

Parenting Tips to Encourage Empathy...

- Model empathy. We all need love and understanding. Research shows that parenting with empathy and guidance encourages healthy emotional growth.
- Give simple, clear explanations about how people feel when they are feeling sad, hurt, angry, scared or happy. If your child caused these feelings it is very important for them to see the consequences of their behavior. No blaming...guidance, support and problem solving techniques.
- Kindness is “caught not taught”. Children will copy YOU! They watch to see how you treat others.
- Praise your child’s small steps...sharing a toy, getting a band aide, noticing another’s feelings etc.
- Encourage empathy but don’t expect that they will respond perfectly every time. They are learning about how emotions work. Every interaction can be a learning experience.
- Label feelings.
 - *“It made your sister very sad when you took her toy away. See her tears?”*
 - *“It was so kind of you to help your friend when he fell down. He feels so much better now.”*
 - *“What can you do to help someone who is sad, hurt, frightened etc.”*
- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings and yours. Listening intently shows that you care and want to know more. Listen to his/her views, challenges, before offering your own.
- Notice other people’s behavior in relation to your child. This will help them understand how other people’s feelings affect them.
 - *“Remember how Sarah helped you to feel better on your first day at school?”*
- Read books and notice/discuss how your child thinks that the characters are feeling in the story. Fiction can be an effective way to discuss an issue indirectly...a way in.
 - *“Would you be brave, scared if you were this character?”*
- Recall and extend story lines in your favorite book by using them in real life situation.
 - *“Remember how the Little Engine made it up the hill...how did he do that?”*
- Teach non-verbal cues. Play a guessing game about what other people are feelings. Make up stories to enhance your understanding. Notice the body language, facial expression and pace of a person.
- Encourage your child to think of others.
 - *“Do you think that your sister would like us to bring home a treat for her?”*
- Give your child jobs. Research shows that as your child takes on simple responsibilities they learn about caring and altruism. Feeding the dog, setting the table, picking up after him/herself etc.
- Involve your child in charitable activities. Acts of kindness are a great way to teach empathy and the feelings that reward you. Donate toys, books. Send a picture to Grandparents, a sick friend or a teacher. Prepare a meal and deliver to someone ill or with a new baby etc. Explain your helping behavior.