

# LIVE KIND, BE HAPPY BOOK CLUB

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*A note from Celeste DiMilla*

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Hello!

It's such an honor that you have decided to take time out of your busy life to start a *Live Kind, Be Happy* book club. Many people find that launching their kinder and happier journey as part of a group is more fun and effective than doing it on their own. Group members provide support for each other, offer new perspectives and ideas, and hold each other accountable—plus, just being part of a group boosts your happiness!

More than boosting your own happiness, by inspiring others to live a kinder and happier life, you can be the change—yes, *you!*

You can be:

- The change in yourself
- The change in your club members
- The change in the world

While organizing a book club is highly rewarding, it does take some thought and effort. This starter kit will provide you with tips, ideas and free handouts to make your job easier. Please note that there's no wrong way to run a book club. So, feel free to do things however feels right for your club.

I'd love to hear from you about how your club is doing. You can write to me at [celeste@celestedimilla.com](mailto:celeste@celestedimilla.com). Good luck!

XO,

*Celeste*

## *Tips for starting a book club*

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If you're the book club organizer or co-organizer, congratulations! Know that your efforts are making a difference. Here are some tips for organizing your club and running good meetings.

### First Things First:

- ❖ **Consider a co-organizer.** There's a lot to do and it really helps to share the responsibilities. Plus having a co-organizer means there's someone to cover if you're ill or away.
- ❖ **Determine where to meet.** Many clubs take turns meeting at each other's houses, but you can also meet at a coffee shop, library or another public venue. If you meet in a public space, it helps to have a sign so that people can easily find the group. You can also host meetings virtually by starting a group on Facebook, Goodreads, Meetup or your preferred social media platform.
- ❖ **Set up a pre-book club meeting.** Get your members together for a meet-and-greet to get to know one another and to discuss the meeting time, how the club will be run, and the goals for the book club.

### Be a Good Organizer:

- ❖ **Be prepared.** If your club is reading a chapter before each meeting, be sure to read the appropriate chapter. It also helps to have an agenda to keep the meeting on track, and to help you stay relaxed.
- ❖ **Be there!** It is important for the organizer to show up to meetings, even when you don't feel like it. Unless you're sick, of course.
- ❖ **Start and end meetings on time.**
- ❖ **Give yourself permission to be human.** You don't need to be a flawless organizer. Things won't always go well, and that's okay. If something doesn't work, you'll learn from it.

Make Everyone Feel Welcome and Included:

- ❖ **Arrive early.** Newer, shyer members may show up right on time or early. Being there early gives you the chance to make them feel welcome.
- ❖ **Greet everyone as soon as they enter.** Greeting people and getting to know their names makes people feel welcome.
- ❖ **Arrange chairs in a circle.** This allows everyone to see and talk to one another.
- ❖ **Be a good listener.** Keep in mind that everyone in the room has something valuable to offer and that you can honor this by listening with your full attention and without judgment.

Run a Smooth Meeting:

- ❖ **Let people know what to expect.** At the beginning of each meeting, tell people what the focus of the meeting is, what you will do and how long you'll be together so that everyone is on the same page.
- ❖ **Give everyone the opportunity to speak.** Make sure that no one monopolizes the conversation so that everyone has the opportunity to speak. If someone is talking too much, one approach is to say, "Let's hear from some others". Some people find it easier to share in smaller groups, so consider forming smaller discussion groups of twos and threes, with one member reporting the small group's conclusions to the larger group.

## *Meeting handouts*

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These handouts are for running a 9-week group based on the eight practice chapters in *Live Kind, Be Happy*, however, do whatever works for you and your club. You can skip some of the chapters, run additional meetings based on earlier chapters of *Live Kind, Be Happy* or from other kindness books. Do whatever works for you and your crew!

## *Handout 1: Meet-G-Greet*

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Welcome to the book club friend! It's such an honor that you have decided to take time out of your life to be part of this group.

In this session we'll get to know one another, discuss the how the club will be run and get ourselves motivated to live a kinder and happier life. Together we can boost our own joy and create a kinder and happier world, so let's get started!

Here's the plan for today's meeting:

**ICE BREAKER:** Let's start with an ice-breaker question to get us warmed up. What's your favorite food?

**INTRODUCTIONS:** Now we'll go around the circle and introduce ourselves. Share your name and why you joined this group. Please be brief so that everyone has the chance to share.

**CLUB DETAILS:** Now let's discuss the details of the club. This includes meeting dates, start and end time, location of the club, the chapters we'll be reading, if there will be a break and/or snacks, etc.

**EXERCISE: SHARE A KINDNESS STORY:** Kindness begets kindness, which means that by simply hearing about people performing acts of kindness, you'll be inspired to be kinder yourself. Let's motivate ourselves to live kinder by sharing kindness stories with each other. Find a partner and take turns sharing a kindness someone did for you. Then we'll come back into the circle and we'll all have the chance to share what doing this exercise was like for us.

**CLOSING CIRCLE:** We'll end all of our meetings with a closing circle which means we'll stand in a circle and each of us will share one takeaway from the meeting.

## *Handout 2: Find a Friend in You*

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Welcome to session two where we'll discuss being a friend to ourselves. Many of us find it easier to be kind to others than to ourselves but we deserve kindness just as much as anybody else. I love what meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg says:

**“You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.”**

Here's the plan for today's meeting:

**ICE BREAKER:** What's a movie, song or book that makes you happy?

**CHAPTER DISCUSSION:** Here are some discussion questions to help you get started:

- Do you believe that beating up on yourself motivates you to improve and prevents future mistakes? Has beating up on yourself ever worked out well for you?
- Have you ever tried to practice self-kindness or self-compassion in the past?
- Was there an exercise in this chapter you were especially drawn to? How can this exercise have practical value in your life? How can you apply it in your daily life?

**CLOSING CIRCLE:** We'll end by standing in a circle and sharing one takeaway from the meeting.

## *Handout 3: Create "Micro-Moments" of Love*

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Welcome to session three where we'll discuss how we can practice kindness by creating brief moments of shared connection. In her book *Love 2.0*, the foremost researcher of positive emotions, Barbara Fredrickson, calls brief moments of shared connection from behaviors like smiling at someone, saying hello or stopping for a brief chat "micro-moments of love". Her research suggests that such moments are vital to our health and happiness.

Here's the plan for today's meeting:

**ICE BREAKER:** As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

**CHAPTER DISCUSSION:** Here are some discussion questions to help you get started:

- Do you agree that people have become less friendly? Do you think this is true of yourself?
- Can you think of a recent moment of friendly connection that made you feel good? Examples include having a friendly chat with someone next to you in line, someone smiling warmly at you, receiving a sincere compliment or a clerk being especially friendly with you.
- Was there an exercise in this chapter you were especially drawn to? How can this exercise have practical value in your life? How can you apply it in your daily life?

**CLOSING CIRCLE:** We'll end by standing in a circle and sharing one takeaway from the meeting.



## *Handout 4: Step up Your Generosity*

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Welcome to session four where we'll discuss the *paradox of generosity* which is:

**Giving good things away makes you happier than keeping them for yourself.**

You've heard this before no doubt, as spiritual traditions and philosophers have been telling us this for centuries. The difference today, however, is that science now backs up this claim.

Here's the plan for today's meeting:

**ICE BREAKER:** What is your secret talent?

**CHAPTER DISCUSSION:** Here are some discussion questions to help you get started:

- Do you believe that giving good things away makes you happier than keeping them for yourself? To help you get to your true belief, you might consider how you would spend a thousand-dollar gift that you were instructed to spend purely for your own happiness.
- What people, teachings, experiences, stories, etc. have given you evidence in the paradox of generosity?
- Was there an exercise in this chapter you were especially drawn to? How can this exercise have practical value in your life? How can you apply it in your daily life?

**CLOSING CIRCLE:** We'll end by standing in a circle and sharing one takeaway from the meeting.

## *Handout 5: Practice Loving-Kindness*

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Welcome to session five where we'll discuss *loving-kindness*, a practice that helps you to develop an inner friendliness for yourself and others. A simple way to explain loving-kindness practice is that you silently send goodwill or loving wishes to yourself and others with the intention of generating feelings of care. Research suggests this practice improves health, boosts happiness and has many other benefits.

Here's the plan for today's meeting:

**ICE BREAKER:** If you had a second life, what would you be?

**CHAPTER DISCUSSION:** Here are some discussion questions to help you get started:

- Have you practiced loving-kindness (sometimes called metta) before? If so, what was your experience like?
- Sometimes it's hard for people to believe that something as simple as silently sending loving wishes can be powerful enough to change your mood, improve your health, make you more compassionate, etc. Do you have trouble believing in the power of loving-kindness? Why or why not?
- Was there an exercise in this chapter you were drawn to? How can this exercise have practical value in your life? How can you apply it in your daily life?

**CLOSING CIRCLE:** We'll end by standing in a circle and sharing one takeaway from the meeting.

## *Handout 6: Open Your Heart to Suffering*

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Welcome to session six where we'll discuss opening our hearts to the suffering of others. While we often naturally open our hearts to the suffering of others, more often than we may realize we don't do so.

When we're busy, stressed or dealing with our own suffering, for example, we may tune out or miss the suffering of others. Also, if we happen to perceive another person as "less than" us or as "bad," it can close our heart to them. We may also close our hearts to suffering to avoid feeling uncomfortable. And sometimes we don't open our hearts because we simply don't see someone's suffering.

When we open our heart to the suffering of others, it gives us the opportunity to respond with compassion and kindness. But it's also the best healing we can give to ourselves. When we open our hearts to the suffering of others, it takes our mind off our own struggles.

Here's the plan for today's meeting:

**ICE BREAKER:** If you could be in the Guinness book of world records, what record-breaking feat would you attempt?

**CHAPTER DISCUSSION:** Here are some discussion questions to help you get started:

- Have you ever had an experience where you learned about the suffering of another, and it took your mind off your own struggles?
- What teachings, experiences, stories, etc. can you share that have to do with opening your heart to suffering?
- Was there an exercise in this chapter you were especially drawn to? How can this exercise have practical value in your life? How can you apply it in your daily life?

**CLOSING CIRCLE:** We'll end by standing in a circle and sharing one takeaway from the meeting.

## *Handout 7: Do Random Acts of Kindness*

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Welcome to session seven where we'll discuss *random acts of kindness* which are small or large unexpected acts of charity or helpfulness. In 1993 Anne Herbert published the book *Random Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty*, and people everywhere began doing random kindnesses, such as giving up that good parking spot that's "rightfully" yours to another car, leaving a generous tip for your waitress and raking leaves for a neighbor unasked.

While random acts of kindness are intended to benefit the people receiving them, research suggests that the people doing the random good deeds also feel pleasure and happiness as a result. One study, for example, found that eighty-three students who performed random kind acts for an hour and a half experienced greater happiness, among other benefits.

Here's the plan for today's meeting:

**ICE BREAKER:** What is a hobby you enjoy?

**CHAPTER DISCUSSION:** Here are some discussion questions to help you get started:

- Can you remember a time when someone performed a random act of kindness for you?
- What are some random acts of kindness you can imagine doing this week?
- Was there an exercise in this chapter you were especially drawn to? How can this exercise have practical value in your life? How can you apply it in your daily life?

**CLOSING CIRCLE:** We'll end by standing in a circle and sharing one takeaway from the meeting.

## *Handout 8: Meet Rudeness with Love*

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Welcome to session eight where we'll discuss meeting rudeness with love. This is a challenging session because kindness is not the first impulse most of us have when someone is rude to us. But we can learn to respond with kindness and research suggests that this may be hugely beneficial for ourselves as well as for others.

Besides, a rude person may be *a teacher in disguise*. Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck says:

“Life always gives us exactly the teacher we need at every moment.

This includes every mosquito, every misfortune, every red light, every traffic jam, every obnoxious supervisor (or employee), every illness, every loss, every moment of joy or depression, every addiction, every piece of garbage, every breath.”

Here's the plan for today's meeting:

**ICE BREAKER:** What's your guilty pleasure to spend money on?

**CHAPTER DISCUSSION:** Here are some discussion questions to help you get started:

- What teachings, experiences, stories, etc. can you share about meeting rudeness with love?
- What are your thoughts on reframing rudeness as an opportunity for personal growth or a way to practice and expand your interpersonal skills?
- Was there an exercise in this chapter you were especially drawn to? How can this exercise have practical value in your life? How can you apply it in your daily life?

**CLOSING CIRCLE:** We'll end by standing in a circle and sharing one takeaway from the meeting.

## *Handout 9: Make Time*

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Welcome to session nine where we'll discuss the impact time stress has on how kind we are and how to decrease this stress. Research has shown that we're less kind when we feel pressured by time constraints. Time pressure is also unkind to us. It puts our mind into a worried state: we become worried about time or the lack thereof, worried about the number of things we must do and worried that we'll fail to achieve something important.

Feeling pressured for time also puts us into a state of stress, which narrows our ability to think clearly and function effectively. And research suggests that this makes us accomplish less. Time pressure may also cause us to spend less time caring for ourselves just so we can "power through" and get more accomplished.

So today we'll talk about some ways we can take the pressure off.

Here's the plan for today's meeting:

**ICE BREAKER:** What's your favorite useless fact?

**CHAPTER DISCUSSION:** Here are some discussion questions to help you get started:

- How often do you feel like you're in a hurry to get things done? Does hurrying work out well for you?
- What are your preferred methods of self-care? Do you take time for these activities on a regular basis?
- Was there an exercise in this chapter you were especially drawn to? How can this exercise have practical value in your life? How can you apply it in your daily life?

**CLOSING CIRCLE:** We'll end by standing in a circle and sharing one takeaway from the meeting. If this is your last group, take some time to go around the circle a second time to let people share about their experience in this club.