

# *The Kindness Ball*

• Barbara Klocek

It was August and I was getting ready for the new school year. I was hoping for some inspiration, as I knew one of the children coming into my class had a real reputation in the community for being difficult. A harmonious social mood in my class is a high priority for me. I have come to feel that one of my tasks as a kindergarten teacher is to support learning the social skills needed for resolving differences and being inclusive.

This child was prone to poking, pushing, grabbing, laughing at, and saying mean things to other children (and teachers). I had in place a “watching chair” as a discipline tool in my class. This was in fact any chair, but usually referred to several that were set to the side of the classroom. The rough or rude child would be led there, and with the teacher sitting with him or her, would have a chance to sit and observe (“watch”) how the other children were interacting. This has the effect of bringing the child into stillness, which for many children is necessary in order for them to calm and collect themselves. It also serves to give positive feedback to children who are able to be kind and cooperative. I have found this a gentle yet effective way to encourage “listening” on the part of the children.

However, with this rough boy coming, I wanted another step as well as the “watching chair” to encourage kind hands and words. I had a copper ball in my classroom that was languishing in a basket. I woke up one morning with the inspiration to use this as a “kindness” ball that lives in the “kindness pouch.” I took time to make a beautiful pouch with soft textures and a circle of heart trim around it.

It came into the class as part of the first story, brought by the king and queen puppets as a gift. The story related how children who were not being kind with their hands or words could hold it and roll it to warm it and this would bring the gold from their own hearts into their hands (or

words). The pouch hung in a special place in the classroom. We could also fill it with kindness if we had extra kindness. We would often do this when we were waiting for the other children to finish washing their hands before story. It could be passed from child to child during this time becoming more and more filled.

What a gift it became to the class. It was a gentle reminder to be kind without needing to be punitive. It was especially wonderful for the little boy who was so rough, as I could say, “It seems like your hands have forgotten to be kind. The kindness ball will take the gold from your heart to your hands.” Over time, it also provided a way for him to build better impulse control and to be seen as having a kind heart, in spite of his hands being rough with others at times.

The next year one of the children told me, “We need a kindness ball at our house.” So we all had a wonderful time wet felting balls with a layer of gold on the outside. They all went home to help with kindness there. We also decided to make two wool ones for the kindness pouch. This made the passing of the balls much more fun at waiting times. It has truly been an inspiration in the class to help provide an imagination and action on building kindness in word and deed.

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