



PARENT SENSE VICKI CURRAN, EDS, LPC

Understanding how others feel

"Do you know what that feels like?" It's an important question to ask our children.

Having conversations about feelings [and being able to put ourselves into someone else's shoes] teaches kids to be "empathetic".

Dr. Michele Borba, author of "UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World" says that "empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another and feeling with the heart of another."

Our children are living in a world with an "empathy crisis." A study from the University of Michigan found that empathy has decreased by 40 percent and narcissism has increased by 58 percent over the past three decades.

It's not all that surprising when we think about the world our children are growing up in — a world driven by the need to post pictures of themselves for approval or recognition from others.

With media promoting a self-focused attitude, treating others the way we want to be treated sometimes gets overlooked.

So what's a parent to do? How do we help our children to be kind and develop a moral identity that questions the values all around them?

In "UnSelfie," Dr. Borba states: "We have to build our children from the inside out and focus on what triggers their hearts."

Here are some suggestions to try:

LABELING EMOTIONS

Help children label the emotions they are feeling [and label yours to model for them]. Once children become better at identifying their own emotions, they are better able to identify emotions in others and then empathize with them.

DISCOVERING COMMONALITY

Help children discover what they have in common with other people. It is much

easier to feel empathy for someone when we perceive them to be similar to us. The truth is, people have far more similarities than differences but, unfortunately, we focus more on the things that are different. Reminding our children that we might look different on the outside but we all feel happy when we enjoy the things we like, we all become upset or frustrated when we can't accomplish something and we all feel hurt when we aren't accepted, helps them to remember that in the end, we're all human.

SEEING THE OTHER SIDE

Teach children the ability to take another person's perspective, not just to understand their feelings. Thinking about the other person's experience helps children to imagine what actions might make that person feel better. Reading stories and discussing the characters' feelings and perspectives offers excellent opportunities for

teaching empathy. Eventually this can be extended by having our children solve a problem with someone by answering the following questions from the other person's perspective:

What happened?

How do they feel about what happened?

What would they like to say about the situation?

What do they think is the best way to solve this problem so that both of you are satisfied?

BENEFITING OTHERS

Teach them how to be of benefit to others and society — how to make a positive difference in the world. Volunteering allows children to become aware of what life can be like for others. Not only are they helping, but they get exposure to social problems that will make them informed citizens as they grow up.

As parents, part of our job in this day and age may be to try and shift the focus from a "me" to a "we" attitude.

If we can start in our own homes with respect for everyone's feelings and by practicing some of the above steps, perhaps we can eventually extend these skills beyond our own four walls!

For more information or a list of local licensed professionals, contact Coastal Community Counseling Resources at 732-612-3148.