

The Parent's Corner

(We're in your Corner)

This month we dive into *empathy*:

It's February, and everyone is talking about kindness this month. We all want to raise kind kids—so how do we instill the significant social-emotional skill of kindness? A good place to start is with the foundation: **Empathy**. If you've noticed, in every previous edition of *Parent's Corner*, we have listed 'empathy' as a key to a successful relationship with your children. Empathy is a tool for better communication, more understanding, and less negativity. Empathy is the foundation for compassion, respect, tolerance, understanding, and kindness. There's a lot riding on empathy, which is why, at the end of the day, the presence or absence of empathy impacts all our interactions.

So what is empathy, really? Empathy is the ability to imagine how someone else is feeling in a particular situation. It's what helps us connect to other humans. Humans are hardwired to *care*. But caring and empathizing are different. **Empathy requires emotional intelligence and the ability to identify a variety of emotions**. Teaching children to identify these emotions is critical. Once they can identify emotions in themselves, they can begin to identify them in others. They can learn that others have thoughts and feelings that are different than their own. Kids can use this knowledge to imagine how a person might feel, and then choose an appropriate, empathetic response.

Empathy is complex—but it is teachable. Teaching our children empathy can help cultivate kind, meaningful relationships. It can give children confidence to stand up against negativity and reach out to kids who are having a rough go. It can help us raise kids who are accepting of differences and who have more positive interactions with others, promoting higher self-esteem and self-worth.

What You Can Do To Nurture Empathy

Talk about others' feelings. Point out emotions that you see along with your child throughout the day. Ask your child about it: "How do you think that kid feels right now?", "Do you think he feels sad or angry?"

Brainstorm ways to show compassion. "What would help that kid feel better?" "What helps you feel better when you feel like that?"

Expand on "I'm sorry." We often insist that our children say "I'm sorry" as a way for them to take responsibility for their actions. "I'm sorry" often removes the ability to understand and empathize with the person they have wronged. Help your child learn empathy in the moment—"Look, she's very sad. I can tell she's sad because she's crying. Why do you think she's crying? What do you think would make her feel better?"

Be patient. If you feel that your child is struggling with grasping empathy as a skill, that's ok! Empathy requires self-awareness and self-control, and it doesn't happen overnight. It's a foundational skill that requires patience, modeling, and nurturing to develop.

If you continue to have concerns, contact your school counselor to make a plan for a success—they're full of ideas, and are always in your corner!