need think long and hard about how important popularity is to our daughters and how important our child's popularity is to us, because our attitude shapes their attitude.

Chapter 1 of my book ends with The Kindness Challenge:

Every morning when you wake up, you have a choice.

You can use your day to spread kindness or chase popularity. You can either ask, "How can others help me?" or "How can I help others?"

Because here is the deal: You can't choose both. It really is one or the other. If your motive is popularity, you'll only have eyes for the cool crowd. Only their circle will do. If you're rejected, it will devastate you because there is no Plan B.

But if your motive is kindness, your options open up. You have eyes for everyone and will go wherever you're needed. Some people think you can't get ahead by being kind, that the only way to achieve your dreams is to connect with movers and shakers, but that's wrong. When you are kind, people try extra-hard to help you. They want you to succeed and somehow, they'll lead you to the connections and opportunities you need.

In the end, love reigns. The most popular girls now may be mean and brave, but ultimately, it's the kind and brave girls who rise to the top and make a real difference in this world.

Make it your goal to love everyone, then surround yourself with those who do the same.

Despite the mean girl stories flooding the news, I know many girls on the right track. Already they're living lives that honor God and practicing virtues like kindness, compassion, humility and forgiveness. They may be young, but they understand how the quality of one's heart matters more than the quantity of one's friends.

What our world needs is more of this mindset. We need kindness to be more popular, not some antiquated concept that some people believe is gone forever.

Kindness doesn't catch on overnight. And it won't be because of me or anyone else that real change occurs because only God can open hearts and orchestrate movements.

But what all of us can do is notice the kindness around us — and then talk about it. We can encourage kindness at home, applauding our kids louder for their beautiful heart than we do for a perfect report card or extracurricular success because these things, while certainly worthy of celebration, will not determine the fate of their soul.

One of my most popular blog posts should not have been so popular. It should have been yet another example of how kids today "get it" and can follow the golden rule. I know I'm dreaming big and that we have a long way to go, but I hope that one day, stories about kindness and true friendship will be common and normal, something that makes us smile and lifts our spirits as we move onto the next story about what's right in our world and what miracles can take place when we point our lives to God.

Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four girls, columnist and blogger for The Huffington Post. Join her Facebook community at "Kari Kampakis, Writer," visit her blog at karikampakis.com or contact her at kari@karikampakis.com. Kari's first book, 10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know, releases this month through Thomas Nelson. Find it everywhere books are sold and online at Amazon, Books-A-Million, Barnes & Noble and Christianbook.com.