

High school feels big—big tests, big games, big expectations, and big dreams. As a freshman, everything is new: the huge hallways, confident upperclassmen, and the sense that others already fit in.

But one thing I've realized this year is that small gestures can have a profound impact.

Small gestures are the little acts that people perform, which might not seem significant at the moment. Something as simple as complimenting someone's outfit, wishing someone good luck before a test, or helping a classmate with a challenging problem can brighten someone's entire day. Although these moments may seem minor, the kindness behind them can have a lasting effect.

One moment that showed me this kind of kindness happened in my Math 3 class.

Math 3 is usually taken by sophomores and juniors, so when I walked into the class on the first day, I felt pretty out of place. There were only a few freshmen in the room, including me, and most of the other students already seemed to know each other. I remember sitting there wondering if I would be able to keep up in a class that most freshmen don't even take yet.

A junior ended up sitting next to me. She was a cheerleader and one of the popular girls you'd see at football games, so at first I assumed she probably wouldn't talk to me much since I was just a freshman.

But I was wrong.

She started talking to me right away, asking my name and if it was my first year at the school. Just that simple conversation made the class feel a lot less intimidating.

When we started working on assignments, we helped each other with the problems. If I didn't understand something, she would explain it to me, and if she got stuck on a question, we would try to figure it out together.

Over time, we began discussing topics beyond just math. Before class started, we would talk about random things like cheer, her boyfriend, friends, and just stuff going on at school. Sometimes she would give me advice about high school, like which classes were good to take later and how not to stress too much about every single grade.

After a while, something kind of surprising happened. Math class actually became one of the classes I looked forward to the most. Not just because of the subject, but because I knew I'd get to talk to someone who made the class feel easier, and the school feels a little smaller.

What made it meaningful was that she didn't have to do any of that. She could have just ignored the freshman sitting next to her and focused on her own work. But instead, she chose to be friendly and welcoming.

That small decision made a big difference for me. It made me feel more comfortable in the class and less nervous about being surrounded by older students.

Even though my Math 3 class ended last semester, she still says hi if she sees me in the hallway, and she sometimes stops to talk to me for a minute. It might seem like a small thing, but it makes me feel better about myself.

High school can sometimes feel really stressful since everyone is focused on grades, sports, relationships, and just trying to fit in. But small gestures remind us that we're all part of the same community and inspire us to be kinder.

You don't have to do something huge to make a difference in someone's life. Sometimes all it takes is talking to someone beside you.

And because one person chose to do something small, a class that once made me nervous became something I looked forward to—and high school started to feel a lot more like a place where I belong.