

CORE SKILL: RELATE

Empathy



What You Need to Know

Showing empathy means imagining how someone else is feeling and responding with care or kindness. As they develop empathy, preschoolers first need a basic understanding of emotions.

Then, they begin to understand that everyone has needs, that those needs may (and often are!) different from their own, and that they can help to meet other's needs. You can support this development by prompting children to consider the needs, feelings, and perspectives of others and by giving them the opportunity to provide care to others in meaningful ways.

Things to Consider

Often, we insist children say, "I'm sorry," if they hurt or upset a peer. But only saying "I'm sorry" doesn't help children develop empathy. It's most effective to help children see the link between their actions (e.g., mean words or hitting) and the other child's feelings (e.g., hurt or sad), and consider what could make the other child feel better. For example, say, "Oh (Child) you are feeling very sad. Look (other Child), (Child) is crying and sad because you said they couldn't play in the sandbox. Let's see how we can help them feel better."

Development of Empathy

Between 36 and 48 months, children <u>may</u> :	Between 48 and 60 months, children <u>may</u> :
Pay attention when others are distressed, but only for a brief period of time.	Pay attention when others are distressed and often respond with care.
Seek out adult support to help another child who is distressed.	Seek out adult support or provide reassurance or support to another child who is distressed.

Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of empathy:

- ◆ Read books about feelings. Talk about what characters are feeling and what could make them feel better. Book suggestions:
 - "Bear Feels Sick" by Karma Wilson and Jane Chapman
 - "Can You Tell How Someone Feels" by Nita Everly
 - "My Friend is Sad" by Mo Willems
- ◆ Use puppets to model feelings and empathy.
- ◆ Engage in dramatic play. Include dolls or roles that prompt children to care for others and consider the perspectives/roles of others.
 - Imagining how someone else feels is challenging for some children. To make the feelings of others more concrete during dramatic play, consider providing access to a Feelings Chart. Some children may benefit from having a visual cue of possible feelings and emotions.
- ◆ Build opportunities for caring into your classroom routines. For example:
 - Pets (e.g., fish in the classroom, pet visitors from home).
 - Gardening or plants.
 - Partnerships (e.g., do something nice for another class, spend time with babies from other classrooms or visitors, a retirement home where children send cards or visit elderly people).
 - Classmates (e.g., set up a challenging task that a child will require help with and encourage others to join in and assist).



Intentional Teaching Practices for Helping Children to Develop Empathy

OBSERVE	<p>OBSERVE</p> <p>Carefully observe children and their current empathy skills. Notice acts of kindness or comfort, as well as simple acts such as a child paying attention to another child's feelings or crying when they hear others cry. Consider whether children are given the opportunity to consider how others are feeling and to care for others.</p>
FOCUS	<p>Narrate and Label Empathy</p> <p>Focus children's attention on empathy by explicitly narrating your <i>own</i> acts of empathy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ "(Child)'s mom is filling out a form, so I am holding their baby brother. I think they're a little nervous because I'm a stranger. I'm bouncing them and patting their back to help them feel safe and calm." ◆ "I think you are feeling sad that your mom left. Can I sit with you for a while?" ◆ "I see (Child) is really frustrated with the train tracks, I'm going to go over there to see if I can help."
SCAFFOLD I	<p>Prompt Children to Consider the Needs/Feelings of Others</p> <p>Prompt children to consider how feelings are related to their <i>own</i> behaviors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ "How do you think they feel when you push by them to get to the front of the line? Do you think they are excited to go outside just like you?" ◆ "Wow, you were really kind to help (Child) clean up the milk they spilled. How do you think they felt?" <p>Or others' feelings that they do not have a hand in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ (With peer, puppet, or character in a book) "I think they're crying because they miss their mom, what do you think?" ◆ (Walking past young classroom) "I hear a baby crying. What do you think could be bothering them?" <p>It may be challenging for some children to take the perspective of others. To help bridge the connection, relate the experience to the child's point of view. For example, "(Child) is crying because they bumped their knee. Do you remember when you bumped your knee yesterday (<i>point to child's knee</i>)? That hurt! But you felt better after we put some ice on it. What do you think would help (Child) feel better?"</p> <p>Note: Use a Feelings Chart or picture cards to help children identify or discuss feelings. This is especially helpful for non-verbal children or dual language learners.</p>
SCAFFOLD II	<p>Prompt Children to Provide Care for Others</p> <p>Prompt children to show acts of kindness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ "What do you think could help them feel better? Would a hug make them feel happier?" ◆ "Do you think our fish is feeling hungry? What should we do? Can you show me the picture of what we should do?" ◆ "The class from across the hall is coming to our room for a visit. I wonder if they will feel excited and/or nervous in a new place. What can we do to make them feel welcome and safe?"
KEEP IT GOING	<p>Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.</p>