



Why is empathy important?

Empathy allows children to understand the experiences of others, leading to stronger friendships, better conflict resolution, and a more positive outlook on the world.

Research shows that children who learn empathy early tend to become happier and more resilient adults. By teaching empathy, you help them build a foundation of kindness and respect that will serve them throughout their lives.



When should we start teaching empathy?

Between the ages of 3 and 9, children go through a crucial stage of developing social-emotional skills. Although empathy is often seen as a complex concept, it can be taught through simple, everyday actions and conversations. At this age, children are naturally curious and eager to understand emotions, making this an ideal time to introduce empathy.



In a Friend's Shoes: Teaching Children to Understand Others' Feelings

Picture empathy as a bridge connecting hearts, which children learn to build one step at a time. Discover how your own small steps can help your child become a keen observer of how others feel.



Preschool and early school-age children undergo important social-emotional development. They are curious about the world, eager to form relationships, and intensely experience emotions. This is the perfect time to introduce them to the world of empathy and teach them to understand the feelings of others, which fosters the development of compassionate attitudes and relationships.

Empathy—the ability to understand and share feelings—supports children in their interactions with others, facilitates friendships, conflict resolution, and understanding others' perspectives. Through daily small actions, such as sharing toys or comforting a sad friend, children learn to express empathy.

Parents and caregivers play a crucial role by supporting conversations about emotions and encouraging reflection on the feelings of others. Questions like "How do you think your friend feels?" help children recognize others' perspectives, teaching them respect.

Developing empathy takes time and patience. The more often a child shows care, the more natural it becomes for them to take care of others and build relationships based on respect.

Step by Step Through the World of Feelings

– How to Help Your Child Understand Others



It's perfectly normal for kids to sometimes struggle with showing empathy. They might feel overwhelmed by their own emotions or not fully understand what others need. In these moments, use gentle reminders and model empathy yourself. If your child doesn't want to share, instead of scolding, try saying: "I understand you want to play with this toy right now. How about we take turns?" Gentle guidance helps them learn to balance their own needs with the feelings of others.



1 Be a model of empathy

Children learn through observation, so show empathy in your daily interactions. If they see you helping a friend or speaking kindly to someone in need, they are more likely to imitate those behaviors. Explain to them what you are doing and why: "I am helping our neighbor carry groceries because they look heavy. It feels nice to help others!"

2 Teach children to recognize emotions

Help your child understand different emotions by naming them. When they or someone else is sad, happy, or angry, name the emotion and explain it. For example, you might say: "It looks like your friend is sad because their toy is broken." Learning to recognize emotions is the first step to understanding others' perspectives.

3 Use stories

Books and stories are excellent tools for teaching empathy. Choose stories where characters experience various emotions and have opportunities to help each other. Pause and ask your child: "What do you think the character is feeling?" or "What would you do to comfort them?" This encourages children to think about others' feelings and how to respond.

4 Encourage action

Support your child in acts of kindness, whether it's helping others, sharing toys, or picking up litter. After such actions, ask how they felt while helping. If they shared a snack, you might say: "It was nice of you to share. I think your friend felt better because of it." Talking helps them understand the impact of empathy.

5 Validate their feelings

When children feel understood and accepted, they are more likely to show understanding to others. Let your child know that it's okay to feel anger, sadness, or frustration, and help them navigate those emotions. This can help them become more aware of feelings, making it easier to recognize and empathize with others.

6 Create opportunities

Caring for pets or plants is a wonderful way to develop empathy in children. Allow your child to feed a pet or water a plant and explain why it's important to care for living beings. Such care fosters sensitivity, responsibility, and understanding of the needs of others, strengthening the child's empathetic approach.

Empathy develops over time and with practice.

Empathy is a skill that grows over time, with practice and patience. With your help, a child can learn to appreciate the value of kindness and relationships with others. Small, consistent actions each day will awaken a lasting sense of empathy, enabling them to build meaningful relationships and have a positive impact on the world around them.

Empathy is a powerful tool. By encouraging a child to care for others, you are not only teaching them how to be a good friend but also helping them grow into a compassionate adult.

