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INTRODUCTION

Letter from the Director

Dear **be nice.** Liaison,

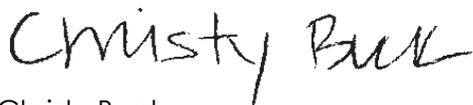
My name is Christy Buck, and I am the Executive Director of the Mental Health Foundation of West Michigan (MHF). The MHF has been educating members of the West Michigan community about mental health since 1990, and we have been working with students for the past eight years. In 2011, we launched the **be nice.** initiative in response to the increased attention given to "bullying" in schools and communities across the nation. Though **be nice.** covers "bully" prevention, we take a unique approach to the issue. The core of the **be nice.** message is the understanding that how you treat others can have an impact on how they think, how they act, and how they feel - their mental health. Our method is an Action Plan, and we know it works.

Three decades of experience in youth and community mental health education tell me that changing climate to be open to mental health education starts with a passionate individual like yourself. We know that a preventative approach to the impact of poor mental health can ultimately save lives. Thank you for investing your time and effort in being a mental health advocate. I also want you to know that you are not the only individual who desires to have this conversation, and that as you begin to bring the initiative to your school and community, you will find others who are also passionate about this challenge.

This kit will supply you with all of the materials you need to start **be nice.** programming in your building and community. The sustainability of this program is up to you and the resources that we offer you to keep the **be nice.** Action Plan a part of daily life in your school. And I'm sure you will be amazed at the ideas that your student leaders can come up with when they are given the tools and are empowered to make decisions and facilitate a school-wide initiative. Are you ready?

notice • invite • challenge • empower

Sincerely,



Christy Buck
Executive Director
The Mental Health Foundation of West Michigan

INTRODUCTION

What is **be nice.**?

be nice. is an Action Plan that helps individuals understand that they can have an effect on how others think, act and feel. **be nice.** is a proactive initiative designed to spread awareness of the importance of noticing, inviting, challenging and empowering community-wide. At the core of **be nice.** is the understanding that someone's mental health (how they think, act and feel) can be affected by how others treat them. **be nice.** reduces the devastating effects of mean behavior as it happens in school climate, which can include low self-esteem, depression and suicide. **be nice.** creates a positive cultural shift in your school and community.

be nice. educates students and community members about how simply "being nice" is an effective way to promote a safe and civil environment within the school and community.

We all have the ability to save a life by simply being nice.

be nice. Action Plan

notice

What is good, what is right, changes in someones behavior.

invite

yourself to initiate a conversation

challenge

the stigma; communicate important resources

empower

yourself with the knowledge that you can have an effect on how someone thinks, acts and feels

INTRODUCTION

Keys to **be nice.**?

- Create awareness of the negative effects of mean behavior
- Spread the message to students, staff and community: individual actions have a tremendous impact on the school environment, as well as each individuals' mental health
- Reinforce positive behavior
- Generate school and community-wide culture change
- Reduce stigma surrounding mental health

Why **be nice.**?

- **be nice.** creates outcomes for kids, adults and communities. It encourages the community to work together with full participation and utilization of the community and community leaders.
- **be nice.** is a sustainable model
- **be nice.** is visibly friendly
- **be nice.** is mental health based
- **be nice.** is an easy tool to use and understand
- **be nice.** enhances other programs already being utilized

INTRODUCTION

A note about bullying.

This is how Michigan law defines the term:

(b) "Bullying" means any written, verbal, or physical act, or any electronic communication, that is intended or that a reasonable person would know is likely to harm 1 or more pupils either directly or indirectly by doing any of the following:

(i) Substantially interfering with educational opportunities, benefits, or programs of 1 or more pupils.

(ii) Adversely affecting the ability of a pupil to participate in or benefit from the school district's or public school's educational programs or activities by placing the pupil in reasonable fear of physical harm or by causing substantial emotional distress.

(iii) Having an actual and substantial detrimental effect on a pupil's physical or mental health.

(iv) Causing substantial disruption in, or substantial interference with, the orderly operation of the school.¹

¹ "Section 380.1310b, The Revised School Code (Excerpt), Act 451 of 1976," Michigan Legislative Website, accessed January 21, 2014, [http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(xsj0ao55wgdpsobyjped1055\)\)/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-380-1310b](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(xsj0ao55wgdpsobyjped1055))/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-380-1310b)



Your state may have its own policy. More information can be found at benice.org

A person who bullies wants to harm their victim. They have had a change in their mental health. Bullying is not a random act nor single incident. It is the repeated nature of bullying that causes anxiety and apprehension in victims. Because of this, even the anticipation of bullying behavior becomes as problematic as the events themselves. This can cause long-term stress to the brain and its chemical makeup. Hence, how someone thinks, acts and feels - their mental health. We need to concentrate on the mental health of all involved.

INTRODUCTION

We have learned over the years that even by using the term bully, ignoring mean behavior or just telling someone to stop are ineffective approaches to halting bullying behaviors. That approach does not help improve the mental health of each individual. **Consequently, we need a broader approach that takes into account the mental health of each individual within the school and the community.** We must work to improve mental health by improving the school environment.

That's why the Mental Health Foundation of West Michigan (MHF) created **be nice**. The MHF exists to promote good mental health at every level; and this perspective guides everything we do. We have seen that bullying decreases the more that students, parents, teachers, and community members are involved in improving individual mental health. **be nice** makes schools safer, more accepting, and more respectful places.



INTRODUCTION

A note about mental health and youth.

The **be nice.** education initiative, was created by The Mental Health Foundation of West Michigan. We know that mental health education and stigma reduction are integral parts of positive school climate.

The facts:

- Half of all mental illnesses begin showing signs and symptoms by age 14, and three quarters by age 24.
- Mental health disorders affect 1 in 5 people. Serious emotional disturbance affects 1 in 10 young people.
- 79 percent of those children will never receive treatment and 45 percent of adults never receive treatment (*AJP, September 2002*).
- In the U.S., suicide is the second leading cause of death among high and college students, and the tenth leading cause of death amongst adults.
- More than 90 percent of individuals who die by suicide have risk factors associated with depression or another mental health disorder.

Involving mental health professionals at your school:

- Involve mental health professionals as they are key to the **be nice.** education initiative.
- Make them aware of the **be nice.** Action Plan.
- What Mental Health awareness or prevention initiatives are already active at your school?
- Make staff aware that the **be nice.** Initiative will elicit the help of Mental Health professionals.

INTRODUCTION

What can schools do?

Teachers, administrators, staff, and parents want students to succeed and develop into healthy, well-adjusted young adults. A negative school environment can be an obstacle to achieving this goal. It's time to move beyond "don't bully" and address your school environment in a comprehensive way. **be nice.** is all about promoting a positive environment in your school that will encourage good individual and group mental health. And it all starts with simply being nice.

be nice. is an answer to the question "What can my school do?"

- Focus on the positives and guide students to initiate their own change. In a district and community, motivated high school students are an incredible resource for change. It is students who truly know what they would like to see change, and students who can encourage others in the school to do the right thing.
- Giving a leadership group the basic background, tools and action plan of **be nice.** will inspire them to add their own experiences to make the message more relatable, engaging, and tangible for the rest of the student body, staff, and eventually the community.
- Find a passionate staff leader, called the **be nice.** liaison to support these leadership students with the tools they need to start **be nice.**. This staff must also make time for students to keep **be nice.** sustained after initial programming. This staff liaison is key for holding students accountable to fulfill the important ideas they come up with. (This IS student-lead!)



The information for a successful and culture-changing program is all right here in the launch kit and online at **benice.org**.

A positive school environment can contribute to the mental well being of all its students thereby reducing negative and aggressive behaviors. A recent study¹ showed that a school-wide intervention aiming to prevent bullying through positive behavior support was effective in decreasing incidents of bullying in all six participating schools. **be nice.** focuses on reinforcing positive behaviors and creating a positive school environment in which students can grow, learn, develop, and achieve their best!

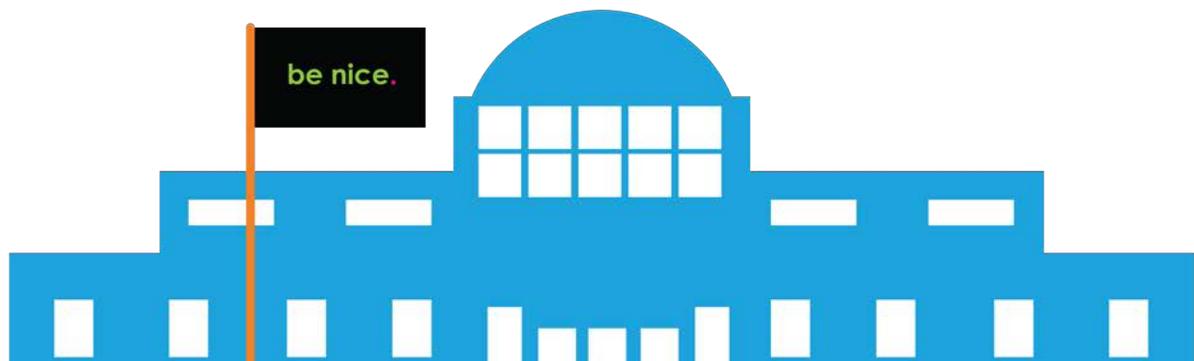
¹ Scott W. Ross and Robert H. Horner, "Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support," Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis 42 (2009): 747-759.

INTRODUCTION

Even though our curriculum does not use the term “bully”, **be nice.** is also a tool for school administrators to use to help them in their efforts to comply with bullying prevention requirements. For example, Michigan's Matt's Safe School Law² suggests that schools implement “provisions to form bullying prevention task forces, programs, teen courts, and other initiatives involving school staff, pupils, school clubs or other student groups, administrators, volunteers, parents, law enforcement, community members, and other stakeholders.” With our online resources at **benice.org**, **be nice.** is your open-source solution for developing programming.



Our online resource at benice.org, **be nice. is your open-source solution for developing that programming.**



² Scott W. Ross and Robert H. Horner, “Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support,” *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* 42 (2009): 747-759.

³ “Section 380.1310b, The Revised School Code (Excerpt), Act 451 of 1976,” Michigan Legislative Website, accessed January 21, 2014, [http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(p4iqfbuhxwnvcq20fta4ssnp\)\)/mileg.aspx?page=GetObject&objectname=mcl-380-1310b](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(p4iqfbuhxwnvcq20fta4ssnp))/mileg.aspx?page=GetObject&objectname=mcl-380-1310b).

INTRODUCTION

Why is whole district involvement important?

In our years of experience with implementation of the **be nice.** initiative at the school level, we have found that total district involvement and buy-in from all district staff, parents and students is important to achieve the maximum positive outcome. It has been a great experience to watch students travel from elementary to the secondary level, bringing the **be nice.** Action Plan with them, and learning how it can translate to many situations.

Why is community buy-in important?

Many communities surrounding **be nice.**'s home in Western Michigan have shown us how empowering community support for **be nice.** can be. Community buy-in can work following many different avenues.

How can schools encourage the community to participate in the **be nice.** initiative?

Some Examples:

- A local business sponsors **be nice.** at a local school; monetarily and physically attends some activities
- **be nice.** Leadership Chapter participates in a local community activity (eg. parade)
- A community organization sponsors a **be nice.** night/event (eg. Mental Health Awareness movie showing)
- **be nice.** Leadership Chapter volunteers at a local community organization



More examples of community activities can be found at benice.org

INTRODUCTION

How can your school get the most out of the **be nice.** Initiative?

The Liaison

If you are the **be nice.** liaison for your school, congratulations! You'll be taking an active role in making **be nice.** a reality, harnessing your enthusiasm for your students' mental health to improve the environment of your school and community.

We suggest one or more co-facilitators to coordinate the **be nice.** chapter with you. Liasons also find it helpful to have an administrative liaison working with them. He or she will act as a go-between, making sure that you and the school's administration are on the same page and that you can get any necessary sign-offs for program activities.

Staff and Parent Buy-In

Staff buy-in will be essential for **be nice.** to be successful in your school building, and should be the first step to concentrate on after being trained in the **be nice.** Action Plan and program. Early in the kick-off of your program, you should organize a staff informational meeting (or set aside time during a staff meeting) for all administrators, teacher and support staff to learn the **be nice.** Action Plan. It is crucial that your entire staff is on board and ready to help implement the program.



See benice.org, the **be nice. Portal for suggestions and resources for staff meetings and trainings.**

It's also important to inform parents/guardians of the implementation of the **be nice.** Action Plan in your community. There have been MANY successful efforts by buildings and districts to promote positive mental health at home through education of the **be nice.** Action Plan! These include **be nice.** sports games, parent presentations, and other awareness events. We want to promote cooperation between parents and school staff so that the ideals of the **be nice.** Action Plan will be reinforced at home as well as in school.



See more information about community involvement on the **be nice. Portal at benice.org**

The Launch

be nice. is a year-round initiative that can kick off ANY TIME during the school year with a **be nice.** day and assembly. This is planned and implemented by your **be nice.** Student Leadership Chapter. This day is built upon throughout the year with classroom discussions and school-wide activities that reinforce the **be nice.** Action Plan. The program is combined with flexibility in mind, so there is a high degree of customization available. This is helpful for ensuring that the **be nice.** Initiative and Action Plan remain sustainable in your building and community.

INTRODUCTION

Choosing the **be nice.** liaison?

What makes a great **be nice.** liaison

- Someone who is not only passionate about school climate, but understands that the discussion is best implemented from a mental health perspective.
 - *You can have an effect on how someone thinks, acts and feels*
- Ability to communicate with school staff and administration your passion for **be nice.**, and the action being taken to implement.
- Ability to meet with Leadership Chapter about twice monthly.
- Understanding that **be nice.** is not just one assembly, but a year-long initiative!

Responsibilities of a **be nice.** liaison:

- Educate staff about **be nice.**, N.I.C.E., and implementation timeline.
- Form **be nice.** Leadership Chapter / **be nice.** Committee
- Meet with chapter to plan Assembly / **be nice.** Day
- Continue to be an advisor to the group:
 - *planning monthly **be nice.** activities and lesson plans school-wide*
 - *forming committees*
 - *'reigniting' the group*
 - *overseeing challenges*

Additional trainings beneficial to **be nice.** liaison:

- Youth Mental Health First Aid - www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/
- QPR (Question.Persuade.Refer Institute) - www.qprinstitute.com

INTRODUCTION

Plan of Action - “Kick-off”

- Familiarize the **be nice**. Leadership Liaison with the **be nice**. launch kit and online tools.
- Review your school's policies with the administration.
- Form the **be nice**. Leadership Chapter (see next section of launch kit).
- First **be nice**. Chapter meeting.
- Provide staff education.
- Subsequent **be nice**. Chapter meetings.
- Host a **be nice**. day and assembly.
- Provide parent education.
- Conduct ongoing classroom discussions.
- Leadership Chapter promotes ongoing school-wide activities.
- Provide leadership to the Chapter to sustain **be nice**..

Important dates

Date of staff training: _____

Date of leadership training: _____

Date of second leadership meeting: _____

Date of all school assembly: _____



benice.org

INTRODUCTION

We recommend sending home a letter in advance of your school-wide assembly, informing parents that you will be kicking off a year-round school-climate initiative, pro-mental health program and asking for their support (Appendix A contains a sample letter). The coordinator should also host an informational meeting for parents that covers the basics of the Action Plan and how parents can participate.



See benice.org for suggestions and resources for this meeting.

Evaluating **be nice**.

At this point, a pre-survey should be distributed to the staff and, if possible, the students. You will want to be able to compare the results with your post-survey to see where your school's culture has improved and where there is still work to do. (Appendix B contains sample surveys.)



benice.org

This launch kit isn't your only resource—**be nice**. is an open-source solution that makes use of our website to bring you the latest ideas from our staff and other educators implementing the program around the country. The website includes exclusive content, additional lesson plans and materials, webinars, fundraising ideas and an interactive forum where you can ask questions and share ideas. You can also visit our online store for the latest posters, merchandise, and other tools.



HOW TO FORM A LEADERSHIP CHAPTER

Many schools may have student groups already formed that address the issues school climate. If your school already has a committee like this, that group may be able to integrate **be nice.** into their mission. If you are starting from scratch, this section will explain the purpose of and how to form your school's **be nice.** Leadership Chapter.

What is the purpose of the **be nice.** Leadership Chapter?

- To bring unity to your school.
- Driven by student leaders in the school, **be nice.** empowers them to become difference-makers and unifiers.
- Leaders are educated regarding stigma, mental health, and suicide prevention.
- The Leadership Chapter will then create a plan of action for bringing the positive message and **be nice.** Action Plan to their school and community.

Your **be nice.** chapter is driven by student leadership. The student leaders should own **be nice.** as much as possible. With the guidance of the **be nice.** Liaison, they will organize and plan the school-wide assembly. They will also meet periodically for the rest of the school year to help plan follow-up activities, sustaining **be nice.** in your school.

Whom should I recruit?

In our experience, the most successful leadership chapters have been comprised of students from a diverse mix of clubs, sports teams, music ensembles, and other social circles. When you get buy-in from all the different groups across the school, it translates to school-wide buy-in.

You should also seek out student leaders from all peer groups. This may include students who are currently leading their group in unhealthy ways. Getting buy-in from these leaders can have a huge impact on your school culture.

Characteristics of the ideal student leadership candidate include:

- Demonstrated empathy
- A personal story about overcoming mean behavior or mental health problems
- Social pull and influence with his or her peers

An effective leadership chapter consists of at least fifteen students (for greater diversity of ideas) and no more than 30 students. Representatives from each grade in your school is also important (depending on school size).

HOW TO FORM A LEADERSHIP CHAPTER

How do I recruit students?

How do you form a student Leadership Chapter?

1. Introduce the idea of the leadership chapter in your school's daily announcements and have the students sign up. Use a script like this one:

"We are starting a **be nice**. leadership chapter at [school name here]. The purpose of the chapter is to look at the social climate of our school and develop a plan to make this school a healthier place mentally."

But be careful—you may not get enough participation. On the other hand, you may get too much participation, which will mean sifting through candidates, making the group exclusive right from the start. Start small (15-30) the group can grow in size after the assembly.

2. Form a faculty panel to select leaders.

This may be the best way to select your leaders. The faculty is in contact with the students every day, so they know who the natural leaders are. You can gather a diverse group of students and select the exact number of students you need. Send these students a letter detailing the purpose of the group and the reason they were chosen to participate.

But be careful—you may have students who feel left out when using this method. If there are only a few and they are passionate about joining, let them participate. Otherwise, kindly let them know there will be upcoming opportunities as the chapter designs **be nice**. activities on a regular basis.

3. Have students submit applications.

If you have an overwhelming number of students who want to participate, ask them to fill out an application and explain why they want to join the group. (See Appendix C for a sample student application.) Again, watch out for students who feel left out.

Liaison's Notes



LIAISON'S NOTES

As your school's Liaison, one of your first goals should be to inform the student Leadership Chapter about **be nice**, so they can engage their peers. It is the responsibility and first goal of the leadership chapter to bring the **be nice** Action Plan to the student body and bigger community. But first, you have to inform yourself! Your education began in the introduction, but here are some more ideas to help you learn how to promote a more positive environment in your school.

Educate yourself about the **be nice** Action Plan

Bullying is a learned behavior that can be caused by multiple factors and influences in a student's environment. Examples include:

- Stress, abuse, or trauma at home; or a lack of interest and involvement
- School environment that ignores acts of bullying and disrespect
- Being bullied by others or having friends who bully
- Anxiety, insecurity, or a desire for power or popularity
- Media and social networking influence

notice

What is good, what is right, changes in someones behavior.

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yourself to initiate a conversation

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yourself with the knowledge that you can have an effect on how someone thinks, acts and feels

LIAISON'S NOTES

How can I recognize mean behavior?

Mean behavior takes on many different forms:

- Physical bullying which includes direct physical aggression or attacks on another individual (hitting, kicking, beating up, pushing, tripping, spitting, etc.)
- Property damage, theft or hiding someone's belongings
- Verbal bullying including taunting, teasing, mocking, name calling, and other forms of humiliation and intimidation
- Racist, sexist, religious, cultural, or homophobic comments
- Starting or spreading lies and rumors
- Emotional or relational bullying through alienation and exclusion from the group, or setting the victim up to take the blame for something
- Crude or hurtful notes, drawings or gestures
- Cyberbullying or electronic bullying by using social media to embarrass, spread rumors about, or reveal secrets about others

Unless you actually observe the situation while it's happening, it can be difficult to recognize when someone is being affected by mean behavior. Signs may include:

- Unexplained injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness (psychosomatic illness)
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating

LIAISON'S NOTES

- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

What are the effects of mean behavior on mental health?

- The effects of harrassment go far beyond momentary discomfort or even prolonged unhappiness.
- Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than other children to be depressed, lonely, anxious, have low self-esteem, feel unwell, and think about suicide. (Limber, 2002; Olweus, 1993)
- A victim of bullying is twice as likely to take his or her own life compared to someone who is not a victim. (National Association of School Psychiatrists, 2011)
- Mean behavior has a direct negative affect on a person's mental health, the sum of how they think, act, and feel. Bullying is a common trigger for depression, which in the most severe cases can lead to suicide. Our goal is to significantly reduce the cases of depression and suicide by improving the mental health of the students in your school.



benice.org provides information that can help identify depression and find referral resources for help.

LIAISON'S NOTES

How does **be nice.** help?

be nice. helps your students and staff to:

- NOTICE how people are treating each other in your school.
What do we do well? What needs to change?
- INVITE yourself to make a change.
Think of ways that you can make a difference in how others are treated in your school.
- CHALLENGE yourself to act.
You've invited yourself to think of ways that you can make a difference; now its time to do them.
- EMPOWER others to make a change.
Be a positive role model and encourage others to join the movement.

Through these efforts, you can effect a positive change in the environment of your school.

You may be asking yourself "How do I do that?"



NOTICE



What does it mean to notice?

We need to be aware of ourselves, other people, our school, and our community. We should all be noticed for our positive thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Encourage students to notice, teaching them to increase their awareness of themselves and others. They can do this by noticing what they, and the people around them, are doing and saying. They should notice what makes for a healthy school environment and what does not.

Why is it important to notice?

If we don't notice something, we can't begin to change it.

Sometimes it's helpful to step back and observe the situation.

Look at it objectively and compare what you see with how you want things to be.

The difference between the two is the change you need to make.

NOTICE



What can we do to notice?

Start by looking for words and actions that reflect the school environment that you want.

NOTICE what is RIGHT:

- When you notice people saying or doing something positive, let them know that you appreciate it.
- When you notice that you have done something positive, congratulate yourself.
- When you are in class, notice what's going well in your school by calling attention to it.

NOTICE what is GOOD:

- Let no act of kindness go unrecognized.
- Go out of your way to find something good about everyone you meet.

NOTICE what is DIFFERENT:

- If you notice that someone's mood or behavior has changed for no apparent reason, tell an appropriate person like a school counselor or trusted adult.



INVITE



What does it mean to invite?

Inviting involves taking a risk and reaching out. Invite yourself to understand that how you treat someone has an effect on how they think, act, and feel. Teach students that inviting is an act of respect that can help to improve everyone's mental health and the school environment.

Why is it important to invite?

When someone is invited, they become less isolated.

When people are connected, they know that we're all in this together.

People who are mutually supported are much more likely to **be nice**.

INVITE



What can we do to invite?

INVITE someone NEW.

- Small actions like this can make a big difference in someone else's life.

INVITE yourself to SAY SOMETHING.

- If you've noticed something is different about someone, reach out to that person and to a trusted adult for help.

Be an INVITING person.

- When you ask someone how they're doing, really listen to their response.

Be consistent – reach out!



CHALLENGE



What does it mean to challenge?

Once we've invited ourselves to make a change, it's time to challenge ourselves to act. This isn't always easy. Acting means taking a chance. There's a chance that you'll be ignored, criticized, or misunderstood. That's why it's a challenge.

The **be nice.** challenge is not being satisfied with the way things are and then doing something about it.

Why is it important to challenge?

If you let it go, you're saying it's ok.

Challenging allows you to become part of the solution.

Talking about it isn't doing it.

Taking the challenge to **be nice.** can change someone's class period, their school day, their week, even their life.

CHALLENGE



What can we do to challenge?

CHALLENGE yourself to REACH OUT.

- It isn't easy to leave our "comfort zones" and help someone who needs it. It's a challenge.
- Even the smallest bit of support can make a huge difference in a person's life, often in ways that we don't expect.

CHALLENGE OTHERS to be inclusive and behave positively towards others.

- Challenging others to change their behavior can be intimidating, but it's easier than you think. Other people feel the same way that you do...most people want to **be nice**..
- When someone isn't taking the challenge to **be nice**., ask yourself if they might need someone to **be nice**. to them, to **notice, invite, challenge** and **empower** them.



EMPOWER



What does it mean to empower?

Now it is your job to take the lead. Being nice is less of a challenge when you empower others to **be nice** along with you. Empower means to give power. Take the power you've gotten from the positive changes you've made by **noticing, inviting, and challenging**, and share it with your friends, your classmates, and even those who may be ignoring or troubling you.

Why is it important to empower?

Bullying happens because one person seizes power over another and uses it against them. When someone is empowered to **be nice**, they are freed to think, act, and feel in a positive manner.

When you **notice** someone who needs help and you **invite** yourself to help them and you **challenge** yourself to **be nice**, you are **empowering** yourself, your new friend, and those who were witnesses.

EMPOWER



What can we do to empower?

To empower means to give power. Exercise the freedom to give power to yourself and others in your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Be encouraging to others, especially those who might doubt themselves. Lead by example.

- Empower yourself by taking the challenge
- No matter what the outcome, it will feel empowering to help someone with how they are thinking, acting and feeling.
- The power that you feel when doing the right thing will be infectious.
- **be nice.** to yourself; appreciate the person that you are and know that you have the power to **be nice.!**

Empower others with your support.

- Once you have taken the challenge to reach out and **be nice.**, you will be giving power through support to someone who needs it.
- You might lift someone's self-esteem so that they can in turn help someone else. It's infectious.

Empower your community with your leadership.

- The ultimate goal of **be nice.** is to take it one step further and empower the community.
- It takes everyone in a community to understand that **be nice.** is about improving the health of our community by taking care of how people think, act and feel.
- Think of ways that you can empower your community with the **be nice.** message.



LEADERSHIP CHAPTER MEETINGS AND ASSEMBLIES

The First Task: Educate and Motivate your Leaders

You did it! You have your Leadership Chapter formed, and you have scheduled your first meeting. Here are your objectives:

1. Introduce the students to one another. Include an icebreaker.
There are icebreaker activities available at benice.org
 2. Explain why the **be nice.** leadership chapter was formed.
 3. Educate the students about the core message of **be nice.:** how you treat someone can have a major impact on how they think, act and feel.
 4. Explain the **n.i.c.e.** Action Plan.
 5. Get feedback from the students on their experience at school. Ask each student two questions and record their answers:
 - "What is one thing you like about the way people treat each other at our school?"
 - "What would you change about the way that people treat each other at our school?"
 6. Decide whether or not to conduct a survey before the assembly. The survey (Appendix B and at **benice.org**) is designed to help you get an accurate picture of your school environment. This can help the chapter to set the goals for the assembly and follow-up activity. It also gives you a baseline against which to measure change with another survey later in the year.
- You'll find a sample agenda for the first meeting in Appendix D and at benice.org. There is also a presentation online for you to edit and use during your group meeting.**

It might take more than one meeting to finish this work. Be sure to leave enough time between forming the Leadership Group and the date of the assembly to get it done.



LEADERSHIP CHAPTER MEETINGS AND ASSEMBLIES

The Second Task: Plan the Assembly

Now that the Leadership Chapter is familiar with **be nice.**, it's time to develop and plan a school-wide assembly. The purpose of the assembly is to:

- Let the students know there is a desire for change.
- Educate them about **be nice.**
- Motivate them to rally around **be nice.**

There are a variety of ways to organize an assembly. It's best to present a simple outline and let the leadership chapter generate their own ideas for introducing the message.



Presentations that you can customize for use at the assembly are available at benice.org

The chapter should consider the following when making their plan.

- Who will emcee?
Schools have had either students or teachers do this. Select someone who will be comfortable in the role and who is energizing and respected by the students.
- Who will introduce **be nice.**?
We recommend that this be someone with school-wide authority, so that it's clear that the initiative is serious. Schools have found that it is very effective if this person can tell their own story, and talk about how **be nice.** could have helped them.
- Will you use media? Videos are often powerful tools to convey your message.



benice.org has videos, presentations, links, and references to resources that can be used at the assembly.

- Which students will speak?
In our experience, the most powerful part of the assembly is made up of student testimonials. Students share their stories about how they've been treated, both good and bad, and how that affected the way that they think, act, and feel.



Transcripts of past testimonials are available at benice.org

How do you encourage students to talk at the assembly?

LEADERSHIP CHAPTER MEETINGS AND ASSEMBLIES

- This is when the Leadership Chapter can practice its ability to **empower**. Potential speakers will be nervous about appearing before a large audience. They may be afraid of negative reactions to what they say. We've found that just the opposite happens. When students share their stories, others discover that they aren't alone. Students in the audience can relate to the stories of their peers and become challenged and empowered themselves. Students can be encouraged to speak by:
 - Letting them know that others have done this successfully.
 - Introducing them to a respected and trusted adult who will tell them their story.
 - Making sure there is more than one student speaker.

How will you seat those at the assembly? You can reduce distractions, and encourage students to **notice** and **invite**, if they don't sit next to their friends.

- You can assign seats.
- You can randomly assign differently numbered or colored paper and have students sit in the section with that number or color.
- You can **challenge** the students to sit next to someone they don't know.

LEADERSHIP CHAPTER MEETINGS AND ASSEMBLIES

The Assembly

The school-wide assembly is the kickoff of **be nice.**

In the days leading up to the assembly, the Leadership Chapter can begin publicizing the event to get the student body excited. They can create and hang posters in the halls. They can create and read the news in your school's announcements. If your school has video announcements, consider having the Leadership Chapter produce PSA skits to be broadcast. If you conduct a pre-assembly survey, you can explain what better explain the **be nice.** Day in the instructions and distribution of the survey.



Continuing the Initiative



CONTINUING THE INITIATIVE

Follow Up Activities

be nice. is designed to continue throughout the year, not just in the weeks leading up to the assembly. Once the kickoff assembly has happened, the leadership chapter needs to reconvene. Their first task is to make a list of ideas for monthly school-wide and classroom **be nice.** activities for the rest of the school year. In cooperation with the coordinator, the student leaders will assign tasks and roles, plan, and implement these activities.



A sample events calendar is available at benice.org

Here are some suggestions for in-class follow-up activities. Visit **benice.org** for more:

- Start daily or weekly journaling in your classroom (see Appendix F for journaling prompts).
- Post a challenge related to **be nice.** every week, then have the students discuss their progress and struggles with the challenge.
- Set up a **be nice.** bulletin board in your classroom.



Pictures of bulletin boards available at benice.org

Here are a few ideas for school-wide activities. **Visit benice.org for more.**

- Delete Day: For one day, unblock social media sites in your school. Encourage students to take a look back at all of their past posts and online interactions. Encourage students to delete posts that are not nice.
- Hold a positive tweet/post day in which students use social media to **be nice.** to their peers.
- Hold a movie day.

CONTINUING THE INITIATIVE



Suggested videos are available on benice.org

- Host a **be nice.** spirit week with a different challenge for each day
- Mix it up day! Students sit by someone new at lunchtime. (You can pass out different pieces of candy as students enter the lunchroom and all “red candy” sit at one table and all “green candy” sit at a different table, etc. You could also use stickers, pieces of colored paper instead of candy).

Community Involvement

Many **be nice.** schools have brought awareness of the **be nice.** initiative to the broader community. For example, you could:

- Have a **be nice.** float in your local parade.
- Ask local businesses and stores if they will put a **be nice.** poster in their front window.
- Have a **be nice.** themed game (football, basketball, etc.). This is a chance to inform school supporters and community members about **be nice.** Have someone speak at halftime, sell **be nice.** merchandise, have the players wear **be nice.** stickers on their helmets, etc.



See benice.org for more examples of how to spread be nice. to your community.

CONTINUING THE INITIATIVE

Testing the Effectiveness of the Initiative

When you complete your first (or any) school year of **be nice.** programming, you're going to want to know how the initiative has affected the school environment. Are students responding? Are incidents of bullying decreasing? We recommend a post-survey to complement your pre-survey. Administer the post-survey toward the end of the school year with enough time to review the results and develop objectives for next year based on the results.

You can also administer a pre and post survey to teachers, staff members, and administrators.



See **benice.org** and Appendix B for student and staff surveys.

Making **be nice.** Sustainable



We encourage each **be nice.** Leadership Chapter to engage in fundraising to renew their membership each year, making the program self-sustaining. **benice.org** has a section devoted to fundraising ideas that can be used for **be nice.** or for your other clubs and activities that rely on fundraising.

CONTINUING THE INITIATIVE

The **be nice.** Program in Subsequent Years

Here are some ideas for how you can keep **be nice.** vibrant in your school for years to come:

Progress Updates

Let students and staff know about the effect that **be nice.** has had in your school. Use the pre and post surveys you've taken each year to determine where your school has improved and where change is still necessary, and share that information as both an encouragement and a challenge.

Leadership Chapter

Reignite your Leadership Chapter! Bring in new students and re-invite the students who have previously been a part of the group. Student leaders should work with the coordinator to make goals for the new year. Pay special attention to the previous year's pre and post surveys to identify what your school has improved on and where more work is required.

Assembly

Kick off your next school year with another **be nice.** assembly. This will remind students of ways they can implement **be nice.** in their everyday school life, and how they can challenge themselves to continue the positive change in their school.

Posters and Displays

These work well for reminding students about the ongoing initiative and continually empower them to **be nice.**



See benice.org for our newest line of posters and displays.

CONTINUING THE INITIATIVE



Use benice.org for:

- Materials and ideas for **be nice.**
- Questions that you have about **be nice.**
- Materials in the appendices in editable form
- Fundraising resources
- Purchasing **be nice.** merchandise



APPENDIX A

Sample Parent Letter

Dear Parents or Guardians,

On [date] we will be starting **be nice.** with a school-wide assembly. **be nice.** is a program that was created by the Mental Health Foundation of West Michigan. Its goal is to promote a positive school environment and encourage good mental health by teaching students to **notice, invite, challenge,** and **empower.** While it is a proactive bullying prevention initiative, it goes far beyond that, seeking to educate students on the impact their words and actions have on the way others think, act, and feel.

This can be a difficult subject for those who are struggling with the way they are being treated, but addressing it is necessary and beneficial. We want all of our students here to feel safe and proud of who they are.

Students and staff are being educated about this topic by myself as well as student leaders from our **be nice.** Leadership Chapter. The chapter and I have worked at length on an assembly that will kick-off the initiative school-wide.

We want the idea of **be nice.** to continue to gain momentum in our school, so discussions and activities will continue throughout the year. Any discussions you can have at home will help keep our students thinking about the importance of their actions and their own personal value. If you have any questions feel free to email me at [email address]. Thank you!

[Teacher's Name]

APPENDIX B

Sample Surveys

STUDENT SURVEY

DATE: _____

GRADE: _____

During the past week:

1. Have you seen another student do something helpful or kind for another student?
YES NO
2. Has another student done something helpful or kind for you?
YES NO
3. Have you done something helpful or kind for another student?
YES NO
4. Have you seen another student make fun of or disrespect another student?
YES NO
5. Has another student made fun of or disrespected you?
YES NO
6. Have you made fun of or disrespected another student?
YES NO
7. Have you seen a teacher or other staff member make fun of or disrespect a student?
YES NO
8. Has a teacher or other staff member made fun of or disrespected you?
YES NO
9. Have you seen a teacher or other staff member do something kind or helpful for a student?
YES NO
10. Has a teacher or other staff member done something helpful or kind for you?
YES NO



STAFF SURVEY

DATE: _____

During the past week:

1. Have you seen a student do something helpful or kind for another student?

YES

NO

2. Has a student done something helpful or kind for you?

YES

NO

3. Have you done something helpful or kind for a student?

YES

NO

4. Have you seen a student make fun of or disrespect another student?

YES

NO

5. Has a student made fun of or disrespected you?

YES

NO

6. Have you made fun of or disrespected a student?

YES

NO

7. Have you seen a staff member make fun of or disrespect a student?

YES

NO

8. Has a staff member made fun of or disrespected you?

YES

NO

9. Have you seen a staff member do something kind or helpful for a student?

YES

NO

10. Has a staff member done something helpful or kind for you?

YES

NO



ASSEMBLY FOLLOW-UP

DATE: _____

1. The presenters kept my attention the whole time.

DEFINITELY SORT OF NOT REALLY

2. They really got the point across.

DEFINITELY SORT OF NOT REALLY

3. I learned some things that I will remember.

DEFINITELY SORT OF NOT REALLY

4. I hope that we have a **be nice.** activity every month.

DEFINITELY SORT OF NOT REALLY

5. This will help to pull the school together to **be nice.**

DEFINITELY SORT OF NOT REALLY

6. What part of the **be nice.** program got to you the most?

7. What ideas do you have for **be nice.** activities?

8. What will you do to **be nice.?**

APPENDIX C

Sample Student Application

The purpose of the **be nice**. Leadership Chapter is to bring unity to your school. The **be nice**. initiative is driven by student leaders, empowering them to become difference-makers and unifiers. Leaders are educated regarding bullying, mental health, and suicide prevention. The leadership chapter will then create a plan of action for bringing the positive message of **be nice**. to their school and community. With the guidance of the coordinator, they will organize and plan a school-wide assembly. They will also meet periodically for the rest of the school year to help plan follow-up activities.

Name: _____

Grade: _____

Other leadership positions held: _____

Please answer the following questions in a few sentences:

1. The climate of a school is how people involved in the school (students, teachers, administrators, etc.) interact with each other and treat one another. Name one thing (be specific) that you would like to see improve about our school's climate. Explain why.
2. Do you see unkind or disrespectful behavior happen between students of our school? How does it affect the academics and extracurricular activities of students at this school? (You may want to use one specific example).
3. What is your personal goal in joining your school's **be nice**. chapter? What would you like the chapter to accomplish at our school?

APPENDIX D

Leadership Group First Meeting Agenda

Icebreaker (10 min.)

What is mental health? (45 min.)

- How someone thinks, acts, and feels. (see Coordinator's Notes)
- How can someone's mental health be affected by how they are treated? (See Coordinator's Notes)
- Suggested video: "To This Day" by Shane Koyzan. (go to **benice.org** for more video suggestions)

What is **be nice**? (see Coordinator's Notes)

- **notice**
- **invite**
- **challenge**
- **empower**
- Practice how each action can make someone's day. The little actions are helpful.

How to lead **be nice**. (45 min.)

- Suggested video: "Leadership Lessons by a Dancing Guy". (go to **benice.org** for more video suggestions)
- Being a positive bystander (see Coordinator's Notes)
- Suggested video: "This Is Water". (go to **benice.org** for more video suggestions)
- Positive behavior and its effects. (See Coordinator's Notes)

Break (10 min.)

Individual's pledge (60 min.)

- Have the students list three things that make them a protective factor for your school.
- Let each student sign the pledge banner.
- Make a pledge video. (filmed by the students)

Closing encouragement (10 min.)

APPENDIX E

Sample Assembly Outline

Needed Materials:

- Projector
- Projector screen
- Computer/tablet with Internet access
- Computer connected to sound
- Microphones

1. Intro to **be nice**.
 - Introductory video
2. Defining **n.i.c.e.** (Get creative: skits and videos can be used to great effect)
 - **notice**
 - Definition
 - What do we do well at our school when it comes to noticing value?
 - What can we do better?
 - **invite**
 - Definition
 - What do we do well at our school when it comes to inviting respect?
 - What can we do better?
 - **challenge**
 - Definition
 - What do we do well at our school when it comes to challenging apathy?
 - What can we do better?
 - **empower**
 - Definition
 - What do we do well at our school when it comes to empowering good?
 - What can we do better?

APPENDIX E

3. Voices From the Community

- The purpose of this section is to let students know that they are not alone if they feel like they are being bullied, if they are suffering from depression, or if they have contemplated suicide. There are stories in your community that will help students understand that they are not alone!
- Student Stories
 - Have 3-5 students from your Leadership Chapter tell a story of how they have struggled as a result of how they were treated. These can be done in person or read anonymously by one of the leadership students. Ideally, these stories should end on a positive note, telling how the student overcame their challenges when someone was nice to them.
- Staff/Community Story
 - Do any of your school staff or community members have a story to share? Maybe they were bullied in school, or maybe they were the bully, only to realize later that what they were doing was wrong.

4. Taking the **be nice.** Pledge

- Wrap-up speech by the coordinator (see guidelines on following page)
- Have students from the leadership chapter sign the pledge. Allow students from the crowd to sign the banner either immediately after the assembly or sometime during the school day.

APPENDIX E

Wrap-Up Speech Guidelines

The **be nice**. Coordinator often gives the closing speech at the assembly, but it can be given by another teacher or staff member the students connect with. In fact, all of the following points except the last can be made by a student leader if your chapter so desires. The important part is to leave the students motivated to change the culture of their school for the better.

Points to make in the wrap-up speech include:

- “Think about whether or not you really ‘get it.’ Do you ‘get’ that you can have an effect on how someone thinks, acts, and feels by how you treat them? Each of us has a choice to make every single day about how we treat others. It’s much simpler to make the right decision with this knowledge: You can make someone’s day, week, or month—you can even save someone’s life—by being nice.”
- “Being nice can be as simple as smiling at someone instead of looking away. It can be more challenging, like choosing not to repeat gossip, or bigger yet, noticing and inviting someone you can tell is having a hard time. All of these simple or more difficult actions could save someone’s life.”
- “We learned today that we usually have no idea what happens to our peers outside of this building. We only know that we can control how we interact with them at [School Name].”
- “This is so exciting! Please keep a lookout for monthly activities that our Leadership Chapter will facilitate, reminding us all to **notice, invite, challenge, and empower.**”
- “Your fellow students, members of this **be nice**. Leadership Chapter, should be shown respect for what they have brought to our attention today. It takes a lot of bravery to speak to your peers about issues of this nature.” (Recognize the Leadership Chapter students with a round of applause.)

APPENDIX F

Notice Journal Prompts

We will use the theme "notice value"

- What does it mean to notice? What does it look like?
- What is value? What sorts of things are valuable in me, others, and my community?
- What does it mean to notice value in myself? What does it look like?
- What does it mean to notice value in others? What does it look like?
- What does it mean to notice value in my community? What does it look like?
- Why should I notice value in myself? What are the consequences when I don't notice my own value? What can happen when I do notice?
- Why should I notice others' value? What are the consequences when I don't notice other's value? What can happen when I do notice?
- Why should I notice the value of my community? What are the consequences when I don't notice the value of my community? What can happen when I do notice?
- What is my value? How can I notice my own value? What can keep me from noticing my own value?
- What is the value of others? How can I notice others' value? What can keep me from noticing their value?
- What is the value of my community? How can I notice the value of my community? What can keep me from noticing its value?
- How can I change my thinking and feeling so that I notice the value in myself, others, and my community?
- What actions can I perform to make sure that value is noticed? What actions should I stop doing?
- How can I notice when other people are not noticing the value in themselves, others, or the community? How can I help them see that value?
- What should I say or do when I notice a negative change in myself, another person, or the community?

APPENDIX F

Invite Journal Prompts

We will use the theme "invite respect"

- What does it mean to invite? What does it look like?
- What is respect? Who should I respect?
- What should I respect in myself, others, and my community?
- What is the connection between inviting and respect?
- What does it mean to invite respect in myself? What does it look like?
- What does it mean to invite respect in others? What does it look like?
- What does it mean to invite respect in my community? What does it look like?
- Why should I invite respect in myself? What are the consequences when I don't? What can happen when I do?
- Why should I invite respect in others? What are the consequences when I don't? What can happen when I do?
- Why should I invite respect in my community? What are the consequences when I don't? What can happen when I do?
- How can I invite respect in myself? What can keep me from doing so?
- How can I invite respect in others? What can keep me from doing so?
- How can I invite respect in my community? What can keep me from doing so?
- How can I change my thinking and feeling so that I invite and respect myself, others, and my community?
- What actions can I perform to make sure that people are invited and respected? What actions should I stop doing?
- What can I do when I or other people are not inviting and respecting themselves, others, or the community? How can I encourage them to do so?

APPENDIX F

Challenge Journal Prompts

We will use the theme "challenge apathy"

- What does it mean to challenge? What does it look like?
- What is apathy? What is empathy?
- What and who should I care about?
- What should I challenge in myself, others, and my community?
- What am I apathetic about that I shouldn't be?
- What does it mean to challenge apathy in myself? What does it look like?
- What does it mean to challenge apathy in others? What does it look like?
- What does it mean to challenge apathy in my community? What does it look like?
- Why should I challenge apathy in myself? What are the consequences when I don't care about myself? What can happen when I do?
- Why should I challenge apathy in others? What are the consequences when I don't show empathy toward others? What can happen when I do?
- Why should I challenge apathy in my community? What are the consequences when I don't care about my community? What can happen when I do?
- How can I challenge apathy in myself? What can keep me from doing so?
- How can I challenge apathy in others? What can keep me from doing so?
- How can I challenge apathy in my community? What can keep me from doing so?
- How can I show that I care about myself? Others? My community?
- How can I change my thinking and feeling so that I challenge apathy in myself, others, and my community?
- What actions can I perform to make sure that apathy is challenged and caring is promoted? What actions should I stop doing?
- What can I do when I or other people do not care about themselves, others, or the community? How can I encourage them to do so?
- What kind of attitudes should I challenge?

APPENDIX F

Empower Journal Prompts

We will use the theme "empower good"

- What does it mean to empower? What does it look like?
- What is good in myself? Others? My community?
- What and whom should I empower? What should I empower in myself, others, and my community?
- What does it mean to empower good in myself? What does it look like?
- What does it mean to empower good in others? What does it look like?
- What does it mean to empower good in my community? What does it look like?
- Why should I empower good in myself? What are the consequences when I don't empower good in myself? What can happen when I do?
- Why should I empower good in others? What are the consequences when I don't empower good in others? What can happen when I do?
- Why should I empower good in my community? What are the consequences when I don't empower good in my community? What can happen when I do?
- How can I empower good in myself? What can keep me from doing so?
- How can I empower good in others? What can keep me from doing so?
- How can I empower good in my community? What can keep me from doing so?
- How do I find the good in myself, others, and my community in order to empower it?
- How can I change my thinking and feeling so that I empower good in myself, others, and my community?
- What actions can I perform to make sure that good is empowered? What actions should I stop doing?
- What can I do when I or other people do not empower good in themselves, others, or the community? How can I encourage them to do so?

APPENDIX G

Sample Letter to Businesses

Dear sir or madam,

Teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and business leaders all want to see local students succeed and develop into well-adjusted and healthy young adults, but bullying and mental illness are grave obstacles to achieving this goal. Bullying is a significant issue both locally and nationally. We all believe that the school environment should be a nurturing one where students can learn, grow, develop, and achieve their best—but how can we make that vision a reality?

be nice., created by the Mental Health Foundation of West Michigan, is focused on realizing this ideal. We believe it's time to move beyond saying "don't bully" and address school and community mental health in a comprehensive way. **be nice.** is all about creating a positive environment in schools that promotes good individual and group mental health community-wide. And it all starts with civility, respect, and simply being nice.

At [School Name], our **be nice.** student Leadership Chapter has worked hard to educate and galvanize the student body to improve the culture of the school and the community. We have led (or plan to lead) assemblies, monthly activities, and other initiatives. But we need your help to keep our chapter financially sustainable so our work can continue.

Our annual membership as a **be nice.** chapter total [\$X,XXX]. If you would consider sponsoring our chapter, you would bring us one step closer to achieving the goals of the **be nice.** initiative in [School Name] and [Community Name].

We hope you will consider partnering your business with our **be nice.** chapter to help make our community a healthier place. Thank you!