

Building Empathy with our Children



Unselfie by Michelle Borba, Ed.D.



Why Empathy?

Empathy - helps to build, foster, maintain relationships

Especially during a pandemic - relationships and fostering social skills are crucial

Empathy is a positive predictor of children's reading and math test scores and critical thinking skills, prepares kids for the global world, and gives them a job market boost (Borba, xiv)

A Changing World

By the end of elementary school, the average child will witness 8,000 murders and, by age eighteen, 200,000 other vivid acts of violence, on all screens including video, television, and online streaming (Borba, 100)

Viewing aggression may also change our children's brains. Brain scans found that just one week after playing violent video games, even kids who were not frequent game players showed decreased activity in the parts of their brains that regulate emotion, attention, and concentration (Borba, 100)

One in six college students has been diagnosed or treated by a professional for anxiety in the past twelve months; childhood anxiety is up 25 percent (Borba, 99)

Nine Essential Habits to Develop Empathy

- Emotional Literacy
- Moral Identity
- Perspective Taking
- Moral Imagination
- Self-regulation
- Practicing kindness
- Collaboration
- Moral Courage
- Altruistic Leadership Abilities

At the end of this presentation, we encourage you to reflect on what habits you believe you can help encourage in your child/ren

Emotional Literacy

- Face to face contact is the best way kids learn to read emotions and develop empathy
- Kids use digital devices at least 7 ½ hours a day which impacts their ability to build empathy
- Personal contact is best to develop empathy
- Kids need an emotional vocabulary to become emotionally literate
- Parents talk far more with daughters about feelings than sons

So given our constraints, how do we do that in a digital heavy world?

Activities:

- Raise an animal
- Use a baby/younger child as a model
- Model empathy with your child
- Focus on feelings - but names/moments to them
- UNPLUG
- Eat dinner together
- Read to your child - character talk
- Watch a show on mute

Moral Identity

- Moral identity can inspire empathy, activate compassion, and motivate caring behavior
- To respond empathetically, kids must value other people's thoughts and feelings
- Overpraising can make kids competitive...diminish empathy
- Entitling and "overvaluing" kids may increase narcissism and hamper moral identity
- If a child can imagine himself/herself as a caring person, he is more likely to care about others

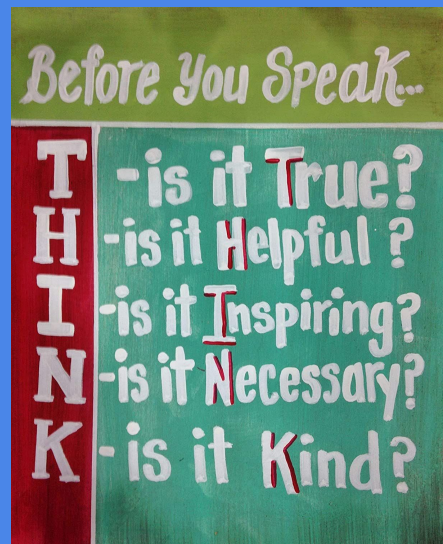
What we say about our children helps define who they are and the type of people they believe themselves to be (Borba, 34).

Share your beliefs

Language of praise

Dinner Talk - Parent

Role Model - Teacher



Perspective Taking

Mentally stepping in someone's shoes is a way to build kids' empathy muscles

Understanding someone else's perspective takes practice and ability

Perspective taking can be taught - how can we do that in school? Because perspective taking builds empathy

Focusing your student's attention on the effect his/her behavior has on another person boosts perspective taking

Discipline vs. Impact statements

I wonder...

Books & Movies, Role-play (Borba, 58)

- Call attention to uncaring
- Assess how uncaring affects others
- Repair the hurt and require reparations
- Express disappointment and stress caring expectations

Moral Imagination

Today's children read less

As digital entertainment choices increase, children's literacy habits decrease

Reading literary fiction - nurtures empathy and perspective taking

Children who read exclusively on digital screens are three times less likely to say they enjoy reading

**Are we sending home paper books when remote?*

**Do your children read paper books at home?*

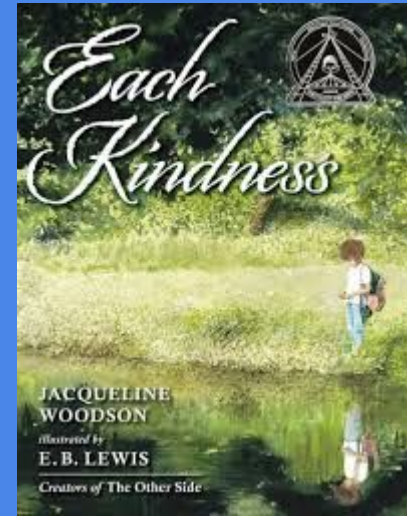
Part of the secret is matching interests and reading ability

Using books..

- What if?
- How would you feel?
- Share your feelings

Read, read, read!!

The right book can stir a child's empathy better than any lesson or lecture ever could. And the right book matched with the right child can be the gateway to opening his/her heart to humanity.



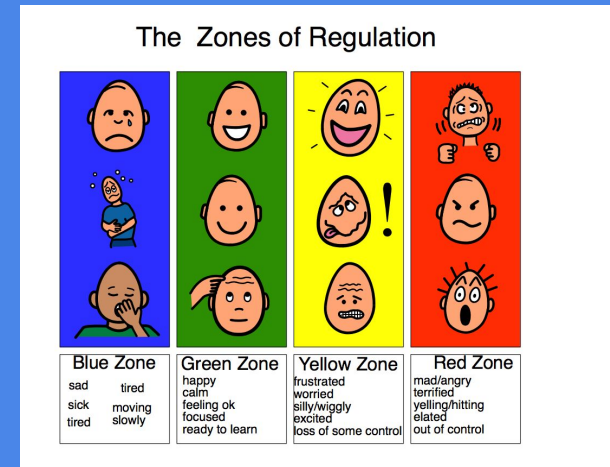
Self-regulation

The ability to manage emotions is a better predictor of academic achievement than IQ, it dramatically increases your adult child's health and financial stability, and it strengthens resilience so your child can bounce back from setbacks (Borba, 99).

- Model calmness in person and virtually
- Create a quiet space in class
- Find a quiet space at home
- Tune in to your child
- Identify body alarms and response
- Teach strategies - breathing, fists, etc.
- Visualization

Self-regulation

- Kids must learn to control their own emotions before they can recognize the emotions of others
 - The more kids are aware of their own body and signals of stress, the better they are at self-regulation
 - The best way to teach self-regulation is to model it for your child/student
 - Deep breathing creates calm
 - Starts in the home...Praise any growth with this
-
- Who is familiar with the Zones of Regulation?
 - Why would this approach be effective?
 - How can we incorporate this into remote instruction?



Practicing Kindness

Practicing kindness increases children's prosocial behaviors as well as their happiness, self-esteem, gratitude, popularity, health, and resilience.

Think...

In 25 years, you are eavesdropping on your child discussing their childhood...

- How do they describe your typical behavior?
- What do they remember as the most important messages you told them as kids?

Adults who talk about the importance of helping others and being kind do influence their children's empathy quotients. We do matter in instilling character in our kids - that is if we talk and walk the example we hope they become (Borba, 130).

Kindness - Model, expect, value, reflect, define, explain

Cultivating Kindness

- Kindness is contagious, needs just a spark to ignite and spreads quickly.
- The more kids see, hear, and practice kindness, the more likely they will adopt it as a habit.
- Kindness can be strengthened like a muscle, but regular workouts are crucial for it to become habitual.
- Acts of kindness must be meaningful and varied to reap gains.
- Kids learn kindness by comforting, helping, caring, sharing, and cooperating, not through hearing lectures or doing worksheets. It should be taught as a verb, not a noun (Borba, 140).
 - How are you modeling kindness to your child/ren

Collaboration

Playing is how kids learn to get along, collaborate, care deeply, solve problems, negotiate, share, communicate, and compromise. Play is also a powerful socializing tool that helps kids appreciate differences, break down barriers, and develop an “Us Not Them” mentality (Borba, 146).

- Stress similarities
- Reality check (they never, always, etc.)
- Diverse literature, shows, children’s books
- Praise teamwork, not the win
- Use cooperative games, card games, etc.
- Stress encouraging others
- Practice how to disagree respectfully
- Model collaboration - watching, doing, repeating

Moral Courage

Moral courage is a special inner strength that motivates children to act on their empathetic urges and help others despite the consequences (Borba, 171).

- Voice moral expectations to your child
- Set an example
- Stop rescuing
- Try small scale courage
- Positive self-talk
- Chunk it - piece by piece

Developing Moral Courage

- Kids discover their inner hero from the right parenting style, experiences, and training.
 - Remember, as the teacher, you are the “parent” during the day!
- Modeling, encouraging, expecting, and acknowledging a child’s moral courage helps instill it.
- Upstanders are kids who unselfishly help others without expecting anything in return.
- A child’s temperament and physical strength don’t determine moral courage; almost every child can be taught how to stand up and speak up to help others.
- The seeds of moral courage must be nurtured in every developmental stage.
- (Borba, 189)

Altruistic Leadership Abilities

...we must begin stepping back so our kids can begin marching forward to make their mark in the world (Borba, 198)

Stretch your children's "helping muscles"

Help your child to see themselves as a helper

Provide regular opportunities for your child to help and provide compassion to others

Help your child recognize that empathy can be improved with practice

Expand your child's "Circle of Familiarity" so they are comfortable with all

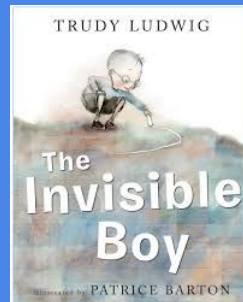
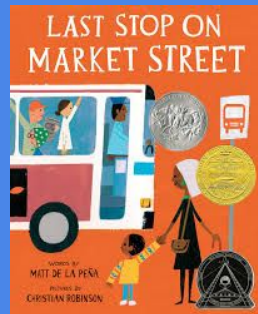
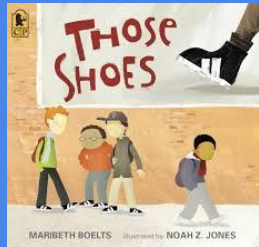
- Growth mindset
- Emphasize effort
- Encourage practice
- Recap the impact
- Find a worthy cause together that has a direct impact
- Positive social media
- Raise a changemaker

(Borba, 212)

Moving Forward

Importance of Time with Family

- Meal Time
- Taking a Walk
- Discussing TV Shows, Politics, etc.
- Shopping Together
- Reading - bedtime, etc.



Developing each child's voice at home

- Ordering food
- Speaking with the doctor
- Writing emails
- Conflict with peers
- Appropriate boundaries
- Ability to have an impact