

Children – Empathy in children

How does empathy affects a child and his growing years?

Empathy is the ability to share and understand another's feelings. A young child who is exposed to empathy would be able to:

- Socialise properly
- Be more sensitive to surroundings
- Learn respect in different contexts
- Learn to build realistic expectations
- Learn to read beyond what is spoken
- Less inclined to blame or jump to conclusions
- Respect themselves and are confident of themselves

Empathy in a child results in her or him being better-adjusted. A child that is more aware of his or her feelings would be able to communicate those feelings more effectively; as a result, parents and friends would be able to react to them appropriately and parents would not need to guess how they are feeling.

Furthermore, in term of a child's social skills, his or her empathy allows him or her to share someone's joy and sorrow appropriately. As such, this makes the child approachable and someone that is comfortable to have around. This "popularity" with people would differ greatly from the "popularity" he may receive if he is loud and insecure. He would be able to maintain friendships and have more stable relationships.

In addition, a child that is more emotionally in-tuned is one that is more secure and independent. This would allow him or her to focus on learning other areas instead of constantly being insecure and focusing on his or her insecurity. This would allow him to also be more confident of himself and eradicate other problems pertaining to that later in life.

What can parents do to cultivate and educate preschoolers to learn the importance of empathy?

Empathy starts from being aware of our own feelings. There is a lot of self-awareness involved. When managing children, parents are encouraged to teach them what they are feeling by getting them to point out how they think they feel in situations and teaching them what emotions are.

In order for parents to teach the young child, they are encouraged not to be afraid to talk to the young child about their own feelings. Usually, Asian parents tend to be more reserved in talking about their emotions but children at this stage mirror majority of the interaction they have by observing their parents. As a result, the children may be reserved in talking about their emotions too. In addition, when parents react negatively

and blame the child when he or she does something, more often than not the child would pick up this method of dealing with things even though he may loathe getting the brunt of it.

Some simple tips parents can try out are:

- When your child kicks up a fuss the next time, instead of shouting at him to “stop it”, ask him “what is the matter?”.
- When parents see their children looking down, it is encouraged for them to ask “what makes you feel sad?” This would show that parents display empathy and children may pick up this. It is important to hear your child out after asking the question. Pay attention to the child; it is likely possible that he may give you an answer that is far from what you have expected and perceived. This would also help to enhance your communication with him and make you more approachable to your child.

Most of all, it is important to respect your child. In turn, your child would learn to respect others. If parents put a child down, he will learn that the world is putting him down.

In The Therapy Room, the team of experienced psychologists, led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist, conducts Camp Global and Travel Light twice per year. These programmes allow children to learn empathy through numerous activities. For more information, please click [here](#). Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please feel free to click [here](#) and contact us to find out more.