



Encouraging Empathy

Empathy is the ability to imagine how someone else is feeling in a certain situation and respond with care.

Being able to empathize with another person means that your child:

- Understands that other people may have thoughts and feelings different from their own
- Recognizes common feelings like happy, sad, angry, scared, etc.
- Can watch a situation—like seeing a child saying goodbye to their mommy—and relate to how another person might feel
- Can respond with appropriate behaviors without being asked to. For example, giving a hug to comfort someone.

What does a child need to develop empathy?

- A secure and loving relationship with their primary caregiver(s)—this could mean mom, dad, or someone else close to them
- Ability to consider how someone else feels (begins at 6 months)
- A beginning realization that other people's thoughts and feelings can differ from their own (begins 18–24 months)
- Ability to know him or herself in a mirror or picture (begins 18–24 months).

How do I nurture empathy in my child?

- Empathize with your child
- Talk about feelings (good and bad)
- Suggest ways your child can show empathy (“He seems scared because he’s all alone, why don’t you go stand next to him?”)
- Read stories about feelings

[I Am Happy: A Touch and Feel Book of Feelings](#) by Steve Light

[My Many Colored Days](#) by Dr. Seuss

[The Feelings Book](#) by Todd Parr

- When your child is upset, frustrated, sad, or experiencing any difficult emotion, let them know the emotion is okay and don't rush to immediately fix it
- Use pretend play to experience how others feel
- Help your child focus on how other people are feeling (for example, ask “Why do you think she’s smiling?”)
- Help your child understand how their actions affect others