

RAISING EMPATHETIC CHILDREN

By Ken Sande

1. Empathy can start at two
 - a. "I wipe your tears, Mommy"
 - b. Individuation opens the door for empathy

2. It's a bumpy road
 - a. Indwelling sin is a constant impediment (as illustrated throughout the Book of Proverbs), which requires a daily outpouring of the gospel.
 - b. Our brains are not fully wired until our mid-twenties, so empathy develops in phases ... and sometimes goes backwards

3. Practical Ways to Promote Empathy

At All Ages

- Recognize your unique role as a parent.
- Be patient and forgiving as your child stumbles and grows in relational skills (Rom. 2:4).
- Weave the gospel into daily life (Titus 2:11-14).
- Pray without ceasing.
- Establish a secure and trusting relationship with your child (Heb. 13:5).
- Be open with your own emotions (John 11:35), using the [READ](#) acrostic.
- Model empathy (1 Cor. 11:1), using the [EMPATHY](#) acrostic.

With Young Children

- Affirm empathetic behavior in your children.
- Use Bible stories to illustrate empathy (e.g., Ruth 1:7-19; 1Sam. 20:41).
- Empathize with your child.
- Talk with your child about others' feelings.

- Read stories about feelings.
- Use pretending to introduce older toddlers to emotion and empathy.
- Use role plays to enable your children to practice and learn empathy. (Our *Young Peacemaker Curriculum* contains illustrated stories and role plays that are well-suited for such use.)
- Talk openly about your child's unpleasant emotions.

With Older Children

- Describe how other people have shown empathy to you, and explain why you appreciated it.
- Use books and movies to help children to develop both cognitive and affective.
- Use news reports and current events in the same way.
- Study and discuss famous empathetic people, such as Abraham Lincoln, Florence Nightingale, Albert Schweitzer, Hudson Taylor, Corrie ten Boom, Oskar Schindler, Nelson Mandela, and Mother Theresa.
- Expose children to situations that stimulate healthy emotions and compassionate actions.

4. Beneficial Life Outcomes

- Their lives are more likely to reflect the character of Christ and be pleasing to God (Eph. 5:1-2).
- Protecting, comforting, and helping others will come more naturally to them (1Thess. 5:14-15).
- They will have greater social competence, which contributes to deeper friendships and more intimate and stable marriages.
- Behavioral studies show a direct correlation between empathy and knowing right from wrong, as well as creative thinking and problem solving.
- They will be more skilled at team-building, collaborating, negotiating, and conflict resolution, all of which contribute to vocational success and advancement.
- Empathetic people are more likely to be humble, open-minded, and able to connect with and learn from a variety of people, all of which contribute to being a life-long learner.

"Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind" (1 Pet. 3:8).

Further study:

- See www.rw360.org/empatheticchildren for more details on activities list above
- Subscribe to RW blog at www.rw360.org/blog
- Download the *RW360 Smartphone App* (www.rw360.org/app)
- Online training in relational wisdom at www.rw-academy.org (50% coupon: "hmschl50")