

Warm Wishes



Cats stalk to the door, scurry back to the fire. Outside it's achingly bright. Crystalline. Huddled into coats, headed for coffee. Toast. Warmth.

Yes, winter is upon us and on bright, clear days it is a source of joy. Less so when the relentless Auckland rain of winter falls. Wet,

damp days to endure. Endless sniffles and colds. For many of us though we live in a warm, well-insulated home. We can afford to switch on a heater, buy wood for the fire and keep ourselves and our loved ones warm and dry.

Sadly this is not the case for many and each winter approximately 1600 deaths in New Zealand are attributed to damp, cold houses. Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable.

For the first time this year, the New Zealand government has introduced a new winter energy supplement for those on the super. Over the winter months it will top up payments, so there is a little extra for those winter energy bills.

This bonus is not targeted and many of us who may have no need for assistance with winter warmth, will still receive it.

If you find yourself in this category, we can help you get this small bonus to a family that does need it. We're working with the Salvation Army to identify people who are struggling to keep their homes warm, especially where there is illness and vulnerability.

Gifting is simple. Go online to aucklandfoundation.org.nz/donate, and select "SuperWarm". If you're still a bit young for the super, but would like to give, you can donate online too. We'll direct your generosity straight to where it will help.

It's a small gesture, to pass on a windfall, to gift a few hundred dollars that you don't need. But it's a gesture that may improve your health and wellbeing too. Being generous, compassionate and kind triggers a flow of healthy hormones that impacts health and disease. We're just beginning to understand how a reduction in stress hormones such as cortisol, and an increase in production of oxytocin and dopamine, the 'happy hormones', leads to better health outcomes and even a longer life!

Scientists have shown that altruism is a basic human need. These behaviours are thought to be reinforced by positive feedback from dopamine, which is stimulated by giving and selflessness.

When researchers looked at people who donated money to charity and examined their brain with MRI scans, they saw the parts of the brain that activated were the areas responsible for basic or primal instincts. This explains in part why being generous or donating makes you feel so good.

Show some kindness. We'll get your small winter windfall to someone who'll benefit from it, and you will have the warm afterglow from the joy of giving.

– Dellwyn Stuart, CEO, Auckland Foundation

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Better for our Mistakes

To avoid situations in which you might make mistakes may be the biggest mistake of all", wrote author Peter McWilliams. Allowing our children to fail at anything is not easy for many. From a low test result at school, to losing a sports game, making a mistake can be a real challenge for some children, and often for some parents.

Many of us (like me) will have grown up in a culture or a family where learning from mistakes was a daily occurrence. I can't say I loved the feeling, but I do know that because of being put outside my comfort zone – and as long as it was handled very well by the supervising adult – I was able to better develop my learning skills. Many of you will be able to identify with this. However, today's children seem to experience few opportunities to fail, robbing them of one of their greatest learning tools on the way to becoming a resilient learner.

In my view, a very important role for teachers in classrooms is to build into their programme an opportunity for students to experience failure. It concerns me that we may be raising a generation of children who are terrified to fail at anything. Don't get me wrong, failure can be detrimental in some instances. But I am referring to the everyday learning for younger children in classrooms and on the sports field, where learning from simple mistakes can be a huge personal advantage, academically as well as socially. I am noticing that in today's culture there seems to be a growing intolerance to children not being 'perfect'.

Of course, we all want our most prized and valuable possession (children) to be perfect and we try to provide as much as we can for them to be successful in their learning. But often the most valuable lessons that can be learnt from making a mistake are those that are common, everyday occurrences at school, home or play.

"Success is walking from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm." I read this on a Year 8 classroom wall recently, and it was great to see. If students are afraid to make mistakes, then they are afraid of trying something new, of being creative, and of thinking outside the square or in a different way; all hugely valuable skills to nurture as they head into the unknown future.

Often, in a classroom, children are reluctant to raise their hand when they are not sure of an answer, or faced with a difficult problem. With a fear of being wrong, they will default to a teacher or another student for help. This can be a good thing, as asking for help is also a very important skill to have. However, a great teacher will know their students well enough to know when this is one of those magical 'light bulb' learning moments, and will nudge a reluctant student in the direction of finding the information out for themselves.

Some children absolutely thrive on challenge after challenge, owing to the fact they have mastered the knowledge that making a mistake is an inevitable and helpful part of the process of learning. They are not afraid of making errors or putting up their hand in class to have a go at the answer. I always love this enthusiasm and like to encourage students to have a go.

Between us, as parents and teachers, let's never allow a child to become a 'victim of excellence'. By not allowing them the privilege of being able to be wrong, or to make mistakes, we are depriving and stealing from them a very valuable life skill experience.

Bill Clinton wisely said, "If you live long enough, you'll make mistakes. But if you learn from them, you'll be a better person. It's how you handle adversity, not how it affects you. The main thing is never quit, never quit, never quit". – Judi Paape

For additional reading, I recommend *Better by Mistake: The Unexpected Benefits of Being Wrong*, by Alina Tugend