

It Takes A Village

A Newsletter for Parents and Caregivers
Raising Tiny Humans



Teaching Infants & Toddlers Empathy

What is empathy and how can we help our littlest ones begin to learn such a complex skill?

Empathy is the ability to imagine how someone else is feeling in a particular situation and respond with care.

Understanding and showing empathy is the result of many social-emotional skills that are developing in the first years of life!

Some important milestones in developing empathy include:

- Establishing a secure, strong and loving relationship with you! Feeling accepted and understood helps a child learn how to accept and understand others as they grow.
- Around 6 months old babies start using social referencing, which is when a baby looks to a parent or loved one to gauge their reaction to a person or situation. This helps a baby understand things like, "is this new person or thing safe?". Being sensitive to a parent's reaction in new situations helps babies understand the world and people around them.
- Between 18-24 months, toddlers will start developing a theory of mind. This is when a toddler begins to realize that, just as they have their own feelings, thoughts and goals, others have their own thoughts and ideas, and they may be different.
- Between 18-24 months toddler will also start to recognize themselves in the mirror. They start to develop an understanding of him/herself being an individual.

What Can We Do to Help Toddlers Develop Empathy?

Examples:

Empathize with your child. "Is the thunder scary? I know it is loud and can feel scary. You are safe in here with me."

Talk about others' feelings. "Quinn is feeling sad because you knocked down her blocks. Let's see if we can help her build it again, and then we can play cars."

Suggest how children can show empathy. "Your sister feel, let's get some ice for her boo-boo"

Read stories about feelings. Books like: My Many Colored Days-Dr. Seuss, The Feelings Book- Todd Parr, Happy Baby, Sad Baby-Leslie Patricelli, Making Faces, Little Monkey Calms Down-Dahl

Be a role model. Be kind and understanding when interaction with all those around you. The littles are always watching a learning from you.

Use "I" Messages. "I don't like when you hit me. It hurts."

Validate the child's difficult emotions. Don't be too quick to want to "fix" the difficult emotion. Slow down, help them name it, validate it and be there with them. All feelings are part of life. We must learn to identify them, express them and then find ways to cope with them.

Use pretend play. Introduce feelings and empathy into play. "I wonder if the cat can share his toy with the moose. How can they take turns?"

Think through the use of I'm Sorry. Toddlers don't understand what "I'm sorry" means, and it doesn't teach them empathy. Try something like, "Luna, look at Issaac. He is crying because you hit him with the block. Let's see if he is okay."

Be patient. Developing empathy takes time. Empathy is a complex skill and will continue to develop across your child's life.



Empathy & Caregiving

When it comes to teaching our children empathy, it's important we look at ourselves. How can we as caregivers and parents be more empathic?

7 Critical Components of Empathy

These 7 Critical Components of Empathy can help us personally and professionally.

adapted from Generationmindful.com/Danny Landgloss

1

Show Genuine Care and Concern

Take care of your family, friends & coworkers. Check in with them. Offer support to them. Help them reach goals.



2

Be Present

Try to always give your child, family, friends and coworkers your full attention. If you can't in that moment, arrange a time to check back in with them.



3

Ask Questions

When talking, ask open-ended questions that give your child, family, friends and coworkers a change to express thoughts & feelings.



4

Act With Compassion

Communicate with kindness and care and use words that encourage and empower.



5

Listen to Understand

Listen to understand their thoughts, perspectives and emotions, versus listening to just respond.



6

Connect Through Emotion

Mirror emotion, connect through body language and words, and let them know they are not alone.



7

Be Curious Not Judgemental

Wonder. Listen to learn and connect, not to determine right or wrong.



"It's not our job to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. It's our job to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless." - LR Knost



By teaching our children empathy, and modeling empathy in our daily lives we can make the world "a little less cruel and heartless".

Question, Concerns or Just Want to Chat?
Reach out!



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