

COMPASSION

Tips for Instilling Compassion

Although you cannot "teach" compassion like a step-by-step math lesson, you can instill it in your children by making changes in your lifelong daily routine and by regularly stepping outside your ordinary schedule to make a difference for someone else. Short of physical violence are the cruel names, the bullying and the one-upmanship some youth face. We've gone from being a compassionate society to being a competitive society. Just like a 1-year-old will copy her parents by tapping away on a computer keyboard, children will copy social behaviors from their caregivers. We model compassion by being nice to each other,

When it comes to modeling compassion for your children, start with your overall parenting style. Children need a strong, loving bond with a caregiver, whether it is a mother, a father, a grandparent or another adult.

Without that attachment, children may later have difficulty showing love and

kindness, says Alice Sterling Honig, professor emerita of child development at Syracuse University. "When you have a relationship that's loving and secure with an adult, then you are probably going to be able to give to others in life the way you were given unto," says Honig, who has written several child development books.

Analyze your own parenting style. It likely fits within one of three categories.

Permissive parents, for example, let the child do just about anything. They don't enforce rules and usually go along with whatever the child wants. They don't set high expectations for the child's behavior.

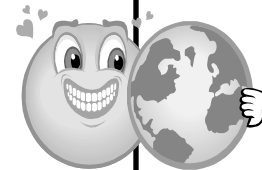
At the other end of the spectrum is the **authoritarian** model. Such parents won't let the child get away with anything. They are quick to crack down and often yell orders. Punishment is used to get immediate obedience.

Then there are **authoritative** parents, who are

not too permissive and not too authoritarian. "You are for your kid 100 percent," Honig says. "You have clear rules, reasons for the rules, a genuine interest in your child's needs and high expectations."

Honig says the authoritative approach is the best for raising a compassionate child. "If you are very permissive, you get a spoiled brat. If you are authoritarian, you get a real sneak. He may be an altar boy and always says 'Yes, sir,' but he knows how to beat up kids and cheat on tests and hide it," Honig says.

If you are authoritative, you are kind but firm. You help children find alternative ways to deal with situations, encouraging their input. When they act inappropriately, you teach prosocial behaviors. Your goal is for children to do the right thing because of internal desire to do so, not because they fear punishment.



January

Character Education

This month, our school community will stress the importance of compassion. Compassion is the act of understanding the experience of others and feeling care and kindness for them. We will focus on encouraging compassion at school by highlighting the positive effects that having compassion instills in our classrooms, neighborhoods, and elsewhere throughout the world. All of us can exercise compassion by:

- Caring about how others feel
- Doing kind and thoughtful things for people in need
- Putting other people's needs before our own.

Books Exhibiting Examples of Compassion

- K-3:** Everett Anderson's Goodbye by Clifton, Lucille
Loop the Loop by Dugan, Barbara
Little Chief by Hoff, Syd
- 2-5:** How Does it Feel to be Old? By Faber, Norma
Losing Uncle Tim by Jordan, Mary Kate
- 4-6:** A Little Time by Baldwin, Anne
Never is a Long, Long Time by Cate, Dick
- Young Adult** Make Lemonade by Wolff, Virginia Euwer
Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World by Kielburger, Craig & Marc

Compassion for the Environment

Even though environmental issues like pollution are global problems, there are little things that we can do to care for the environment. Teaching kids to be environmentally friendly is easy:

- Recycle
- Plant a tree
- Walk instead of drive
- Read a book about science and nature
- Use both sides of paper
- Conserve e.g., water, energy

Developing Character

In our fast-paced society we face many challenges when we try to raise young people with character. Our culture values personal success, so how do we make sure that our children are hard workers but still value kindness, cooperation, sharing, and caring for other people? Children will learn character by the values you teach, your words of praise, or the way you correct them. They'll learn character by observing your values and behavior in daily interactions outside your home and watching how adults treat each other in your home. Use this list of ways of developing character as tools to make a list that works for you:

1. **Notice children's acts of kindness.**
2. **Notice acts of kindness and decent behavior in others.** Think about what we see on the media or hear in gossip. If we aren't careful, we will expose children to a world much worse than reality. Let's begin talking to each other about the positive things our friends and neighbors do every day that go unnoticed.
3. **Treat each other well.**
4. **Treat strangers well.**

5. **Reinforce the importance of including all children.** There are cliques and "in groups" and "out groups" often in childhood. Often the best way to ensure that a child is welcome in the in group is to reject other kids, the *outs*. Help your child realize the importance of other children's feelings. Having a wide variety of friends is a great asset, but it's even better when children choose friends for themselves rather than based on what others say or think.
6. **Promote responsibility.**
7. **Don't spoil your children.**
8. **Be there when they are watching television and listening to music.**
9. **Work toward a better world.**
10. **Honor plurality.** We may feel connected to certain groups and want our children connected to these groups because they share our values. This desire for connection should not be an excuse for not teaching tolerance or for allowing prejudice.
11. **Care about nature.**

Adapted from *A Parent's Guide to Building Resilience in Children and Teens*. Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed, FAAP with Martha M. Jablow

Modeling Compassion

At home, you can model or teach compassion in ordinary, everyday situations. For example:

- Try to stop what you are doing and pay full attention when your children come to you with a concern.
- While grocery shopping, buy extra food for a local food bank even if you can only afford something small.
- Role-taking or role-playing. Activities which call for children or adults to assume the role of a real or fictional person and to imagine or act out that person's feelings and/or behavior are effective in increasing empathy. Increases in empathy are noted even when children are asked to imagine the point of view of an animal, plant, or inanimate object.
- Ongoing practice in imagining/perceiving another's perspective. For many people, including the very young,

the ability to imagine and gain insight into another person's point of view does not come easily. Sustained practice at role- or perspective-taking is an effective means to increasing levels of empathy.

- Model empathetic behavior
- Pick up trash together while you are out for a family walk.
- Volunteer, as a family, to rake an elderly neighbor's yard or shovel driveways and sidewalks.
- Last, but not least, be sure to praise your children for performing small acts of kindness to family members without being asked.

Volunteering/Service

Make volunteering a meaningful experience for children by giving them several choices as to what types of activities they might engage in.

- Encourage opportunities that fit the child. For example, a very lively child

may do much better in an active outdoor situation rather than in a setting where he'll be required to sit still or remain quiet for long periods of time. A child who loves animals might enjoy donating food or other items to an animal rehabilitation center.

Showing compassion for others can be difficult in certain situations—for everyone! How many parents, for example, have heard their children mimic their behavior when stuck in traffic? How do you explain to your child why someone has just been rude or unfair to you?

- Model compassion, even when others frustrate you, by using positive phrases like, "Wow, he must really be in a hurry," or "Looks like she's having a rough day." You, your children, and others will all benefit!