

EMPATHY

compassion, sympathy, feeling, humanity

***Life's Most
Persistent and
Urgent Question Is,
"What Are You
Doing for Others?"***
Martin Luther King

***Empathy is about
finding echoes of
another person in
yourself"***
Mohsin Hamid

Empathy means identifying with and being concerned about other people's feelings and needs. It provides the emotional root for caring about other people. Empathy allows us to be understanding and tolerant of different points of views and beliefs and makes us aware of the suffering of others, allowing us to empathize with them or to feel their suffering as our own. Empathy also allows us to feel joy and excitement—rather than anger and despair—at other people's successes and achievements.

Babies may begin to cry when they hear other sounds of crying, and coo and laugh when they hear others making happy sounds. By the age of three, many children will make an effort to hug or comfort another child or a parent who seems upset. As children grow, compassion can guide their actions and behaviors in positive ways. They understand that by doing something wrong, they cause others pain or unhappiness.

We can promote empathy by helping our children to think about how others feel. For example, if your child says or does something hurtful to another child, help him to focus his attention on the feelings of his victim by saying, for example, "How do you think Zack feels? Would you like to feel like that?" Children develop empathy by practicing acts of caring and kindness towards others. As adults, we need to emphasize the importance of helping others, giving others the benefit of the doubt, and being open to differences.

What You Can Do

- ★ Talk about the point of view of others as you watch TV, read books, or discuss other people with your child. For example, ask, "What do you think that character is feeling and thinking?"
- ★ Show care toward others, such as running errands for sick neighbors or opening doors for others.
- ★ Give others the benefit of the doubt. If your child complains that a classmate deliberately pushed her down on the way to lunch, explain that sometimes when people are in a hurry, they don't watch where they're going—they don't mean to push or hurt anyone.
- ★ Be open to differences. If your child says "Our new neighbors dress funny," explain that people often wear clothes that reflect their cultures or native countries.
- ★ Be a role model. When you have strong, respectful relationships and interact with others in a kind and caring way, your child learns from your example.

***"Empathy is about
standing in someone
else's shoes, feeling
with his or her heart,
seeing with his or her
eyes"***
Daniel H. Pink