



PARENT NEWSLETTER - EMPATHY!

This month our focus is on building **Empathy**. All the Umbrella Skills can be built with practice and this month we are working to build the empathy piece of your child's umbrella of wellbeing skills.

What will empathy do for my child? CREATE STRONG SOCIAL NETWORKS.

Empathy is the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and understand what they may be feeling. It is a key ingredient to successful relationships with our friends and family. High levels of empathy result in lower levels of conflict, better problem solving. It also helps us make new friends, keep the ones we have and build a stronger social network.

Having a strong social network helps us live longer and is one of the best predictors of our health and happiness.

Each week we will add one simple step you can use at home to build your child's umbrella skills.

EMPATHY TIP #1

Help your child recognize and label their own feelings.

Understanding what you are feeling in a given situation helps children learn to empathize. When we ignore or suppress feelings it's difficult to understand them in others. At home, make sure your child understands that all of their feelings are okay, including sadness, anger, frustration and how to recognize those feelings. Help them give these feelings a label. Then set clear boundaries about what is and isn't okay to do with the feelings. For example, it's normal to feel angry at a sibling but not okay to hit them as a result. This simple step helps children learn to calm themselves, cope better with life's ups and downs and empathize with others.

EMPATHY TIP #2

End your day with "High low high"

This is a quick exercise you can do around the dinner table or as a family before bedtime.

Have each member of your family recall a high point, a low point and then another high point of their day or week. Take time to listen to each person and ask questions if you want. In order to practice empathy for someone else, we need to understand their journey.



For your kids, it's very beneficial to hear what went well in your day, what you are proud of and also the challenges you are working through. For parents, this is a great way to get your kids talking about the specifics of their day and improve your parental empathy for the daily rain they face.

EMPATHY TIP #3

Start a phone bin

Technology provides us with a great many benefits but one downfall is its impact on our empathy levels. When we are immersed in our devices we get less practice with face-to-face interactions, communication and interpreting people's feelings, all key components of empathy.

To build empathy this week, start to carve out device-free time in your home with a phone bin. Use it over dinner, while playing a family game or walking to get ice cream. Maybe it's over dinner, while playing a family game or walking to get ice cream. Have everyone with a device throw it in the bin and just enjoy each other's company without distraction. Try to find a few chances every week to connect this way.

Time without technology is critical in helping our children develop empathy. Even before they themselves have these devices, our empathy levels as parents are impacted by this divided attention and we are modelling behaviours that are very important for our child's future development. In my home, I find my 7 and 9 year old will ask for this device-free time now. A great start for when they get their own technology to manage.

EMPATHY TIP #4

Help kids see what they have in common with others.

Having high empathy is linked with increased happiness and scholastic achievement.

To build this important skill help kids see what they have in common with others. One of the biggest predictors of prejudism and a failure to empathize with members of other groups, is having little or no contact with people who aren't like you.

Research shows that schools can boost empathy by fostering an inclusive, warm attitude towards cultural diversity and you can do this at home too.

Take stock of how often your kids play with others who are different than them. Do your girls play with boys and vice versa? What about other cultures? What about the adults around them? How wide is your child's perspective? Encourage diversity to learn about and empathize with others.



See this blog for a more detailed look at coaching children through the challenges of building empathy: <https://umbrellaproject.co/category/empathy/>

Health and happiness,

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