Respect for Others

The deepest form of respect is making someone feel heard

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Respect is often thought of as something grand, but I have learned that it is usually expressed through the smallest acts of kindness. A few years ago, I decided to teach myself German. For months, I struggled. I mispronounced words, failed to understand conversations, and smiled blankly while native speakers waited politely for me to finish embarrassing myself. What stayed with me wasn't frustrating. It was the specific feeling of having something to say and no way to say it. That feeling, I realised, wasn't unfamiliar to me. I'd felt versions of it before, in rooms where conversations carried on without me, in groups where I was present but never quite included. I know that specific kind of loneliness. And because I know it, I watch it in others. Around the same time, a new student joined our class. He had a stutter, and while nobody was openly cruel to him, people slowly stopped including him. He'd start a sentence, lose it halfway, and the conversation would move on without him. I watched him shrink. Sit alone. Stop trying. I recognised something in that, not the stutter, but the particular loneliness of being present in a room and still feeling like you don't quite belong. So, I started showing up, sitting next to him, asking questions, and waiting for answers. For the first few weeks, he barely looked up. Then slowly, the person behind the fear started coming through. He's one of my closest friends now. I remember the exact afternoon it shifted. We were arguing about something stupid, football maybe, and he forgot to be careful. He just talked. That was it. Watching him laugh freely with people who once looked past him is honestly one of the things I'm most proud of. That's what inclusivity means to me. Not a programme or a speech. Just a friendly hand at the right moment, extended consistently, to whoever needs it. I've been fortunate that academics come easily to me, and I know that's not true for everyone. So, when a classmate is struggling, I sit with them and explain it until it makes sense, not doing it for them, but making sure they actually understand. There's a difference between the two, and I believe that difference matters. In a world where it is easy to overlook people, respect begins with making sure that no one feels invisible. Sometimes, the greatest act of kindness is simply helping another person feel seen