

Empathy (Grades 3-5)

For PurposeFull Families



EXPLANATION:

This month we are having conversations and experiences to help us develop the social-emotional skill of Empathy! We are using this definition at school:

Empathy: the ability to understand and connect to the feelings of another.

Empathy is an important skill for creating connected and kind communities. It is critical to our relationships both personal and professional. There is a huge need for Empathy in our world because, as anxiety increases in our culture, Empathy decreases. Even though we have lots of digital connections, we need a lot of training on in-person communication and understanding! So, we are working to develop a few key skills in order to live more empathetic lives. First, developing an “emotional vocabulary” to make sure we have the words to understand and describe what we are feeling personally. Second, being able to connect with others based on their feelings even though we may not have the exact same story or perspective as someone else. Finally, we will think about how listening and sharing help create more Empathy in our classroom and the world. There will be some powerful activities and some amazing conversations inspired by people like Brenè Brown and Dr. Oz. It will be a wonderful experience for your child and (hopefully) you!

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- Empathy is about understanding how somebody else is feeling. It is about switching places and perspectives with them to imagine what they’re going through. Share with one another about a time when you wished someone had shown more Empathy for you.
- Some people say that Empathy is “feeling with people.” What could it mean to feel “with” someone? How can that be hard?
- Empathy requires a level of mindfulness that helps us be aware and notice how others are acting or speaking. Only then can we practice empathy. What are ways that we might practice mindfulness to become better aware of those around us? Ideas may include deep breathing, checking in with your five senses, doing a body scan, art, mindful walking or eating, etc.

QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK:

- What gets in the way of us showing Empathy to one another?
- What is the difference between sympathy and Empathy?
- What is a conflict that you had recently with someone? How do you think they were feeling and why may they have been feeling that way? How could you respond to that situation with empathy?

APPLICATION:

Books:

- [*The Sandal Artist*](#) by Kathleen T. Pelley
- [*Stand in my Shoes: Kids Learning About Empathy*](#) by Dr. Bob Sornson
- [*The Potato Chip Champ: Discovering Why Kindness Counts*](#) by Maria Dismundy
- [*Just My Luck*](#) by Cammie McGovern
- [*Inside Out and Back Again*](#) by Thanhha Lai
- [*The Wall*](#) by Eve Bunting

FOR YOUR READING:

- [*9 Habits of Empathetic Children*](#) by Michele Borba
- [*5 Tips For Cultivating Empathy*](#) from the Making Caring Common Project
- [*There Is No Good Card for This: What To Say and Do When Life Is Scary, Awful, and Unfair to People You Love*](#) by Dr. Kelsey Crowe
- [*Empathetic Sentence Starters for Teachers \(and Parents!\)*](#) by Amanda Morin

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ACTIVITY:

Learn the ASL (American Sign Language) letters to spell out the word E-M-P-A-T-H-Y.



Discuss: What might the experience of being hearing impaired be like?

PURPOSEFULL PURSUITS:

Trading Places

Have a conversation over a meal tonight about what it would feel like to be in each other's places. Have each person try to answer some of these questions about what it would be like to be every other person at the table: What are your biggest challenges? What do you want? What do you need? What feeling do you feel most often? What makes you feel happy?

Toughness: 3

Time: 2

Type: Group

Super Selves

Imagine that each member of the family is a superhero. Have a conversation about it with your child. Better yet, make it an art project or a video project! Make a costume. Film a preview for your upcoming movie!

You can ask (and share your own answers!) to questions like: Which superhero are you? What do you like about being this superhero? What are some obstacles that come with being this superhero? What is your superpower? How do you use it to help people? What would happen if you lost that superpower?

Toughness: 1

Time: 2

Type: Partner

Empathy and Service Go Hand in Hand

Having Empathy for others often drives us to practice service as well. Brainstorm as a family members of the community that may have a need you can serve. Examples might include elderly folks in need of some company, sick folks in the hospital in need of some creativity or fun, folks experiencing homelessness or hunger needing resources such as toiletries and clothing, or animals at the local shelter in need of some play time or a walk. You may also know of specific neighbors who could use some quality time, a kind word, or a warm meal.

Brainstorm together how you can recognize and meet a need in the community. Then, go out and do it! You may find it meets some of your own needs as well.

Toughness: 4

Time: 4

Type: Group

Family Temperature Check

Decide this week on a time and place to do a weekly Family Temperature Check. Sit together as a family and eliminate any distractions. Ask each family member, "how are you feeling today?" Practice active listening skills as family members each take a turn to talk about how they are feeling. When someone shares a challenging feeling, instead of jumping in to provide advice, take time to listen and use empathic statements like:

- "What has that been like for you?"
- "I'm sorry you are going through this."
- "That sounds really hard for you."
- "It makes me feel ___ to hear that happened."
- "What do you need right now?"

To start, you can use a simple check-in system like, "How are you doing on a scale of 1-5 today?" As you get good at answering questions like that, you can continue to develop your emotional vocabulary and vulnerability as we family with more complex sharing!

Toughness: 4

Time: 4

Type: Group