

DEVELOPING EMPATHY IN CHILDREN

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(Presenter's Notes)

Slide 1: Developing Empathy in Children

"Empathy is crucial to a healthy, thriving culture," explained Dee Cummings, M.Ed., LPCC, JD, a child therapist, attorney, and author of 11 books for children all about empathy, hope, and therapeutic coping skills. Quoting Mahatma Gandhi, she added, "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." While we are born with the capacity for empathy, it has to be cultivated over time.

Slide 2: What is Empathy?

- ❖ Empathy is the ability to understand and respect the perspective of others, and the root of a child's ability to be kind and compassionate.
- ❖ Empathy is the ability to truly show compassion, understand another person's experience, and walk in someone else's shoes.

Slide 3 **Ephesians 4:32 NIV.** *"Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

1 Peter 3:8 NIV

"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."

Slide 4: Evidence of Empathetic Kids

Jessica Lahey says, in Teaching Children Empathy that:

- "Educators will tell you that a classroom full of empathetic kids simply runs more smoothly than one filled with even the happiest group of self-serving children.
- Similarly, family life is more harmonious when siblings are able to feel for each other and put the needs of others ahead of individual happiness.
- If a classroom or a family full of caring children makes for a more peaceful and cooperative learning environment, just imagine what we could accomplish in a world populated by such children."

Slide 5:

Our personal success as individuals and the survival of our society as a whole depend on our ability to understand and connect with others, so empathy is inarguably one of the most important traits to instill in our children.

Slide 6: How Do Children Learn Empathy?

Children learn empathy both from watching us and from experiencing our empathy for them. When we empathize with our children they develop trusting, secure attachments with us. Those attachments are key to their wanting to adopt our values and to model our behavior, and therefore to building their empathy for others.

Slide 7: Attitudes & Feelings

- Our words matter far less to our children than [what we actually think and feel](#).
- Our children are the most sensitive, receptive, and perceptive audience we will ever encounter, and for them, our feelings and attitudes are transparent and contagious.

Slide 8: Harvard University's [Making Caring Common Project](#).

According to the 2014 national survey, a large majority of youth across a wide spectrum of races, cultures, and classes appear to value aspects of personal success—achievement & happiness—over concern for others. At the root of this problem may be a gap between what parents say are their top priorities and the real messages they convey in their behavior day to day.

Slide 9: Achievement Over Caring

- About 80% of the youth in our survey report that their parents are more concerned about achievement or happiness than caring for others.
- A similar percentage of youth perceive teachers as prioritizing students' achievements over their caring.

Slide 10: Strategies to Teach Empathy at Any Age

- ✓ Model empathy
- ✓ Discuss emotions
- ✓ Help out at home, in the community, or globally
- ✓ Praise empathetic behavior

<https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/key-strategies-teach-children-empathy>

Slide 11: **Model Empathy

- Consider small acts of kindness you can do together with the children – eg. donating a toy for a needy child.
- Demonstrate kindness & compassion at home, at church, & in the community.
- Pounce on teaching opportunities--involve your child in conversations when you witness a situation when someone is involved in an emotional experience.
- Point out rude or disrespectful behavior--hold back sharp comments. Ask and explain
- Guide; don't preach.

(Caroline Maguire

<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/teaching-empathy-to-children-tips-from-child-care-expert>)

Slide 12: Magda Gerber

“Personality characteristics such as generosity, empathy, caring and sharing cannot be taught, they can only be modeled.”

Slide 13: Child Guidance, 215

“Children imitate their parents; hence great care should be taken to give them correct models. Parents who are kind and polite at home, while at the same time they are firm and decided, will see the same traits manifested in their children. . . In the family, fathers and mothers should ever present before their children the example they wish to be imitated. They should manifest one to the other a tender respect in word, and look, and action.”

Slide 14: Actions Speak Louder Than Words

- A fascinating [study reported in Scientific American](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/how-kids-catch-our-social-biases/) showed how our children “catch” our social biases through the nonverbal messages we might unconsciously send.
- So, we can preach our unbiased approach to children all we want, but what children sense about us “in action” will override all of those lessons.

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/how-kids-catch-our-social-biases/>

Slide 15: **Discuss Emotions

- Empathize with your child – “Are you scared of that dog?” “He is a nice dog, but he is barking very loudly.”
- Talk about others’ feelings – “Jean is very sad because you took her dolly.” “Can you give her back & you can choose another toy to play with.”

- Read stories about feelings and talk about it. Suggest how to show empathy – “Let’s get Johnny some ice-cream after he hurt his knee.”

Slide 16: **Make Caring for Others a High Priority & Set High Ethical Expectations

- Consider the messages you sent to your children. You might say, “The most important thing is that you are kind and that you are happy.”
- Prioritize caring when you talk with other adults like their teachers or coaches.
- Have children help around the house, be polite even when they are in a bad mood and be kind to others.

<https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-families/5-tips-cultivating-empathy>

Slide 17: **Provide Opportunities for Kids to Practice Empathy

- Encourage empathy for peers – ask them about their classmates.
- Discuss with your child ethical dilemmas that help them appreciate various perspectives, e.g. “Should I invite a new neighbor to my birthday party when my best friend doesn't like her?”
- Take your child out to do kind deeds to help the neighbor mow the lawn or run errands.

Slide 18:

- Showing interest in how people are feeling (asking, “How are you?” or, “Is Jane feeling better?”) and offering your help to others that may need it (“Is there something I can do for you? Or “I could help you clean the yard.”) are two very important acts of empathy and kindness to practice daily.
- Praise spontaneous acts of kindness...Your praise can reinforce behavior you perceive as kind and empathetic. But should you praise behavior or personality?
- Read stories or books together and talk about the experience of the characters and what the situation looks like from the perspective of different characters.

Slide 19: Conclusion

If we want the world to be a better place, Let’s cultivate empathy in children. Kindness and understanding of another’s perspective is living out God’s kingdom values.