

Lesson 30: Fostering Empathy

“All I ever wanted was to reach out and touch another human being not just with my hands but with my heart.” —Tahereh Mafi

Social Justice Standards: Diversity 9, Justice 12

Summary

As caregivers, we hope for a strong foundation of care, kindness, and understanding in our children. Empathy gives us the capacity to take on another experience or perspective and is at the heart of this work. We can do this by modeling empathy, keeping our messages and conversation clear, and allowing our children to practice empathy through various opportunities. We want our children to practice compassion by zooming out beyond their perspective and leaning in to their curiosity with respect and dignity. As educators, you can model empathy in your classroom and encourage your students to practice compassion. Since young children are naturally egocentric, it is up to the adults in their lives to nurture their other natural capacity—empathy.

Booklist

- *Milo Imagines the World* by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson
- *Fishing Day* by Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Shane W. Evans
- *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts, illustrated by Noah Z. Jones
- *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by E. B. Lewis
- *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by E. B. Lewis
- *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman, illustrated by Caroline Binch
- *Big Red Lollipop* by Rukhsana Khan, illustrated by Sophie Blackall
- *The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family* by Ibtihaj Muhammad and S. K. Ali, illustrated by Hatem Aly

Consider This

- What is your earliest memory of experiencing empathy? Has it had an impact on you through life?
- Why is empathy important to you? How do you find yourself keeping up with this practice and mindset?
- Can you think of a time in your life, whether it be at home or outside of the home, when empathy was needed but absent? How could the situation have changed if empathy was a part of the narrative?
- Knowing that we cannot empathize with every experience, how does empathy show up in your anti-racist journey?

Talk Together

- Have you ever felt sad for someone? What did you do?
- We try to treat others with kindness and respect, how would it feel if someone did not treat you that way? What about if someone else was not treated that way?
- Can you think of a time when you made a connection to someone's experience? Has anything happened to a friend that has also happened to you?

Engage

- Identify feelings. While looking at books or other media (television, games, etc.) name the different feelings that the characters are experiencing. Encourage conversation around why they may be feeling that way. You can also make a personal connection naming a time you have felt that same feeling.
- Role play. One way to help children practice empathy is by giving them opportunities to react and engage. Learning empathy takes guidance and practice, so create scenarios where children can practice taking on your perspective and tuning in to your feelings by responding to your problems.

Explore More

- "How to Help Your Child Develop Empathy" by Rebecca Parlakian (Zero to Three, February 1, 2016)
- "How Children Develop Empathy" by Erin Walsh and David Walsh (Psychology Today, May 9, 2019)
- Very Special Tales' "Empathy Activities for Kids" (February 27, 2022)