

# TIPS FOR RAISING KIND, CARING, EMPATHETIC KIDS



## MAKE CARING FOR OTHERS A PRIORITY AND SET HIGH ETHICAL EXPECTATIONS

### Try this:

- 1. Keeping to a clear message.** Consider the daily messages you send to children about the importance of caring. For example, instead of saying "The most important thing is that you're happy," you might say "The most important thing is that you're kind and that you're happy."
- 2. Prioritizing caring when you talk with other important adults in your children's lives.** For example, ask teachers and coaches whether your children are caring community members in addition to asking about their academic skills, grades, or performance.
- 3. Helping your children understand that the world doesn't revolve around them.** It's vital at times for parents to put children's concern for others above their happiness, for example, insisting at times that children turn off the TV and help around the house, be polite even when they are in a bad mood, or not dominate the airwaves when they are talking to other children or adults.



## PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO PRACTICE EMPATHY

Children are born with the capacity for empathy, but it needs to be nurtured throughout their lives. Learning empathy is in certain respects like learning a language or a sport. It requires practice and guidance. Regularly considering other people's perspectives and circumstances helps make empathy a natural reflex and, through trial and error, helps children get better at tuning into others' feelings and perspectives.

### Try this:

- 1. Having family meetings.** Hold family meetings when there are family challenges or conflicts, and in those meetings give children a voice and encourage them to take the perspective of other family members. Listen carefully to your children's views and ask your children to listen carefully to the views of others.
- 2. Encouraging empathy for peers.** Ask children about their classmates and other peers. Ask children when they're in conflicts with peers to consider their peers' perspectives.
- 3. Reflecting on empathy and caring.** Notice with your child when you're together and someone exhibits strong empathy—or shows a lack of empathy—either in your daily life or in a book or on television. Discuss why acts of empathy are important and why lacking empathy can be harmful.
- 4. Discussing ethical dilemmas.** 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?" "Should I tell my friend if I know her boyfriend, who is also my friend, cheated on her?"
- 5. Supporting "doing with."** Encourage children not just to do service, to "do for" others, but to "do with" others, working with diverse groups of students to respond to community problems.



## BE A STRONG MORAL ROLE MODEL AND MENTOR

### Try this:

- 1. Service.** Regularly engage in community service or model other ways of contributing to a community. Even better, consider doing this with your child.
- 2. Honesty and humility.** Talk with your child when you make a mistake that affects them about why you think you made it, apologize for the mistake, and explain how you plan to avoid making the mistake next time.
- 3. Check-in with others.** Reflect and consult with people you trust when you're finding it hard to be caring or to model important ethical qualities like fairness.
- 4. Take care of yourself.** Whether it's spending time with a friend, going for a walk, praying or meditating, try to make time to relieve your stress both because it's important for you and because it will enable you to be more attentive to and caring with others.



## EXPAND YOUR CHILD'S CIRCLE OF CONCERN

### Try this:

- 1. Zooming in and out.** Help children learn to zoom in, tuning in carefully to others, but also to zoom out, taking in multiple perspectives and people. Use newspaper or TV stories to start conversations with children about other people's hardships and challenges, or simply the different experiences of children in another country or community.
- 2. Understanding those who are different or struggling:** Emphasize with your child the importance of really listening to others, especially those people who may seem unfamiliar whom they don't immediately understand. Encourage children to consider the feelings of those who may be vulnerable, such as a child experiencing some family trouble or an unpopular child. Give children some simple ideas for taking action, like comforting a classmate who was teased.

## EMPATHIZE WITH YOUR CHILD AND MODEL EMPATHY FOR OTHERS.

### Try this:

- 1. Knowing your child.** Ask your child questions. For example, what did you learn today that was interesting? What was the hardest part of your day? How would you most like to spend a day if you could do anything? Do you have a friend that you especially respect? Why do you respect that person?
- 2. Demonstrating empathy for others, including those different from you.** ways of contributing to a community. Even better, consider doing this with your child. Express interest in those from various backgrounds facing many different types of challenges.
- 3. Engaging in self-care and self-reflection.** Try to find time to regularly engage in an activity—whether it's going for a walk, reading a book, meditating or praying—that can help you avoid being overwhelmed by stress. Reflect and consult with people you trust when you're having a hard time empathizing with your child.
- 4. Talk about what kids see in the news,** such as a person who stood up for an important cause or an instance of sexism or racism. Ask children how they see these actions and explain why you think these actions are caring or uncaring, just or unjust.
- 5. Expressing thanks.** Consider making expressing gratitude a daily ritual at dinnertime, bedtime, in the car, or on the subway. Encourage children to express appreciation for family members, teachers, or others who contribute to their lives.

These tips for raising kind, compassionate, empathetic kids were developed by the Making Caring Common Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

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