

Why tough times can create better neighbors

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Image 1. Flavia, who is 8 years old, and her mother, Silvia, put a banner reading "Everything will be alright" on the balcony of their apartment in Rome, Italy, March 13, 2020. Photo: Alessandra Tarantino/AP Photo

People around the world have gotten sick. They have the coronavirus. Its symptoms include fever, cough and trouble breathing.

Similar scenes are playing out in neighborhoods across the world quarantined because of COVID-19, (short for coronavirus disease 2019). The coronavirus is a flu-like illness that began in China and has been spreading across the globe since December 2019.

To fight this virus, people have to stay away from each other. Still, they have found ways to reach out.

In Boston, Massachusetts, people came from their homes for a flash mob. It was on March 14. The neighbors waved to each other. They joined to sing the Beatles song "Let it Be."

During their show, they stayed more than 6 feet apart. It was to keep the virus from spreading.

The show got people to dance. It also made many cry.

Finding Ways To Connect

Similar things are happening around the world. In Wuhan, China, buildings full of people chanted, "Keep up the fight." In Italy, people leaned out of windows to sing. People in Spain clapped together to cheer health care workers.

People find ways to connect even though they can't meet face-to-face. They use video calling. Some are on social networks like Facebook. They are not just staying in touch with friends and family. People are reaching out to their communities. In this outbreak, there is kindness among strangers.

Jamil Zaki wrote the book "The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World." Helping others is a way to avoid feeling helpless, he said. Kindness can help people heal, he said.

One of the ways that people are being kind to others is by staying away. They want to protect others.

Still, not everyone is being kind. Fights have broken out in supermarkets over the last item on a shelf. Some are keeping hand sanitizer and toilet paper for themselves. Many did not stay home. They went out to restaurants. So leaders in several states shut down restaurants except for takeout.

Kindness Can Go Viral, Too

Even so, acts of kindness have become common. Pro basketball players have given money to people who can't work. Others give food to children who are out of school.

Seeing kindness moves others, said Zaki. He has written about how people "catch" generosity from others. This desire to help others grows during times of trouble. It goes across class, race and other divisions.

In Germany, people began staying inside in March. Molly Wilson realized she did not know the older people near her. Wilson and a neighbor put up flyers on their street. They offered help to those who felt unable to go outside.

