

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From ***What's the Buzz?*** A social skills enrichment programme for primary students



Lesson 10: responding to others (*empathy*)

This lesson focused on how to respond to the emotional needs of others by using empathy. Your child learnt that to show empathy they need to display two behaviours -

1. They need to say something that shows they understand how the other person must be feeling.
2. They need to do or say something to comfort the person, or gives them hope.

This is how empathy works. As empathy is a highly valued quality in the social world - it can make, repair and strengthen friendships - here are a few ideas parents may wish to use or adapt to support your child's emergence into the social world.

Teach by example

A natural way to teach empathy our children is for us to show empathy and compassion at every opportunity that presents itself. Our children never stop watching and learning from us!

The art to managing our children's emotions empathetically

When your child is upset over an incident, refrain from saying, "*Hey, stop making such a big deal out of it*" or "*Why are you so upset over that?*" The more parents say "*get over it*" the more children are likely to feel not listened to. In contrast, spontaneously jumping in to find a solution for them, or to spend too much time chatting about the issue, are counter-productive strategies. Both strategies steer children away from developing flexible, independent patterns of recovery. There truly is an art to managing our children's emotions empathetically. It begins with accepting that from time to time they must experience being upset or unhappy. These are real and normal feelings. The most helpful approach is to acknowledge how your child is feeling by recognising their upset or disappointment. They need to know that you are there to listen, empathise, understand and suggest, but you are not responsible for creating their happiness or solutions to their upsets.

Teach your child how to think and live compassionately

An easy way to do this is to watch a movie together. Many movies and sitcoms are wonderful as a springboard to observe the behaviours of others. Together, play with questions as;

Why a character was liked?

Why another was disliked? Did you dislike them?

What could have they said or done to help others like them more?

Was there a reason for them to behave like this?

Who was their favourite character? Why? What qualities did they show that you liked?

Who was their least favourite character? Why?

Who was the hero? What made them a hero?

Who was the victim? How could you tell? Was it their fault? Was it anyone's fault?

What reasons do you have to make this judgment?



If you had of been 'so and so' what would have you done to make things better?

Observing behaviour and emotion in this way guides children to see the complexities behind human interactions. An extraordinary display of frustration, where the character expresses his emotions with overt anger and aggression, albeit humorously, is seen in Basil Fawlty in *Fawlty Towers*. Even after 30 years this series makes for wonderful discussion. Basil's bad temper in combination with having to be right and needing the last say causes him so much trouble.

Play, what if?

To do this read the scenario below to the family.

"Dakota, your good friend and someone you have known for ages, has been picking on a quiet kid who is new to your class. Actually you like Jono, the new boy. He has similar interests to you and seems friendly. At first, you thought what Dakota was doing was funny, but now it's getting serious. Jono tries to stay away from Dakota, but Dakota seems to track him down and pick on him. You can see Jono is becoming more and more upset. Dakota and a few others still think it's funny."

What could you SAY or DO to show understanding and kindness to both Dakota and Jono? Discuss this together. Remember, to respond with empathy two things need to happen -

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how the other person must be feeling.
2. Do or say something to comfort the other person and give them hope.

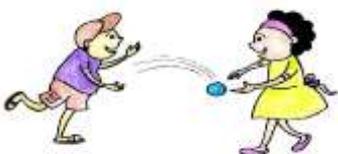
Learning to say "sorry" matters!

Some find it difficult to say, and others throw "sorry" about nonchalantly to excuse anything they do. Used genuinely, "sorry" can repair so many situations. Explore what "sorry" is about, when to use it and how it can be said sincerely. Have fun with your children role-playing situations where "sorry" might be helpful. Try "sorry" with a smile, a touch, a wink, a handshake, a rub on someone's arm or a hug. Coach your child to understand that saying "sorry" isn't an admission of wrong doing and it may not always be accepted by another. However, it is a powerful gesture to reduce resentment and allow relationships to heal and grow.

Helping others

A practical way for your child to give pleasure to others, and see it returned, is to arrange for them to prepare a meal for the family each week or fortnight. Sure, some support may be required, but with a little help and supervision most seven year olds are capable of preparing a simple meal for their family. Nudging children to do more for themselves, and for others, helps children to stretch their independence and thoughtfulness.

Without wishing to upset any parent, a good number of the children with memory weaknesses, social delay and behavioural immaturities often have their well-meaning mothers and fathers squarely in their service. Many become accustomed to receiving help and lose opportunities to give to others. Perhaps the next step is to steer your children to help others outside the family. The idea of giving back and doing thoughtful things for others instantly immerses them in an emotionally broader and richer world. As they see and absorb the thoughts and feelings of others a more empathic view of life is promoted. Ask yourself, how long is it since your child sent a thank-you card, a small present, a warm email, a friendly note, a hand-made card or made a phone call to someone who has been helpful or needs their spirits raised? Start by setting them up to deliver kindnesses. Teaching how to care to children underpins that they themselves are cared for.



"The only way to have a friend is to be one."

Ralph Waldo Emerson