**Kindness Is Podcast with Kaitlin and Nate**

# **Attendees**

Kind Cotton, Nathan Lyon

# **Transcript**

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Kind Cotton: welcome to Another episode of the kindness is Pod where I have the honor and privilege to sit down with so many and discuss with them, how we Cultivate a more kind society, What does kindness mean to you? I have been on this journey now with kind cotton for almost six years and Never in the beginning, did I think? That our worlds would be.

Kind Cotton: In the place that it is at today. however it is talking to people like Nate who is going to be my guest today who has been an educator for over 15 years, who gives Every ounce of his being to ensure that children become active allies when they grow up that queer children, feel loved and seen and valued for who they are in his classroom that gives me this sense of peace and hope and I just hope you feel that too after listening to this episode, and if there is anything whatsoever that you have taken away from listening to one of these thus far, please take the two seconds that it takes to either follow rate or review because it means the world to us.

Kind Cotton: Okay, I am so excited to have Nate with me today. Nate Lyon has been teaching fourth grade in the suburbs of Chicago for over 15 years. He is passionate about teaching kids to think critically about inclusive practices and ask the question ‘whose story is missing?’. So as you can imagine, I'm going to be very very excited to chat with him today. When he's not teaching, you can find Mr. Lyon biking, in Chicago writing middle grade novels, which I did not know. So I'm excited to dive into that a little bit too, reading trying, new restaurants and watching Bravo with his partner, Paul. Nate. I am so happy that you were here today. Is there anything else you would like to add that gives us a little bit of an insight into who you are and what you love to do?

Nathan Lyon: Gosh, I mean not really, I have a social media presence on Instagram and a little bit on tiktok Mr\_Lyon\_fourthwith two underscores in there. that's just been a really cool thing to connect with other lgbtq+ educators, and just kind of hear their struggles whatever part of LGBTQ they are like, we tend to have some overlapping struggles but also joys and so I've made some really good friends on Instagram in particular and it's just helped me. I think be a better teacher and a better advocate. Because of some of those people. So yeah that's a big part of who I am as well outside the classroom, but it all kind of mixes together with the Instagram world and my classroom for sure.

Kind Cotton: yeah, I think that's important to highlight because I think we often think of The dangers of social media and we may get into that too throughout this conversation, but there is some real beauty in connecting with minded people. Particularly, I would say for me over the past couple of years. When I felt very isolated in,…

Nathan Lyon: Yeah.

Kind Cotton: the world shutting down and watching the world move on for a lot of people behind me, it was nice to know that I wasn't alone so I can imagine that you feel similarly and it's an awesome space to learn from people and to grow relationships. So I'm happy that you brought that up to kind of kick start things**. What is it that you feel**

**Kind Cotton: All teachers, if they are listening to this, could do right now to create a safer space for all children, in their classroom?** What do you think is typically the number one thing that maybe lacking or The people could do to just truly welcome.

Nathan Lyon: One.

Kind Cotton: All right, you see all those things all the time. All are welcome here, but are they really welcome there?

Nathan Lyon: Yeah gosh that is such a deep question because my mind immediately goes to some of the barriers and the stuff that gets in the way. And we know that different parts of the country are facing unique struggles right now. I feel very, very fortunate to live in Illinois. Our governor just yesterday or the day before passed, like a law, like outlawing, the banning of books, First state in the country to do that. And so,

Nathan Lyon: and I think where I teach, the teachers I work with are amazing, the admin I work with are really strong the community. I'm in, I think values who I am, so I feel very fortunate, but I also know that there are teachers out there in different parts of the country. Or it, could even be rural, Illinois that don't. Have that same privilege that I do. So, if I'm thinking about Allyship and what teachers can do for queer kids in the classroom is I think, **educate yourself, first and foremost.** Understand what lgbtq+ means. I just think with this political politicize environment like lots of

Nathan Lyon: Ignorance gets tossed out and I think teachers really need to educate themselves on what is the difference between gender and biological sex because if you're ever bringing up those topics in your classroom, your kids are going to have questions and you want to be able to

Nathan Lyon: Answer those questions in kid appropriate ways, I just went to a book event where they talked about this Rainbow parenting book, and it really was about empowering parents, and teachers to kind of break down the binary in their own thinking and kind of Get in deep with their own biases and you got to do that before. You can really bring that into your classroom.

Kind Cotton: Yeah. Knowledge is key when it comes to that for And we're both definitely coming from. I mean I'm not in the classroom but just in doing the book fairs that we do, I am in Montgomery County in Maryland. So I'm right outside of DC now coming from a very different area in Florida where I was receiving threats.

Kind Cotton: In some of the fundraisers that we were doing schools there part of the reason as to why we picked up and had the privilege such as yourself to actually move and be in a space where we feel much safer and much more valued for what we do. so If people are in areas like we are, can you just talk a little bit about the importance of doing all of that unpacking and the importance of educating yourself and then in turn bringing inclusive resources into the classroom because I think I mean the reality of it is that even in more

Kind Cotton: What do I want to call Progressive areas that there's still a lot of educators,…

Nathan Lyon: Yeah.

Kind Cotton: not quite doing the work that they could be doing. And that's not to take away from all of the incredible educators out there who are doing this or maybe they just don't know enough yet and they want to Learn what to do more what would you say to them?

Nathan Lyon: , I think there's this idea that lgbtq+ topics have to be attached to after kids learn about sex and puberty, right? And you can't,…

Kind Cotton: Yeah.

Nathan Lyon: How can you talk about? Lgbtq if kids haven't gone through like sex, education, and that might be a fifth grade or sixth grade or whatever grade that is. But

Nathan Lyon: There's so many entry points. I think there's family diversity, And from families can look like and that is not about sex that's about This family happens to have two dads as family after two moms. There's a great picture book called My Maddie about a non-binary parent, right?

Nathan Lyon: So I think unpacking that bias around this is just for teenagers, and we all know that**, kids start to, learn about who they are and what their gender is at a very young age**, lots of, gender nonconforming and trans. And I'm binary kids figure that out way before puberty or start to figure that out. And **we want to create spaces in which they can see themselves and know that who they are belongs there**. And I think if you're not explicit about it, Then they don't know that they belong there

Kind Cotton I think that's what Is needed is incorporating books and lessons in which children feel loved and seen and heard and valued for who they are. And I think it's not only important for children who may have two moms or two dads or non-binary parent. As you were saying or children who may be lgbtq+ themselves, but I think it's really important for the other children in the classroom, Just when we talk about showcasing by poc families and the importance of black excellence and black joy. It's just as important for a white child to sit there and see that as it is the black child for a different reason and I think it's just as important for

Kind Cotton: If my daughter happens to not be lgbtq+ right when she goes to school, it's just as important and she comes from a family with a mom and a dad. It's just as important for her to sit there and see that all families are beautiful and different and unique. And we're embracing that and not othering that

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Nathan Lyon: Absolutely. Yeah.

Kind Cotton: I think a lot of times that's not happening.

Nathan Lyon: Yeah, I think swinging back to you. your question is and you do such a great job with getting books and the hands of kids, but I think if you're in a place you're an educator and you're in a district or a school where you really feel like you can't explicitly teach. Have those books in your classroom library, just accessible. you don't have to Ra here, here it is. And have big arrows on the book. or simple things I always think of word problems and use that, them pronouns math problem or if you're modeling a writing assignment

Nathan Lyon: Just kind of like embed some of that without if you feel like you can explicit I'm a big believer in kids should be taught explicitly,…

Nathan Lyon: some of these concepts like they're ready for them? Because kids can handle it, but if you feel you can embed a little bit into the different things you do.

Kind Cotton: Yeah, for and then just a touch upon a little bit only because I know from friends and…

Nathan Lyon: Yeah.

Kind Cotton: everything in states, like Florida where their libraries have been taken away from them and completely vetted. I think we need to start getting more creative. Of course, We need to be yelling from the rooftops and voting and doing all of those things too. But I know a lot of people who have started banned booked free little libraries or have found their local lgbtq+ youth center and have donated books that way and I'm curious as to What your take is on, why situations such as what we're seeing in Florida and legislation, that is so harmful.

Nathan Lyon: In Florida. If you like teachers, just don't have a lot of options they're books are being watched and even like Putting up a small pride flag somewhere. I'm sure is being watched. I'm glad you mentioned, different resources outside of school buildings that kids have access to

Kind Cotton: Okay.

Nathan Lyon: I think mean, the interesting thing is that As certain age. I teach fourth grade. I know a lot of my kids are on social media. Even though when they sign up for an account it says, are you 13 and over and they're still on these apps and they're getting information about the world outside of their home town.

Kind Cotton: Mmm.

Nathan Lyon**: So, I mean that's a double-edged sword. That gives me a little bit of hope, right? That some kids are finding communities online or just, there's something great. Queer advocates on Tiktok and Instagram that are, educators but just living their lives as queer people. That I hope kids can see.**

Kind Cotton: Yeah.

Nathan Lyon: And just,

Nathan Lyon: Learn from. But we know social media has a double edge to it too.

Kind Cotton: Yeah, How has that For you as a content, creator as a queer educator. How has it been being on social media, as your full authentic self? Because I know that you spoke to the beautiful relationships, but I can also imagine that you have encountered some difficult things as well.

Nathan Lyon: Yeah, I think any lgbtq+ educator that has, more than 10,000 followers is probably been in a situation where at least getting terrible comments, but It's a year and a half ago. Now that there's a libs of Tiktok Twitter account. That really just goes after, I haven't looked at that account in ages, but good.

Nathan Lyon: They were going after career educators really hard. I don't know if they're still doing that and posted like I did tiktok when they don't say gay, Bill was brand new right? And just showing support and I had Sweatshirt on that supported queer kids and whatnot. So, I made a tiktok and That libs of Tiktok account, reposted it and

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Nathan Lyon: It wasn't good people were tagging my school district. And Emailed. I'm just trying to forget what all or trying to remember that happened, but he definitely email my administrators and so all sudden my professional life and my social media life, we're getting mixed together and definitely wasn't a good feeling. My district was really supportive

Nathan Lyon: But it definitely wasn't a good feeling to feel that vulnerable.

Kind Cotton: yeah, and you could be in a space as you mentioned before where Had you been living in a different district or a different state? The outcome may have not been the same and that's terrifying. And Awful.

Nathan Lyon: Yeah, I mean, I guess one of the good things about social media is that, a fire gets lit and then it goes out pretty quickly, And they could,…

Kind Cotton: Yeah.

Nathan Lyon: that account in particular, unfortunately for individuals, but unfortunately, for others tends to just put out content constantly and so, Whatever is about,…

Kind Cotton: Yeah.

Nathan Lyon: you gets buried, pretty quickly and then people move on. So I guess if you're listening and you are not a part of the queer community, just know that. a lot of us really to or I'm sure you've dealt with it, look, more carefully at your settings and I have key words on Instagram that are like bands or someone tries to type it like it can't get in there's a lot. I had to do to make sure my accounts were safer after that happened.

Kind Cotton: yeah, yeah, I appreciate you sharing that because I know the weight of social media can be allowed at times too, so that goal is in your instance To your personal life and…

Nathan Lyon: Yeah.

Kind Cotton: as I shared with things that happen in Florida it becomes much more of an actual attack on you. And not just Someone typing something on social media.

Nathan Lyon: my brain can't wrap around Seeing something online and reaching out to a school district that it states away from you that has nothing to do with you and your family. I don't understand that at all, but

Kind Cotton: Mmm.

Kind Cotton: Yeah, for And that brings up a really good point because that's something that I have had a very Difficult time, understanding with the backlash with legislation such as the don't say Gable and the books that people are reading in their classrooms, I mean, as you mentioned, we teachers are reading books, such as Heather Has Two Mommies or, Prince and Knight, but are totally fine with Sleeping Beauty. And I've never been able to wrap my head around. This idea that

Kind Cotton: This isn't affecting you or how you live your life, right? This is just saying, Hey, maybe we are really making a difference for The kids in the classroom who need to hear this and for the other kids, like I had mentioned before. so I struggle with that as well. Absolutely.

Nathan Lyon: I do too and I do think it's just been politicized, lik**e I do. think there are politicians that benefit from politicizing it and getting people riled up** and those people that are riled up, aren't the ones that want to learn more like Let me go actually figure out what it means to be a non-binary or trans.

Nathan Lyon: But yeah, **people's fears and worries are definitely stoked and it's definitely been pointed in the direction towards kids of we got to protect the kids. We gotta protect the kids and It's unfortunate for sure because It's queer. Kid. That need the most protecting and they're Being attacked,**

Kind Cotton:. Why is it so important that we are making that extra effort to let queer children know that they're seeing and valued for who they are authentically?

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Nathan Lyon: Yeah, I'm definitely like I don't have numbers in my head but I think it's been proven over and over again, that Queer kids and lgbtq+ kids. Do Struggle with some of those things you mentioned, add a much higher rate than the general population. And so, I just made a tick talk recently about **if we have kids in our classroom that have ADHD we make accommodations to help them succeed. we do what we need to do to help those kids if we have at least in my district food allergies really changed our policies as a district, right, our district doesn't allow any food for birthdays or there's really strict rules around**

**Nathan Lyon: Food in our district to protect kids with different food. Allergies, whether that's celiac or peanut allergies or whatever or dairy allergies or whatever happens to be, that's what educators do we look at who's the most vulnerable or who just needs Something extra and we make that happen, we do that all the time. And so when we look at statistics and see that lgbtq+, kids have more anxiety, have more depression, are less connected at school, higher dropout rates, and all that kind of stuff As educators, we just make sense to ask What can we do to change this? What can we do to help these kids?**

Nathan Lyon:, It's gonna help kids more that there's one queer kid in your class. The kids they're moving through their school system with

Nathan Lyon: Those kids understand lgbtq issues issues a little bit more and can be advocates and allies like that's gonna help kids way more than long run, right? I think about we go on a field trip every year to this place called cradles to crayons or…

Kind Cotton: Yeah.

Nathan Lyon: the couple across the country but it's a donation place specifically for kids and families and that are in need. So they collect clothes, they collect books, they collect toys and our kids I teach in a pretty well to do community. Go to help sort the items. So it's kind of a give back service, learning kind of experience, And Maybe some January went, but the kids were sorting clothes and there was just lots of bins for Here's toddler girls. Here's school, I don't know kids sizes very well but all that was definitely sorted And girl, All the clothes, no matter what item was and I wasn't even around. But I came over and one of the workers there came up to me, and said, I want your kids was asking about, what, clothes, do not binary kids get to have and what do you do for kids that? don't really feel like they're a boy or a girl, right? And so,

Nathan Lyon: It's just a really cool moment of when I'm not around this kid is advocating for others, and it was a really cool experience and gosh, I didn't know if I talked to her about it, because it's like, I don't know, she just a really cool kid and that's gonna help. our future more when that kind of stuff happens, I'm **things feel very tumultuous right now but our future, I don't know. I'm a big believer in We're gonna be a better place in 10, 20, 30 years. We just kind of get through this, rough patch.**

Kind Cotton: I needed to talk to you today. I need to hear that.

Nathan Lyon: Right.

Kind Cotton: Can you I'm gonna clip this out of the podcast and…

Nathan Lyon: .

Kind Cotton: play it once a day, because I think It's important to hang on to that hope. And I think, Being a caregiver. I need to know with certainty that there are people such as yourself out there. And that there are people who not only want to be believe in being hopeful, but that hope through the future. And I commend you for that because Like I said, as a mother, I need to hang on to that change. So, I

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Nathan Lyon: yeah, and I think the timeline isn't great, **I think, if you ask a lot of queer people like**

**Nathan Lyon: Thought, five ten years ago, it felt like we're on a nice trajectory forward.**

**Nathan Lyon: Now it feels like we've taken and I don't think anyone would really predicted this.**

**Nathan Lyon: So I think we're all kind of taken aback by it, And it's a dangerous time for sure** but don't know. I do think we'll be in a better spot in the future and this is just a big awful bump in the road, but I don't know, kids are blank slates and a lot of ways and they

Nathan Lyon: they get it and they get some of these Issues pretty easily**. adults are so hanging on to their biases, like kids are just like that kid doesn't feel like a boy or a girl. Great.**

Kind Cotton: Okay.

**Nathan Lyon: Let's go play, right?**

Kind Cotton: Exactly. I mean that's all it. Took One of my daughter's teachers is trans and it took one conversation for her to understand their pronouns for her to never mistake them for her to be like,…

Nathan Lyon: Yeah.

Kind Cotton: Yeah, I love my teacher and that's all I care about. And now I want to go in the sand box

Nathan Lyon: Yeah, and

Kind Cotton: She sees their humanity and that's all that matters. And it's such a beautiful thing to see the world, through the eyes of a child.

Nathan Lyon: Truly they really get it and I guess we hope.

Kind Cotton: Mm- And she's three and a half. You…

Nathan Lyon: That's awesome.

Kind Cotton: so if a three and a half year old can do it, we can all do it, right?

Nathan Lyon: Absolutely. Yeah, that's awesome.

Kind Cotton: Before we go, a couple of things. First, I want to know you mentioned it in the beginning, but you're doing a lot of really cool things. You're writing books, you have a social media, presence. You're selling beautiful shirts, how can people support Where can they find you? And I want to hear a little bit about both projects, whichever one you feel. Inspired to talk about first, go ahead and share with us.

Nathan Lyon: Yeah, I mean my writing is very much for me so I'm writing, I have a middle grade novel that I've written The whole thing is probably, Past 50,000 words but I've kind of decided to get just wasn't clicking how I wanted and I was revising it I hope to be published one day. I hope you can find one of my books on a bookshelf but it's just I feel like I gotta find the energy to write consistently and that can be hard sometimes but there's definitely er issues. Embed in the book I'm working on now. I wanted back to the advocacy thing I wanted a character that has his own issues but a lot of his stories about advocating for others and friends, and non-binary kid, and helps out that kid, right? And I wanted

Nathan Lyon: real Kids in the Real World, They'll read a fictional book models so that it's very much for me and a writing group that people are critiquing and giving me feedback and helping me on my journey, but don't feel anywhere close to publishing anytime soon, so that's okay.

Nathan Lyon: Yeah, and then yeah, my social media is Mr. Underscore Lyon underscore fourth on Instagram and Tiktok. So you can support me there, I created some bonfire T-shirts. I'm wearing one now that says,…

Kind Cotton: I love that one.

Nathan Lyon: Queer books save lives.

Kind Cotton: Yeah, it's really beautiful. I love it so much and you were donating some of the proceeds, right?

Nathan Lyon: Yeah, I did for my birthday. I had other T-shirt that all the money went to the Trans Law Center fighting trans court cases across the country.

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Kind Cotton: Which is super important right now. Yeah. so I ask everyone…

Nathan Lyon: Yeah, absolutely.

Kind Cotton: who comes on here and you've probably heard this 1,000 times for me over the past couple of years, but I feel as though, as a country, we need to be on a mission to redefine kindness and what that has looked like historically and how it has been Weaponized for centuries, essentially. And I ask everyone who comes on. If they could define kindness in any way,…

Nathan Lyon: In.

Kind Cotton: shape or form, what would that look and sound like to you?

Nathan Lyon: Yeah. I mean**, I always think about the difference between being nice and being kind, And you can sound sweet and say nice things and use good manners and it doesn't mean kind. And so I mean, really what it comes down to kindness for me is look who in the room or what groups of people need something and do something about it,** And so with the queer community right now is there's laws being passed hurting our community. And so kindness means noticing that and what can I do to help? Right. So

Nathan Lyon: And that can be. Angry, you can be kind and angry and pissed off at the same time.

Nathan Lyon: That's really just advocating for people and who needs advocacy and what can I do to make change.

Kind Cotton: Yeah, it's beautiful. I love that. Thank you Nate so much for your time, your presence, your energy. And thank you for all you do for kids.

Nathan Lyon: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

Kind Cotton: Bye everyone.

Kind Cotton: kindness about getting uncomfortable, kindness is Putting aside, your worry is and your anxieties and your fear and just Being there. and doing the things that, are right? To hopefully create a better future. and I think that, This conversation has really brought to light the current attacks on the lgbtq+ community, the current attacks, particularly on queer kids, and I hope it also gave you the motivation to find your voice. And to

Kind Cotton: The strength to use it. And know that you can make a difference. Regardless of your platform or your network, or Anything that you may think is holding you back from standing up and being on the right side of history let it go out the door. You can make a difference. And we all need to collectively stand together with lgbtq+ community right now, and do what’s best for kids.

Meeting ended 👋