

“Empathy and Compassion”

Jesus demonstrated empathy and compassion to us when He was here on earth. He showed love and care for those that society rejected. He loved the Samaritan woman and those afflicted with leprosy. He stopped and noticed the beggar, the poor and the lame. And, He wants us to do the same as we see others around us.

Empathy is that ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes and really feel and understand what they are feeling. Some kids are born with it and, well, some kids are not. You may have one child who weeps when they see an injured bird and another child who giggles to himself at the misfortune of others. Often these traits are gender dominant, but not always. And just because someone is not born with a predisposition for empathy does not mean that it cannot be taught.

Here we will explore some tips on how to help your empathy-deficient child understand and appropriately respond to the needs and feelings of others.

1. Teach them feeling words.

It is very difficult to understand how others feel if the only feelings you can identify are happy and sad. Make sure that you are using “feelings language” when you talk to them. Instead of saying “mad,” try “enraged” or “furious.” Not only will they get a vocab lesson, but you will be helping them to see the world in different shades, not just black and white.



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2. Put on your own empathy glasses.

Point out emotions when you see them around you. If you see a toddler screaming in the grocery store, you can simply say, “He seems really angry. Can you remember a time when you were that angry?” Asking this type of question will help your child begin to connect his internal feelings states with what he sees demonstrated in others.

3. Read books with a new focus.

If you are trying to teach your children empathy, don't just read to read, read with a purpose. Children's books are filled with images and imagery that demonstrate a wide range of emotions. Ask your child to identify how the different characters are feeling. Ask probing questions like, “Why do you think he feels that way?” and “What about his face or body tells you his feelings in this picture?”

4. Read Scriptures about empathy.

Jesus was the Master of empathy. He was able to instantly connect with and understand the heart of the person or people with whom He was conversing. People who met him felt understood and loved. Remember His reaction to the mourners at the grave of His dear friend Lazarus? Here are some Bible verses about empathy:

- Matthew 9:6: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”
- Matthew 15:32 :“Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people;



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they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

- Philippians 2:3: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,”
- 1 Peter 3:8: “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.”
- Matthew 7:12: “ So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

5. Put it into practice.

Once your child is armed with all this information and insight, you will need to help him put it into practice. When he comes home from school and tells you of his day, ask him to speculate as to how others in his story were feeling during the events in question. When he squabbles with his little brother, take him aside and ask how he thinks his brother is feeling. Ask him to examine facial expressions and body language as clues. Reference some pictures of feelings faces if you have them. These kinds of activities and reminders will help your child begin to develop eyes that can see the feelings of those around him.

Remember, the goal is not to simply give your child head knowledge or to teach him to act empathetic. The goal is a transformed heart; one that truly engages in and seeks to understand the feelings of others. Whenever you see your child demonstrating empathy in some way, you can say, “I can see Jesus in you when you treat others that way.”



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Reference

Kuehn, L. (2020). Teaching Children Empathy. Downloaded from:
<https://www.cornerstonesforparents.com/teaching-children-empathy>



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