



Building Moral Intelligence

The Seven Essential Virtues That Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing

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JOSSEY-BASS
A Wiley Company
San Francisco



Contents

Foreword by Thomas Lickona	xi
Acknowledgments	xv
Introduction	1
The 1st Essential Virtue: Empathy	13
The 2nd Essential Virtue: Conscience	45
The 3rd Essential Virtue: Self-Control	81
The 4th Essential Virtue: Respect	119
The 5th Essential Virtue: Kindness	157
The 6th Essential Virtue: Tolerance	191
The 7th Essential Virtue: Fairness	229
Epilogue	267
Resources for Building Moral Intelligence	269
Notes	291
Book Discussion Guide	303
About the Author	307
Index	309



Introduction

*Sow a thought and you reap an act; sow an act and you reap a habit;
sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap
a destiny.*

CHARLES READE

There is a clear and pressing crisis in today's society, one that involves our most cherished possession: our children. Everyone agrees there is a problem; lawmakers, doctors, clergy, businesspeople, educators, parents, and the general public alike have voiced their concerns. And concerned we all should be. Each day's news adds to a growing litany of shocking tragedies and statistics about American kids, and they've left us shaken, deeply worried, and in search of answers.

By far our biggest worry is youth violence, and that alone should warrant a national declaration of emergency. Although the hard data on youth crime and violence show a recent decline, there is little cause for comfort: the American Academy of Pediatrics reports that the United States has the

highest youth homicide and suicide rates among the twenty-six wealthiest nations in the world. In fact, our kids are *ten times* more likely to commit murder than comparably aged youths in Canada. Perhaps most disturbing is that our killers are getting younger and younger. As I write, this week a six-year-old intentionally suffocated her three-year-old brother with the help of her five-year-old friend. Just months earlier, a six-year-old boy settled a schoolyard score by killing his first-grade classmate with a .32 semiautomatic. Each incident is unthinkable, yet others equally horrifying follow.

There are other signs that stir our national conscience as well. Peer cruelty is steadily increasing: an estimated 160,000 children each day miss school for fear of being picked on by their peers, and, considering the accessibility of weapons, the potential for physical injury is high. Other disturbing indicators include substance abuse among younger kids; the growing disrespect for parents, teachers, and other legitimate authority figures; the rise of incivility; the increase of vulgarity; and widespread cheating and commonplace dishonesty. A recent national survey of 10,000 high school students revealed that nearly half admit they stole something from a store in the previous year; one in four said they would lie to get a job; and seven in ten admitted to cheating on an exam within the previous twelve months. Heavy alcohol and drug use is increasing among our younger kids: recent studies found 22 percent of fifth graders have been drunk at least once, and the *average* age at which a child first uses marijuana is twelve. In two decades, the number of diagnoses of hyperactivity and attention deficits has risen 700 percent. In the last four decades, adolescent suicide in our country has increased 300 percent, and depression has risen 1,000 percent. These statistics are especially frightening when you consider that in one survey, over one-half of American teenagers reported they can get a gun in an hour and one in four high school students say they took a weapon to school at least once in the past year. Our kids are troubled and our crises continues.

These episodes and statistics distress us, of course, and as a nation we are reacting in alarm: school officials have installed metal detectors and

stricter gun control; the president of the United States called for emergency summit meetings of congressional leaders; some parents have started charter schools, while others have opted for home schooling; lawmakers passed laws to prosecute juveniles as adults, and the courts sentenced them as such. We've tried an endless variety of educational strategies as well: teachers have taught self-esteem and conflict resolution skills, and counselors have addressed social skills and anger management. Individual states have implemented retention policies, lowered class sizes, and boosted academic standards. Psychologists have even developed complete new theories: Howard Gardner revolutionized our understanding of children's cognitive capacities with his view of multiple intelligences, as Daniel Goleman did in transforming our awareness of emotional intelligence.

Despite our frantic efforts, however, the crisis remains, and we know so because our children are still hurting. That's because we have missed one critical piece: the moral side of our children's lives. It is moral strength that kids need most to keep their ethical bearings in this often morally toxic world. Moral issues haven't been completely overlooked: the work of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg has helped us understand the stages of children's moral reasoning; William Bennett provided literature anthologies to cultivate kids' moral imaginations; William Kilpatrick's book *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong*, offered ways to engage our youth in moral reflection. But in these troubling times, parents need far more if they are to succeed in helping their kids not only *think* morally but also *act* morally, and unless children know how to act right, their moral development is defective. After all, we've always known that the true measure of character rests in our actions—not in mere thoughts.

Enhancing our children's moral intelligence is our best hope for getting our kids on the right course so that they do act as well as think right. It's also our best hope for their developing the traits of solid character. In his book *The Moral Intelligence of Children*, Robert Coles wrote of the urgent need to address this crucial aptitude in our children. Developing this miraculous

moral capacity in your child is the best way to protect his moral life now and forever, and *Building Moral Intelligence* will teach you how.

MORAL INTELLIGENCE: THE BEST HOPE FOR SAVING OUR KIDS' MORAL LIVES

Moral intelligence is the capacity to understand right from wrong; it means to have strong ethical convictions and to act on them so that one behaves in the right and honorable way. This wonderful aptitude encompasses such essential life characteristics as the ability to recognize someone's pain and to stop oneself from acting on cruel intentions; to control one's impulses and delay gratification; to listen openly to all sides before judging; to accept and appreciate differences; to decipher unethical choices; to empathize; to stand up against injustice; and to treat others with compassion and respect. These are the core traits that will help your child become a decent, good human being; they are the bedrock of solid character and strong citizenship, and they are ones we want most for our kids.

It's increasingly apparent that a number of kids are in serious trouble because they've never acquired moral intelligence. With only flimsy consciences, poor impulse control, underdeveloped moral sensitivity, and misguided beliefs, they are greatly handicapped. Although the causes of moral decline are complex, one fact is undeniable: the moral atmosphere in which today's kids are being raised is toxic to moral intelligence, for two major reasons. First, a number of critical social factors that nurture moral character are slowly disintegrating: adult supervision, models of moral behavior, spiritual or religious training, meaningful adult relationships, personalized schools, clear national values, community support, stability, and adequate parenting. Second, our kids are being steadily bombarded with outside messages that go against the very values we are trying to instill. Both factors are contributing greatly to our kids' moral demise as well as to their loss of innocence.

Our challenge is even tougher because those incessant toxic messages come from a variety of sources to which our kids have extremely easy access. Television, movies, video games, popular music, and advertising are certainly among the worst moral offenders because they flaunt cynicism, disrespect, materialism, casual sex, vulgarity, and the glorification of violence. The amount of bad stuff in cyberspace is staggering: pornography, stalkers, satanism, pedophiles, and so many new hate sites even the best filters can't screen them all. Of course the popular media aren't the only toxic influences; anyone or anything that counters your family's moral convictions is a potential threat, so add peers, other adults, and even the evening news to your list.

The truth is that toxic influences are so entrenched in our culture that shielding your child from them is almost impossible. Even if you've blocked their accessibility and prohibit them in your home, once your child steps outside they lurk at every corner. That's why it's crucial that you build his moral intelligence so he has a deeply developed inner sense of right and wrong and can use it to stand up against those outside influences. Moral intelligence will be the muscle he needs to counter those negative pressures and will give him the power to act right with or without your guidance.

The best news is that *moral intelligence is learned*, and you can start building it when your kids are toddlers. Although at that age they certainly don't have the cognitive capacities to handle complex moral reasoning, that's when the rudiments of moral habits—such as exercising self-control, being fair, showing respect, sharing, and empathizing—are first acquired. In fact, the latest research on moral development finds that babies six months of age are already responding to others' distress and acquiring the foundation for empathy. The mistake parents often make is waiting until their kids are six or seven—the so-called Age of Reason—to cultivate their moral capabilities. Parents' delaying in this way only increases children's potential for learning destructive negative habits that erode moral growth and make it so much harder for them to change.

Although moral intelligence can be learned, achieving it is far from guaranteed. It must be consciously modeled and nurtured, and because you are your child's first and most important moral instructor, there is no one better than you to inspire these essential moral virtues. The sooner you begin purposefully cultivating your child's capacity for moral intelligence, the better her chances of acquiring the foundation she'll need to develop solid character and of growing to think, believe, and act morally.

THE SEVEN ESSENTIAL VIRTUES OF MORAL INTELLIGENCE

Moral intelligence consists of seven essential virtues—*empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness*—that help your child navigate through the ethical challenges and pressures she will inevitably face throughout life. These core virtues are what give her the moral bearings by which to stay on the path of goodness and to help her behave morally. Or, as a seven-year-old told me, "They're the things in me that help me be good." *And all can be taught, modeled, inspired, and reinforced so that your child can achieve them.* Here are the seven essential virtues that will nurture a lifelong sense of decency in your child:

1. *Empathy* is the core moral emotion that allows your child to understand how other people feel. This is the virtue that helps him become more sensitive to the needs and feelings of others, be more likely to help those who are hurt or troubled, and treat others more compassionately. It is also the powerful moral emotion that urges your child to do what is right because he can recognize the impact of emotional pain on others, stopping him from acting cruelly.
2. *Conscience* is a strong inner voice that helps your child decide right from wrong and stay on the moral path, zapping her with a dose of guilt whenever she strays. This virtue fortifies your child against forces coun-

tering goodness and enables her to act right even in the face of temptation. It is the cornerstone for the development of the crucial virtues of honesty, responsibility, and integrity.

3. *Self-control* helps your child restrain his impulses and think before he acts so that he behaves right and is less likely to make rash choices with potentially dangerous outcomes. This is the virtue that helps your child become self-reliant because he knows he can control his actions. It is also the virtue that motivates generosity and kindness because it helps your child put aside what would give him immediate gratification and stirs his conscience to do something for someone else instead.

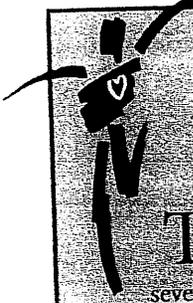
4. *Respect* encourages your child to treat others with consideration because she regards them as worthy. This is the virtue that leads your child to treat others the way she would like to be treated, and so lays the foundation to preventing violence, injustice, and hatred. When your child makes respect a part of her daily living, she will be more likely to care about the rights and feelings of others; as a result, she will show greater respect for herself, too.

5. *Kindness* helps your child show his concern about the welfare and feelings of others. By developing this virtue, your child will become less selfish and more compassionate, and he will understand that treating others kindly is simply the right thing to do. When your child achieves kindness, he will think more about the needs of others, show concern, offer to help those in need, and stick up for those who are hurt or troubled.

6. *Tolerance* helps your child appreciate different qualities in others, stay open to new perspectives and beliefs, and respect others regardless of differences in race, gender, appearance, culture, beliefs, abilities, or sexual orientation. This is the virtue that influences your child to treat others with kindness and understanding, to stand up against hatred, violence, and bigotry, and to respect people primarily on the basis of their character.

7. *Fairness* leads your child to treat others in a righteous, impartial, and just way so that she will be more likely to play by the rules, take turns

and share, and listen openly to all sides before judging. Because this virtue increases your child's moral sensitivity, she will have the courage to stick up for those treated unfairly and demand that all people—regardless of race, culture, economic status, ability, or creed—be regarded equally.



MORAL INTELLIGENCE BUILDER

The Seven Essential Virtues of Moral Intelligence and Solid Character

The seven essential virtues that follow comprise the complete plan for building your child's moral intelligence provided in this book. These seven traits are what your child needs most to do what's right and resist any pressures that may defy the habits of solid character and good ethical living.

<i>Virtue</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Empathy	Identifying with and feeling other people's concerns
Conscience	Knowing the right and decent way to act and acting that way
Self-control	Regulating your thoughts and actions so that you stop any pressures from within or without and act the way you know and feel is right
Respect	Showing you value others by treating them in a courteous and considerate way
Kindness	Demonstrating concern about the welfare and feelings of others
Tolerance	Respecting the dignity and rights of all persons, even those whose beliefs and behaviors differ from our own
Fairness	Choosing to be open minded and to act in a just and fair way

BUILDING MORAL INTELLIGENCE STEP BY STEP

Building Moral Intelligence provides a step by step blueprint for enhancing your child's moral capacity based on the ethical principles of these seven essential virtues. This book provides you with the tools to teach these critical principles to your child. Each time your child achieves another virtue, she expands her moral intelligence capacities even further, and she climbs another rung on the moral development ladder.

Three virtues form the foundation of your child's moral intelligence: *empathy*, *conscience*, and *self-control*. In truth, they are so critical to moral intelligence that I call them the *moral core*. When any one of the three is underdeveloped, the child is left morally defenseless against toxic influences coming his way; when all three of the core elements are weak, the child becomes a time bomb waiting to explode. A solid core is crucial to developing children's moral intelligence because it gives kids the power to counter outside and inside vices so that they do what's right.

Once the foundation to moral growth is solidly laid, the next two virtues of moral intelligence can be added: *respect*, a deep valuing of all life; and *kindness*, which is a sense of human decency and compassion in relationships. The final virtues, *tolerance* and *fairness*, are the cornerstones to integrity, justice, and citizenship. Together, these seven virtues become your child's moral compass, guiding her toward responsible living and ethical conduct. They are the tools she will use to chart her moral fate.

Once your child achieves these essential seven virtues, her moral education is by no means complete. Moral growth is an ongoing process that continues throughout your child's lifetime, and along the way she'll be adding dozens more virtues to her moral repertoire; in fact, morality experts have identified more than four hundred virtues. As her moral intelligence capacities expand and if the right conditions for moral growth are present, she'll have the potential to attain even higher moral virtues, such as self-discipline, humility, courage, temperance, integrity, mercy, and altruism. But the origin of her moral I.Q. will always consist of the seven

essential virtues that you helped her achieve. She will use these virtues as a template for creating her character and defining her humanity, and she'll refer to them the rest of her life.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

What you have in your hands is a guide to teaching the traits of moral intelligence most needed by children and teens in today's troubled world. I've purposely ordered the seven essential virtues into a logical teaching sequence. Because the virtues of empathy, conscience, and self-control lay the foundation for the later virtues—respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness—I urge you to focus first on building these three core virtues. This approach gives your child the best foundation for solid moral growth.

To help you build these seven essential virtues, each chapter offers a wealth of research-based practical strategies for enhancing moral intelligence. The goal of these activities is to teach your child new moral habits she'll need to lead a good and moral life, so choose the ones you feel are best suited to her unique temperament and learning style. Although the content of this book is quite serious, the activities are designed to be *fun, relaxing, and enjoyable*. I hope this is the tone with which you and your child will work together. Here's what you'll find in each chapter to help you expand your child's moral intelligence:

- *A self-test to evaluate your child's virtue strength.* You can use this tool to help you assess how well your child is presently achieving the virtue and to pinpoint any areas that may be hindering her moral growth.

- *Practical ways to enhance the virtue.* Literally dozens of practical suggestions and activities are provided to teach the virtue and model the behaviors associated with it. Throughout each chapter you'll also find Moral Intelligence Builders—easily distinguishable in their bordered boxes—that discuss other simple, research-based ways to boost the virtue.

tell your child about a real child who demonstrated the virtue and made a positive difference in the world. It will help your child recognize the virtue's power and think of ways he too might make a difference in the world.

- *Discussion questions about the virtue.* Also included are questions to pose to your child to help her think about the importance of using the virtue in her life. These can be springboards for you to use in talking together about real dilemmas your child has faced or may face in the future, important moral issues in the world, and how to make moral choices that are wise and ethical.

- *Further resources to enhance the virtue.* At the back of the book is a Resources section, organized by chapter, that lists wonderful children's literature selections, videos, websites, and organizations to share with your child. You can use these resources to expand her understanding of the virtue, encouraging her to incorporate it into her life.

SHAPING OUR CHILDREN'S MORAL DESTINIES

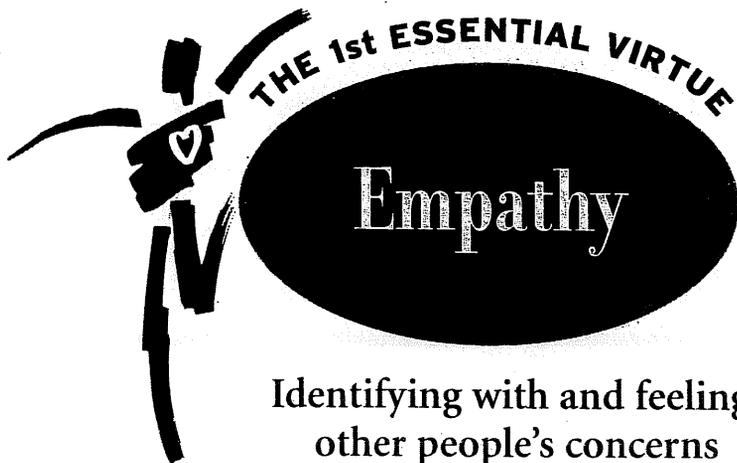
Teaching any new habit—especially those as important as the behaviors associated with these seven essential virtues—takes time, commitment, and patience. Of course, the optimum goal is for our kids to become less and less dependent on our moral guidance by incorporating these moral principles into their daily lives and making them their own. That can happen only if you emphasize the importance of the virtues over and over and your child repeatedly practices these moral behaviors. After all, that's how people learn habits and internalize principles, as Aristotle pointed out hundreds of years ago when he said, "We are what we repeatedly do." Consistent, repeated, short lessons about these virtues are precisely what your child needs to achieve them.

Also keep in mind that *telling* your child about the virtue is never as powerful as *showing* what the quality looks like by demonstrating it in your own life. Try to make your life a living example of these seven virtues

for your child to see. Doing so is the surest way to help your child "catch" them and want to use them in his own life both now and later.

As parents and teachers, we can no longer sit back and hope our kids become caring and decent human beings. Too many societal influences are endangering our children's moral growth. There is an answer to our fears, and it lies in what all the research tells us: *we can make a difference in our children's lives because the seven essential virtues that build moral intelligence are learned—and we can teach them.* Deliberately teaching these virtues at home, at school, and in our communities is the best assurance we have that our kids will lead decent, moral lives.

Building our children's moral intelligence capacities will be perhaps our greatest legacy. It can affect *every* aspect of their lives now as well as the quality of their future relationships, professions, productivity, parenting skills, citizenship—even their contributions to art, commerce, and literature and to their local community and society as a whole. These virtues are timeless: they will remain vital long after our children leave home to begin their adult lives, and use the virtues to raise their own children. Because the moral foundation we provide for our children now is what ultimately will define their reputations as human beings, building that foundation may well be our most crucial and challenging task as parents. And we haven't a moment to lose, for the moral destinies of our sons and daughters are at stake. Are you up for the challenge?



In 1997, eleven-year-old Nathaniel Abraham from Pontiac, Michigan, told his friend that he was going to shoot somebody. He allegedly stole a gun and practiced his aim on stationary targets. Then he walked to a convenience store, pointed his gun at a stranger, and shot Ronnie Greene Jr. in the head. The eighteen-year-old youth died hours later. The next day the sixth grader bragged about the killing to his friends. At his trial, Nathaniel turned and looked at his mother and other relatives and showed no emotion as he was convicted. The sixty-five-pound youth became one of nation's youngest children charged with first-degree murder.

On February 1993, two-year-old James Bulger was separated from his mother in a shopping center in Liverpool, England. A security camera showed two ten-year-olds, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, leading the toddler away. The boys threw more than twenty bricks at the two-year-old, kicked him, tore off his lower lip, stripped him, and possibly molested him. They then left James's body on the tracks to appear as though the murder were accidental, and went into a video store to watch cartoons on television.

On a school snow day in northeast Pennsylvania, nine-year-old Cameron Kocher was playing Nintendo with Jessica Carr, age seven. A parent stopped the game because the kids had made a mess and the two had argued; Cameron went home angry. He then took a rifle from his family gun cabinet, went back and shot Jessica, and hid the spent cartridge. As Jessica's mother futilely tried to save her daughter, Cameron went back to playing Nintendo. Later he told the other kids who were crying over their friend's death, "If you don't think about it, you won't be sad."

Shocking as these stories are, they are true. Each involved grade school children who knew it was wrong to kill but did. They were all cold-hearted kids without an ounce of empathy—the one virtue that experts say could possibly have stopped them from committing their horrific acts. The good news is that empathy can be fostered in kids, and we can begin when they are very young. Doing so may be the best hope for preventing yet another tragic story.

THE CRISIS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMPATHY

Empathy, the first essential virtue of moral intelligence, is the ability to understand and feel for another person's concerns. It's the powerful emotion that halts violent and cruel behavior and urges us to treat others kindly. Because empathy emerges naturally and quite early, our children are born with a huge built-in advantage for their moral growth. But whether our kids will develop this marvelous capacity to feel for others is far from guaranteed. Although children are born with the capacity for empathy, it must be properly nurtured, or it will remain dormant. And therein lies the crisis: over the past years, many environmental factors that research has found to be critical to the enhancement of empathy are disappearing, replaced by more negative ones. Although there certainly are other conditions that hinder kids' capacities to feel for others, the following five factors are especially lethal in squelching empathy, and point to a crisis in its development.

Studies find that when it comes to enhancing kids' empathy, not just any parent will do. Milestone studies by John Gottman of the University of Washington found that the parents who are best at developing empathy in their children are those who are both actively involved in their kids' lives and emotionally available. That's why it's especially troubling that total one-on-one time between parents and their kids has dwindled dramatically over the past few decades. A university study found that today's mothers who work outside the home spend an average of eleven minutes a day in exclusive quality interaction time with their children on weekdays and about thirty minutes on weekends. The data for fathers were only eight and fourteen minutes, respectively. Nonworking mothers didn't fare much better, devoting an average of thirteen minutes per day. A recent poll taken of children as young as nine years old revealed that only 40 percent of boys and 50 percent of girls spent almost all weekend with their parents, and 25 percent of the young boys reported spending no hours with their families. The emotional availability of parents is diminishing for a number of reasons, including parental illness, death, work, fatigue, and divorce. Whatever the cause, critical empathy-building moments for kids are being lost as well.

Absence of Supportive Fathers

Research confirms what many have known all along: involved dads can make a major contribution to raising empathic kids. A long-term study begun in the 1950s, for instance, found that children whose fathers were positively involved in their care when they were age five were found thirty years later to be more empathic adults than those whose fathers were absent. Another study involving first-grade boys in intact families revealed that children whose fathers took more responsibility for their sons' discipline and schoolwork and were more involved in their children's personal problems had significantly higher levels of empathy. And this was true regardless of the father's own level of empathy.

Aside from the many fathers who don't take an active parenting role there are the troubling numbers who have chosen to be completely absent from their kids' lives. A recent White House report found that fewer than 25 percent of young boys and girls experience an average of at least one hour a day of relatively individualized contact with their fathers. The figures are particularly staggering for African American children: in 1994, 66 percent of black children lived in one-parent homes. So another critical nurturer of empathy—good old dad—is not at home to teach the lessons of compassion and right and wrong.

Barrage of Cruel Media Images

Over the past decade, our kids have been bombarded with television, movies, music, video and arcade games, and Internet content that emphasize violence, nastiness, and cruelty. It is affecting our kids. Here's why: behavior is generally learned by imitating observed experiences, so the more examples of caring our kids witness, the greater the chance that those will be the kinds of behaviors they copy. A number of studies have found that watching television programs with prosocial messages increases cooperation, sensitivity, and caring among children and that the children will tend to imitate those kind behaviors. Research also shows that those prosocial behaviors are substantially enhanced when parents watch with their children and discuss or role-play those kind behaviors.

Of course, the reverse is also true: the continual barrage of cruel images teaches our kids cruel behaviors that stifle their capacity for empathy. As Madeline Levins states in her book *See No Evil*, "There is a large body of research focusing on the effects of media violence on preschool children. Almost without exception, the research has found that viewing violence makes children more aggressive, more restless, more fearful, less creative, and less intuitive." The American Academy of Pediatrics points out that well over one thousand studies overwhelmingly conclude that viewing violent entertainment can increase aggressive values and behavior in children. They further state that viewing violence can desensitize

kids to empathy because it can decrease the likelihood that they will take action on behalf of victims when violence occurs.

Raising Boys to Mask Their Feelings

Studies find that when it comes to emotions, parents raise sons very differently than they do daughters. Parents discuss feelings more and use a greater array of words for emotions with their daughters than they do with their sons. They also encourage their daughters to share their feelings, whereas boys are typically told to mask their emotional pain. Considering that a major determinant of whether a child develops the ability to feel for others is how well he understands and can express his own feelings, it is easy to see that parents' attitudes toward their son's emotional expression can hinder a boy's empathy development.

William Pollack, author of *Real Boys*, explains, "Research shows that boys begin their lives with a natural sense of empathy, which is antithetical to violence. By second grade boys seem far less attuned to feelings of hurt and pain in others and begin to lose their capacity to express their own emotions and concerns in words." In fact, boys learn that the only emotion that it is socially acceptable for them to express is anger; other feelings must be stifled. And as their anger slowly intensifies, their potential for empathy is diminished. The result, Pollack notes, can be lethal: "This is the process that pushes boys to wear a mask of bravado. And this, in large part, is what makes them violent."

Abuse in the Cradle

Fascinating new research by Bruce Perry of Baylor College of Medicine finds that the first three years of a child's life are pivotal in building the capacity for empathy or planting the seeds of violence. A large determinant as to which way a child's moral development goes is how she is treated by her primary caregivers. Perry states that empathy can be greatly impaired in those first thirty-six months as a result of repeated stress—abuse, neglect, and trauma. Mark Barnett of Kansas State University

explains that if young kids “have not had their emotional needs satisfied, they may not realize that they need to be concerned about or sensitive toward others’ emotional needs.” Considering the staggering numbers of child abuse cases, we are forced to conclude that many of America’s youngest citizens may have dismal moral futures.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that nearly three million children were reported to child-protection service agencies for abuse and neglect in 1997; *one in three victims of physical abuse was a baby less than twelve months old*. Child Protective Services reports that three-quarters of child fatalities involve children under three years of age. Although reported cases of child abuse and neglect vary per agency, they appear to be declining. But that’s certainly no cause to celebrate: any report of child abuse is one case too many. Although your child may not be affected by these issues, chances are she will be associating with other kids who are. Because peers are moral influences, in the end all our kids are affected.

Many environmental factors identified as critical for the growth of empathy are dwindling. Although no one factor by itself predisposes a child to cruelty, researchers stress that the interaction of factors may be enough to trigger antisocial behavior. Therefore it’s vital that we do everything we can to counteract these negative influences by nurturing the core moral emotion of empathy. As long as we allow these negative influences to continue, many children’s capacity to feel for others will be extinguished, and their emotional lives will be empty.

WHAT IS EMPATHY?

Empathy—the ability to identify with and feel another person’s concerns—is the foundation of moral intelligence. This first moral virtue is what sensitizes our kids to different points of view and increases their awareness of others’ ideas and opinions. Empathy is what enhances humanness, civility, and morality. Empathy is the emotion that alerts a child to another per-

son's plight and stirs his conscience. It is what moves children to be tolerant and compassionate, to understand other people's needs, to care enough to help those who are hurt or troubled. A child who learns empathy will be much more understanding and caring, and will usually be more adept at handling anger.

Our children are often exposed to an unsettling world of violence, drugs, cruelty, and incivility; empathy may be the best antidote. By learning to show empathy to others, our kids can help create a more tolerant, peaceful world. This chapter shows you proven ways to build empathy in your child so that she will develop the virtue that lays the critical foundation for nonviolence and for doing what is right because she feels it in her heart.



MORAL INTELLIGENCE BUILDER

Signs of Strong Empathy to Share with Kids

There are many ways people display empathy toward others, and the more aware that kids are of what those actions look and sound like, the more likely they are to incorporate those behaviors into their daily lives. Here are a few examples of empathy to discuss and role-play with your child:

What People with Empathy Say

"You look upset."

"I understand how you feel."

"I'm sad that you got hurt."

"That happened to me too once. It makes me feel sad for you."

"My heart is racing. I feel like I won, too."

"I'm happy for you."

"I bet it hurts a lot. It happened to me."

What People with Empathy Do

Notice when people are hurting, and feel for them.

Tear up when they see someone crying.

Walk up to console others in pain.

Comfort another because they understand the person's hurt.

Feel excited for others when they win.

Wince when they see the hero hurt at the movies.

Talk soothingly to those in pain.

Mirror the facial expressions of the distressed person.

HOW EMPATHIC IS YOUR CHILD?

The statements that follow describe behaviors usually displayed by children with strong empathy toward others. To evaluate your child's strengths in this first virtue, write the number you think best represents your child's current level on the line following each statement and then add all the scores to get her total score. If your child scores 40 to 50, she's in great shape with this aspect of moral intelligence. If she scores 30 to 40, she could benefit from virtue enhancement. A score of 20 to 30 shows signs of potential problems. A score of 10 to 20 reveals potential danger; consider getting help to increase this essential virtue.

5 = Always 4 = Frequently 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Never

A Child with Healthy Empathy	My Child
Is socially sensitive; has a lot of feeling for others.	_____
Shows sensitivity toward the needs and feelings of others.	_____
Correctly reads others' nonverbal cues: gestures, body language, facial expressions, tone of voice.	_____
Readily picks up others' facial expressions and reacts appropriately.	_____
Recognizes when someone is distressed and responds appropriately.	_____
Shows she understands another person's feelings.	_____
Tears up or looks upset when someone else is distressed.	_____
Acts concerned when someone is treated unfairly or unkindly.	_____
Shows a willingness to understand someone else's point of view.	_____
Can verbally identify someone else's feelings.	_____
Total Score	_____

THREE STEPS TO BUILDING EMPATHY

Empathy, the key emotion for supporting a sense of right and wrong, is a trait that emerges early in kids. Whether it blossoms or lies dormant largely depends on whether it is nurtured. There are three steps to building this crit-

ical aspect of moral intelligence. Because the foundation for empathy is the understanding of emotions, the first teaching step helps your child develop an awareness of emotions and develop a feeling vocabulary. He'll need this skill to successfully identify a wide variety of emotions so that he can tune in to the feelings of others. The second step provides ways to enhance your child's sensitivity to other people's feelings so that he'll become more aware of their needs and concerns. The last step helps expand your child's awareness of perspectives other than his own. Only then will he really be able to step into other people's shoes and feel with them. These three steps increase the empathic capabilities that your child will need to face a world that too often stresses apathy, cruelty, coldness, and self-centeredness.

Here again are the three teachable steps you can use to nurture this essential first virtue in your child and build her moral intelligence:

Step 1: Foster Awareness and an Emotional Vocabulary

Step 2: Enhance Sensitivity to the Feelings of Others

Step 3: Develop Empathy for Another Person's Point of View

STEP 1: FOSTER AWARENESS AND AN EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY

I was in an office with James and Jeremy, third graders at a school in Minnesota where I was consulting. Their teacher explained that although the boys seemed to have good hearts, they were forever making fun of classmates and didn't seem to grasp the hurt they caused. Their teacher warned them to stop, yet today they teased a boy to tears, so she wanted me to talk to them about it. I began by trying to understand their concept of teasing. "Is it ever OK to make fun of someone?" I asked.

"Sure," James said. "I make fun of Jeremy all the time, and we're still friends."

Jeremy agreed, "He makes fun of my hair all the time, but it's no big deal."

I said, "Some things we're teased about don't bother us much. What did you tease your classmate about today? It must have bugged him, because you made him cry."

“We just told Seth that he talks weird,” James said. “You can’t understand most of what he’s saying. So it’s not like it’s not true.”

“Seth probably has a speech problem,” I explained. “He must get teased a lot about it, and it bothers him. How do you think he feels being teased about his speech?”

The boys couldn’t answer. “How would you feel if you were teased about something you really cared about?” I asked. And again I was met with silence. “You saw Seth. How do you think he felt about being teased?” Now both boys looked clearly puzzled. Then it dawned on me: it wasn’t that these boys didn’t understand that teasing was hurtful. The problem was that they couldn’t identify how Seth felt about it, so it was almost impossible for them to empathize with his hurt. These boys simply didn’t have a strong enough emotional education to identify either how they might feel or how the other boy felt. They didn’t have a clue about how to imagine their victim’s discomfort.

Of course we want our kids to be compassionate and sensitive to other people’s feelings. The problem is that many kids’ empathy potential is greatly handicapped because they don’t have the ability to identify and express emotions. They have tremendous difficulty feeling for the other person simply because they may not recognize the other person’s hurt: elation, discomfort, anxiety, pride, happiness, or anger. What these kids need is an education that provides stronger emotional intelligence: an adequate vocabulary of feelings and then the encouragement to use it. Once they are more emotionally literate and can understand their own feelings, their empathy will grow, because they will be far more capable of understanding and feeling other people’s concerns and needs. This first step will show you how to develop your child’s emotional literacy.

How to Listen to Your Child with Empathy

Last month I was in a long line at a ticket counter in the Scranton Airport with a number of other passengers eager to get home. One three-year-old boy was clearly agitated with the wait. As his mom finally reached the front of the



MORAL INTELLIGENCE BUILDER

Eliminating Gender Bias

When studies compare boys and girls on their emotional intelligence, males finish a distant second. As boys get older, they express fewer emotions—other than anger—than girls do. Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson, authors of *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*, claim that one reason boys may be so emotionally illiterate is that we discourage their emotional awareness in a number of ways. Studies show, for instance, that mothers take more time explaining their emotional reactions to their daughters and validating their feelings than they do with their sons. And those distinctions have a dramatic impact on the emotional development of girls. “The message the daughter gets,” explain Kindlon and Thompson, “is that it’s okay to be concerned about another’s feelings; her natural concern and empathy are reinforced.” Those are the very kinds of messages our boys need if they are to develop emotional competency.

line, he began pulling his blanket from a bag, mumbling “I need Blankey.” His mother sternly told him to act like a big boy, and stuffed the blanket back in the suitcase. This just upset the boy more, and, wailing louder, he struggled to pull it out again. The tension escalated, and the embarrassed mom looked ready to spank her distraught child. At that moment, a boy about thirteen years old kneeled in front of the boy and softly said, “Are you scared your blanket’s going to get lost? Your mom’s going to carry that bag on the plane, so don’t you worry.”

The little boy immediately stopped crying and looked up at his mom, who confirmed that the bag holding his blanket would not be checked. The child’s relief was instantaneous. The mom thanked the older boy, then asked him how he knew what was bothering her son. He smiled and explained, “Whenever I traveled as a kid I used to worry my blanket would get lost, so I knew how he must feel.” I had just witnessed the power of empathy.

John Gottman, a professor of psychology at the University of Washington and the author of *The Heart of Parenting*, conducted two ten-year studies of 120 families. He found that kids whose parents acted as “emotion coaches” learned to acknowledge and master their emotions better; they were more self-confident and physically healthier. They also scored higher in math and reading, had better social skills, got along better with friends, and had lower levels of stress. Experts find that most parents generally don’t use the emotion coaching method, which is unfortunate, because it is found to greatly benefit kids’ emotional literacy as well as their empathy. There are four parts to the technique. To help you remember the parts, just think of the word *TALK*; each part begins with a letter of the word:

- T*—*Tune in* to your child’s feelings and listen with empathy.
- A*—*Acknowledge* what is causing the emotion.
- L*—*Label* how the child is feeling.
- K*—*Kindle* a resolution for the child’s need.

Here are the four parts to listening with empathy and how you might use them with your child:

Tune In to Your Child’s Feelings and Listen with Empathy The first part is often the toughest for parents: listening calmly to your child with your ears, eyes, and heart. Tune in to her body language: it often tells so much more than her words. For instance, is she stressed or elated or angry or frustrated? Your job is to gather information to find out what is bothering her. Experts say the surest way to stop your child from sharing is to discount her feelings: “That’s nothing to be angry about,” or “You’re too old to get so upset.” So be supportive and don’t judge or discount her emotions. Because they convey your interest, sometimes the briefest of words, such as “Really,” “Oh?” or “Gosh,” are best at encouraging kids to continue talking.

Acknowledge What Is Causing the Emotion The second part is to acknowledge what situation is causing your child to feel the way she does.

Sometimes you can easily figure out what is contributing to the emotion, and sometimes you'll have to ask a few questions to be sure you understand. Once you discover the issue, identify it: "When you find out you have soccer practice . . .," or "When you have to wait for Matt to call you to find out if he is coming over . . ."

Label How the Child Is Feeling The third part is to label the emotion you think your child is feeling and say it back to her. This step sounds so simple, but it is powerful because it validates that you understand how she's feeling. For many kids, just knowing you understand can be very healing. It also helps your child develop a stronger emotional vocabulary. Here are a few examples: "You seem nervous," "Do you feel irritated?" "Are you feeling frustrated?"

Kindle a Resolution for the Child's Need The final part is to help your child resolve her emotional need. It often is helpful to add a response that shows you empathize with her plight: "I can understand why you might feel that way," or "I'd feel the same way if that happened to me." Sometimes your child may want you to help her think of a solution to her problem, and other times she just wants to hear that you understand her need or desire. You can always ask, "Would you like some ideas on solving it?"

You don't always have to do the four parts in order. Include them in whatever way seems most natural in your conversation. Here are examples of how putting the four parts together might sound:

Child's Concern

"I don't want to go to soccer practice."

Parent's Empathic Response

"Do you notice that whenever you know you have soccer practice you feel a bit uptight because you don't think you can kick as well as the other kids? Would you like me to help you think of how to improve your kicking?"

Child's Concern

"I don't ever want Matt coming to this house again."

"I hate going to the doctor."

"That camp is stupid."

Parent's Empathic Response

"It seems that whenever you invite Matt to come over, you get irritable. Is it because he takes so long to call you back, and you're stuck waiting? I can understand why you might be upset."

"Whenever you have a doctor's appointment, you are afraid he's going to give you a shot. This time you won't have to have a shot."

"Staying away from home seems to make you feel a little anxious because you don't know the other kids. Let's see if someone you know is going to be at the same camp this year. Would that help?"

Four Ideas to Help Kids Develop a Stronger Emotional Vocabulary

Of course, no child is comforting and caring all the time, but some kids are definitely more compassionate, and for years psychologists have pondered why. Recent studies offer a helpful hint: kids who are more empathic are generally more emotionally literate. In other words, these kids understand how to recognize and express their emotional states and those of others. How well kids can identify feelings depends in part on whether they have an accurate emotional vocabulary. These next activities are designed to help kids develop a stronger emotional vocabulary so that they have the skills to recognize feelings in others.

1. **Use feeling questions.** To enhance your child's emotional vocabulary, use words and questions that help your child tune in to feelings; for example, "You seem [tense, anxious, worried] about something. What's the matter?" or "Your friend seems really [unhappy, angry, upset]. What's the matter?"



MORAL INTELLIGENCE BUILDER

An ABC Emotional Vocabulary

In order for kids to read the feelings of others, they must have an adequate emotional vocabulary. To enhance your child's emotional intelligence, teach him the feeling words in the list that follows. Consider using a different feeling word each day or a new word each week.

A

afraid
agitated
alarmed
angry
antsy
anxious
apprehensive
ashamed
awful
awkward

B

bashful
bewildered
bitter
bored
brave

C

calm
caring
cautious
cheerful
comfortable
concerned
confident

confused
content
critical
cross
curious
cynical

D

depressed
delighted
disappointed
discouraged
disgusted
distressed
disturbed
down

E

eager
edgy
embarrassed
encouraged
enraged
enthused
exasperated
excited
exhausted

F

fatigued
fearful
fidgety
frightened
frustrated
funny
furious

G

glad
gloomy
greedy
grouchy
guilty

H

happy
hassled
hateful
helpless
hesitant
hopeful
horrible
hostile
hurt
hysterical

An ABC Emotional Vocabulary, continued

I

impatient
indifferent
inferior
insecure
intense
irate
irked
irritated

J

jealous
jittery
joyous

L

lazy
leery
lonely
loved
loving

M

mad
mean
mischievous
miserable
moody

N

nervous
nice
numb

O

overwhelmed

P

panicky
patient
pessimistic
pleased
proud
puzzled

Q

queasy

R

rejected
reluctant
resentful
restless
ridiculous
riled
rushed

S

sad
safe
scared
secure
sensitive
shaky
shocked
shy
silly
sleepy
sorry

stressed
surprised
suspicious
sympathetic

T

terrified
tired
troubled

U

uncomfortable
unsafe
unsettled
upset

V

vicious
victorious

W

warm
weary
wonderful
worried

X

excited
exhausted

Y

yucky

Z

zany

do you think is bothering her?" Once your child develops an emotional vocabulary, ask often, "How do you feel?" or "How do you think he feels?"

2. **Say your feeling ABCs.** Each night with her two preschoolers, Jane Brewer, an educational administrator and mom, plays a fun game called Feeling ABCs. "We say the alphabet together," explains Brewer, "but for each letter we also try to include a feeling word. So it goes something like this: A, *angry*; B, *brave*; C, *calm*; and so on. We usually don't get beyond G, but the point is we're having fun together, and my kids are also learning a feeling vocabulary." You might want to try this idea with your kids.

3. **Have feelings with dinner.** This activity helps family members tune in to each other's conversations and at the same time learn to express their feelings. One night or more a week, have a dinner conversation that includes discussing the feelings each member had during the day. You might begin by picking a feeling—such as proud—and asking, "What was the proudest moment you had this week?" Then everyone can take turns sharing his or her experiences, starting with the stem, "I felt proud this week when . . ." Some families even like to vote on who had the most interesting (or unusual, exciting, different) experience.

4. **Create feeling cards.** Gather a set of three-by-five index cards, scissors, glue, a pen, and old magazines. On each card, write the names of some of the most common emotion words, starting with just a few and then adding more as older ones are learned. For very young children, include only the six basic emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, and disgust. Then help your child find pictures from magazines or computer programs to depict each emotion; glue them onto the corresponding card. Now use them like flash cards. Show your child the picture and ask him to guess the feeling. Later you can tell your child the emotion word and have him act it out with his face and body or discuss a time when he experienced the emotion.

Older kids can use a much more extended list of emotion words. Each week, make a few cards (depending on your child's age and learning aptitude) containing new feeling words from the preceding Moral Intelligence Builder, "An ABC Emotional Vocabulary." Use the cards

throughout the week to help expand his emotional vocabulary by playing games with the words. Here are a few games you can play with your child for any feeling word. These examples use the emotion of anger: think of synonyms [furious, incensed, irate]; name antonyms [calm, peaceful, serene]; identify times you felt angry; name body signs that tell you you're angry [flushed cheeks, rapid heartbeat, clenched fists]; and describe a time you've seen another person experience anger.

STEP 2: ENHANCE SENSITIVITY TO THE FEELINGS OF OTHERS

It was Colby's sixth birthday, and his mom, Mary, was cutting pieces of birthday cake to serve his friends. The children lined up, plates in hand, waiting to be served. Ronnie, Colby's best friend, was next, and Mary noticed that he had a plate in each hand. "Extra hungry, Ronnie?" she laughed.

The six-year-old smiled. "No, I just thought I'd bring a piece to Daiwan." "How nice, Ronnie," Mary answered. "Did she ask you to bring her one?" "No," Ronnie whispered. "She just looks like she might like one. She's been sitting by herself and seems kind of sad. This might make her feel better."

Mary turned and saw the little girl sitting rather forlornly by herself and recognized that she did seem sad. She marveled at Ronnie's sensitivity while everyone else had overlooked the little girl, Ronnie hadn't missed. In fact, Ronnie always seemed to pick up on other people's feelings, and Mary wondered how she could help her own son be more sensitive to others like Ronnie.

Ronnie exemplified what it means to be emotionally sensitive: he recognized the emotional cues of his friend, interpreted them as sad, and then acted on them. One of the biggest reasons some kids are more sensitive is that they can correctly interpret people's emotional cues: their tone of voice, posture, and facial expressions. Without that understanding, a child is greatly limited in his ability to react to another person's need.

Six Simple Ways to Nurture Kids' Sensitivity

Here are six ideas you can use almost anytime to tune up your child's awareness of the feelings of others.

1. **Praise sensitive, kind actions.** One of the simplest and most effective ways of enhancing any behavior is by reinforcing the action as soon as it happens. So whenever you notice your child acting in a sensitive and caring manner, let her know how pleased it makes you feel: "Karen, I love how gentle you are with your baby sister. You pat her so softly, and it makes me so happy knowing how caring you are."

2. **Show the effect of sensitivity.** Sensitive, kind acts—even small ones—can make a big difference in people's lives, so point them out to help your child see the impact his actions made. "Derrick, your grandmother was so pleased when you called to thank her for the present." "Suraya, did you see the smile on Ryan's face when you shared your toys?"

3. **Draw attention to nonverbal feeling cues.** Pointing out the facial expressions, posture, and mannerisms of people in different emotional states sensitizes your child to other people's feelings. As occasions arise, explain your concern and share what clues helped you make your feeling assessment: "Did you notice Grandma's face when you were talking with her today? I thought she looked puzzled. Maybe she is having trouble hearing. Why not talk a little louder when you speak with her?" "Did you see the expression on Meghan's face when you were playing today? She looked worried about something because she had a scowl on her face. Maybe you should ask her if everything is OK."

4. **Ask often, "How does he feel?"** One of the easiest ways to nurture your child's sensitivity is to ask her to ponder how another person feels. As opportunities arise, pose the question often, using situations in books, TV, and movies as well as real life. "How do you think the mommy feels, knowing that her little girl just won the prize?" "The tornado destroyed most of the town in Georgia; see it here on the map? How do you think the people feel?" "How do you think Daddy feels hearing that his mom is

so sick?" Each question forces your child to stop and think about other people's concerns, and nurtures sensitivity to their needs.

5. Use the formula "feels + needs." Michael Schulman and Eva Mekler, authors of *Bringing Up a Moral Child*, reviewed studies and found that an effective way to increase sensitivity is to ask children questions to help them discover people's needs and feelings. Such questions were found to expand children's awareness of what people might be experiencing. As a result, the children became more sensitive to how they might be able to help. To use the idea with your child, look for occasions to draw attention to people's feelings and then ask her to guess what the person might need in order to remedy the feeling. Here is how a parent might use the method:

Parent: Look at that little girl crying in the sandbox. How do you suppose she feels?

Child: I think she is sad.

Parent: What do you think she needs to make her feel better?

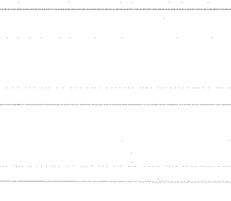
Child: Maybe she could use someone to hug her because she hurt her knee.

6. Share why you feel the way you do. One of the best ways to help kids become sensitive to others' feelings is to share your own. Use situations as they arise to describe how you feel about them and why: "I'm so excited! My new computer is being delivered to me today." "I am frustrated; yesterday the auto body shop told me that fixing the car would cost five hundred dollars, and now they say it's going to cost a lot more." "I'm so tired. The barking dogs kept me up all night."

Five Fun Ways to Help Kids Read Nonverbal Emotions

Drs. Stephen Nowicki and Marshall Duke, child psychologists at Emory University in Atlanta, conducted tests with more than one thousand children and found that one out of ten children, despite normal and even superior intelligence, has significant problems with nonverbal communi-

cation. The psychologists said that this disability prevents kids from recognizing particular emotional signals that are so important in getting along with others as well as interpreting the feelings of their peers. The researchers' recommendation: enhance your child's skills in reading non-verbal messages! Doing so will not only boost her interpersonal skills but



MORAL INTELLIGENCE BUILDER

Nine Factors That Favor the Development of Empathy

Suzanne Denham, author of *Emotional Development in Young Children*, identified nine factors that researchers say generally increase the chances that a child will display more empathy (although there are certainly no guarantees):

1. *Age.* The ability to take the perspective of others increases with age, so older children are generally more empathic than younger kids.
2. *Gender.* Younger children are more likely to empathize with a peer of the same sex because they feel a greater sense of commonality.
3. *Intelligence.* Smarter kids are more likely to comfort others because they are better able to discern other people's needs and devise ways to assist them.
4. *Emotional understanding.* Children who freely express their emotions are usually more empathic because they are more capable of correctly identifying other people's feelings.
5. *Empathic parents.* Kids whose parents are empathic are likely to become empathic themselves because the parents model those behaviors, which in turn are copied by their children.
6. *Emotional security.* More assertive and well-adjusted kids are more likely to assist others.
7. *Temperament.* Kids who are by nature happier and more social are more likely to empathize with a distressed child.
8. *Similarity.* Kids are more likely to empathize with those who they feel are similar to them in some way or with whom they have shared a similar experience.
9. *Attachment.* Kids are more likely to empathize with their friends than with those to whom they feel less closely attached.

also nurture the development of empathy. The following are five good ideas for getting started.

1. **Play "Guess the Feeling."** Brainstorm as many different feeling words as you can and write each of them on an index card. Turn all the words face down or put them in a box or basket. Tell family members they are to take turns drawing the cards one at a time. Each person then acts out the emotion using only his or her body. No words are allowed. Everyone else tries to guess the emotion that is being acted out.

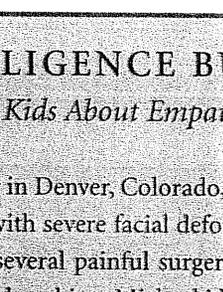
2. **Make comic mood characters.** Cut out with your child an assortment of pictures from newspapers and magazines showing people depicting a wide array of different emotions. Glue them onto paper. Guess together how each person feels based on how his or her body looks; help your child draw balloons over each person's head and together write inside what you think he or she may be saying. Tell your child she has just designed comic mood characters.

3. **Read with feeling!** This activity helps children recognize that our tone of voice conveys moods. Start by reading any children's literature selection. Reading the same short passage each time, give your voice a different emotional tone [bored, excited, tired, sad, angry] and challenge your child to identify the tone. Take turns reading or role-playing the same passage or different ones with your child.

4. **Watch TV silently.** Turn off the sound on your television and watch the show together. Make a game out of trying to guess how the actors feel, just from what you see. Point out the kinds of nonverbal behaviors people do to express their feelings. (A person exhibiting tension behaviors might rapidly blink her eyes, twirl her hair, grind her teeth, clench her fists, and tighten her jaw. A person showing uninterested behaviors might roll his eyes, look away, walk away, or turn away from the speaker. A person expressing interest might nod, lean into the speaker, smile, raise her eyebrows, or stand or sit close to the speaker.)

5. **Hold a feeling watch.** With your child, watch other people's faces and body language at the shopping mall, grocery store, park, or play-

ground. Try together to guess their emotional state without hearing their conversation: "How does her body look now?" "How do you think he feels?" "Look at the expression on her face. What do you think she's feeling right now?" "Listen to the sound of that man's voice. How do you think he feels?" "Look how that girl is standing with her fists so



MORAL INTELLIGENCE BUILDER

A Story to Tell Kids About Empathy

Michael Crisler, a first grader in Denver, Colorado, was born with a rare birth defect that left him with severe facial deformities. By the age of seven, he had already experienced several painful surgeries. So when he read about the tragedy of the Oklahoma bombing, Michael identified with the victims' pain and was particularly moved by the plight of the children at the America's Kids Day Care Center in the ill-fated Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. "I know what it feels like," he explained, "because I've been in a hospital, too." So Michael decided to do something to aid the smallest victims of the bombing by organizing a local bowl-a-thon. Its success surpassed his wildest dreams. He raised one of the largest single cash donations: \$27,077. The check, which he proudly presented to then Oklahoma governor Frank Keating, was set aside as a relief fund for survivors and families of victims of the Oklahoma City bombing. Michael explained, "I wanted to do this to help little kids." The first grader's remarkable sensitivity toward the Oklahoma victims and his desire to do something to comfort them because he understood their pain clearly showed he is a child with empathy.

Michael found out about the Oklahoma bombing victims by reading about it in the newspapers and seeing it on television. Even though he never personally met any of the victims, he felt their distress. That's what empathy is: you understand and feel other people's concerns and needs so well that you want to do something to make their situation better. There are many people each day who could use comforting and support. They might live next door to you or across the ocean in a different country. So keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities to make a difference in people's lives. Showing empathy is one way you can make the world a more caring place. What could you do?

tight. See the scowl on her face? What do you think she's saying to the other girl?"

STEP 3: DEVELOP EMPATHY FOR ANOTHER PERSON'S POINT OF VIEW

Recently I was visiting a first-grade classroom in Dayton, Ohio, and the teacher had just asked her students to join her on the rug to hear a story. While the children eagerly gathered to sit in a circle around her, one boy sat by himself with his head in his hands a few feet back from his classmates. I wasn't the only one to notice the isolated child: Joey, another six-year-old, was trying to figure out the situation. He quietly began inching his way back until he was seated next to the boy. Then he leaned over and whispered something in the boy's ear. The other child nodded shyly and smiled back. Joey patted him on the back, then both boys turned to listen to the story.

As soon as the teacher dismissed the students to their seats, my curiosity got the best of me, and I pulled Joey aside and asked what he had said that had such an effect on the other child. "Dashon just looked lonely," Joey explained. "He just moved here and doesn't know many kids, so I asked if I could sit with him. I just knew how he felt: Dashon needed a friend."

I had just witnessed a six-year-old with remarkable empathy: Joey recognized his classmate's loneliness and identified with his distress. And because he could imagine how it feels to be alone, he extended kindness to the dejected boy. Even at a young age, Joey already was capable of taking the view of the other person so that he was able to extend empathy.

Dr. Ezra Stotland from the University of Washington was one of the first researchers whose work demonstrated the development of empathy. The subjects in Stotland's study were asked to watch as a person reacted to heat being applied to his hand. The subjects didn't know that the victim was actually Stotland's assistant, who had been taught to act as if he was feeling pain: the "heat" didn't really exist. When the subjects were told just to focus on the assistant's movements, they reported very little empa-



MORAL INTELLIGENCE BUILDER

The Stages of Empathic Development

Martin Hoffman, a renowned authority on moral development, believes children slowly develop empathy in a series of stages, in which they gradually move from an egocentric, self-centered, "always thinking about me" perspective to one in which they not only care about the other person but also can feel and understand the other person's point of view. The more you understand these stages and your child's current empathy level, the better you will be at helping her reach the next stage. Keep in mind that because kids vary enormously in their experiences and abilities, the listed ages should serve only as a guide. The following stages are adapted from Dr. Hoffman's acclaimed work.

Stage 1: Global empathy

The first year of life

The child cannot clearly distinguish between himself and his world, so he is unclear as to who is experiencing the distress and interprets it as his own. *The six-month-old baby heard another baby cry and began to cry too.*

Stage 2: Egocentric empathy

Beginning around age 1

The child's reactions to others in distress begin to slowly change. She now understands that another person's discomfort is not her own. *The two-year-old saw her mommy crying, so she sat next to her and softly patted her arm.*

Stage 3: Emotional empathy

Early preschool years

Around the age of two or three, the child begins to develop role-taking capabilities. He recognizes that someone's feelings may be different from his, is better able to decipher the source of another person's distress, and finds simple ways to offer comfort or show support. *"You look sad. Your car broke. You can use this one."*

Stage 4: Cognitive empathy

Elementary school years, beginning around age 6

The child can now see things from another person's perspective, so there is a noticeable increase in her efforts to support and comfort those in need. The ability to use language to comfort others also substantially increases. *"That older woman looks like she needs help getting into the elevator," Kelly thought; she held the elevator door open so the woman could walk in safely.*

Stage 5: Abstract empathy

Late childhood: ages 10 to 12

The child can now extend empathy beyond those he personally knows or can directly observe to include groups of people he may have never met. *"The people in India look so hungry. If I sent some of my allowance each week, it might make them feel better."*

thy for his "pain." But when the researchers told the subjects either to imagine having the heat placed on their own hands or to suppose how the victim felt, the subjects reported noticeably more empathy.

Stotland's research found that encouraging a child to imagine how the other person feels or to put herself in that person's place is a powerful way to nurture empathy. This third step shows some of the most effective ways to help a child imagine another person's feelings and thoughts so that she can really step into another person's shoes and feel with him.

Three Simple Ways to Increase Children's Role-Taking Abilities

Years ago at a conference in Santa Clara, I had the good fortune of watching Virginia Satir, a renowned therapist and the author of *Peoplemaking* and many other classic books, conduct a marriage-therapy session. Satir began by asking a couple to sit in chairs across from one another on the stage. She explained that once in their chairs they were to assume the role of the other person by acting, thinking, and feeling only as his or her spouse would react. Then, before a packed room, under Satir's guidance the couple began to role-play their marital problems totally from the other person's view. At the conclusion of the session, both admitted they'd never seen the other person's perspective before; they left the stage elated that they had finally been able to resolve a marital problem that had almost caused a divorce. The rest of the audience was spellbound. We had witnessed not only an enormously gifted therapist but also the power that perspective-taking has in increasing empathy. These next three ideas show ways to help your child imagine the thoughts and feelings of other people and see beyond herself.

1. **Switch roles to feel the other side.** The next time there's a conflict between siblings, between your child and a friend, or even between you and your child, ask each participant to stop and think how the other person would feel if the roles were reversed. Then ask each person to talk about the problem as if she were the other person: "What would the other

person say and do?" The method can be a valuable way of helping each person gain a different perspective on a troublesome situation. It's often helpful to use puppets with younger children so that each puppet represents a person in the conflict. The child can then act out the problem with the puppets.

You don't have to use role switching only with conflicts: use it in any situation to help your child understand the point of view of the other people involved. "Why do you think Matt always insults everyone?" [He probably doesn't feel really good about himself. Maybe bringing the other person down makes him feel he's better.] "Why do you think Kelly is always following you?" [Maybe she's lonely and doesn't know how to make friends.] "Why did Dad yell at you?" [Because he's trying to get the taxes done and feels really stressed right now.] Taking the other person's perspective tends to enhance your child's empathy, so use it often.

2. Walk in my shoes. Here's a great tip that Jill, a mom of one of my ex-students, shared with me to help your kids understand your point of view. Jill explained that her twelve-year-old daughter, Kaysa, couldn't understand why she was so upset when Kaysa forgot to tell Jill where she was. One day Jill said, "Step into my shoes and pretend you're me. I don't know where you are, and it's getting dark. What am I saying and feeling?" Kaysa literally put on Jill's shoes, pretending to be her and role-playing what she would say and feel about the predicament. Jill said Kaysa immediately apologized, explained she had just never realized Jill would be so concerned, and promised she would never forget to call home again.

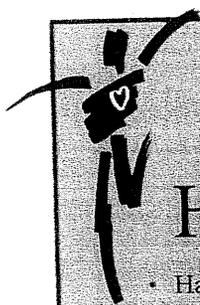
You may want to try the technique with your child. Choose a real situation that concerns you, and have your child step into your shoes, imagining what it would be like to experience the event from your perspective.

3. Imagine how the person feels. To help your child identify with the feelings of others is to have him imagine how the other person feels about a specific circumstance. Suppose your child just sent a thank-you card to his aunt for the birthday present he received. Use it as an opportunity to help your child recognize his aunt's feelings when she receives the card by

having him pretend to be the aunt. "Pretend you're Aunt Jen right now. You open up your mailbox and find this card. How will you feel when you read what it says?" You later can expand the imagining technique to include individuals your child has not personally met: "Pretend you're a new neighbor, and you're moving into this town and don't know anyone. How will you feel?" Asking often, "How would you feel?" helps children grasp the needs and feelings of other people.

Discipline That Builds Empathy

Steve watched his nine-year-old son, Lucas, play baseball at the park with the neighborhood kids. Lucas was playing first base, and his team was ahead by three runs. Aaron, a seven-year-old, was batting next, and as soon as he



MORAL INTELLIGENCE BUILDER

Talking About Empathy with Kids

Here are some questions to discuss with kids to help them think about the importance of empathy in their lives.

- Have you ever seen a movie where you got teary-eyed because something sad happened to someone and you felt that character's sadness? What was the movie? What made you so sad?
- What does empathy mean? Have you ever had a time when you felt the feelings of someone else? What does it mean when we try to put ourselves in someone else's shoes?
- Do you know anyone with a disability? What kind do they have? Try to imagine what it feels like to have that disability. What would be the hardest part of having that disability? How do you suppose other people would treat you sometimes? How would you feel?
- What are some ways to let someone who is hurt or sad know how you feel? How do you think it makes the other person feel, knowing you understand how she feels?

stepped up to the plate, Steve got nervous. Aaron was not only younger than the other kids but also less coordinated. He hoped the other players would show a little compassion for Aaron, never expecting the response from Lucas's teammates. "Easy out!" yelled the third baseman. Another shouted, "Hey, everybody, move in!" Then he heard his son yell, "Don't worry, guys. He couldn't hit a basketball." Steve was furious, and wondered how Lucas could be so insensitive. How was his son going to develop empathy when he was hanging around with a group of kids who obviously didn't care one bit about people's feelings?

Sensitizing children to how someone else feels is a significant and serious enterprise. Research by Dr. Martin Hoffman and a number of others has shown that parents who consistently react to their children's misbehavior by focusing on the feelings of the person they harmed tend to have children who are more empathic. The four parts in the lesson that follows help turn children's insensitive moments into teaching tools that sensitize them to the feelings and needs of others and nurture the seeds of empathy. The four parts can be remembered with the acronym CARE:

C—Call attention to the insensitive, uncaring behavior.

A—Ask, "How would you feel?"

R—Recognize the consequences of the behavior.

E—Express and explain your disapproval of the insensitive action.

Call Attention to the Insensitive Behavior Use this first part of the CARE lesson any time your child acts unkindly. It's an opportunity to sensitize her to the feelings of other people and to the disastrous effect unkind actions have on others; it's a critical step to developing empathy. As soon as you see an uncaring behavior, call attention to it. We're always more successful in helping kids change their behavior when we "nip it in the bud" before it has a chance to escalate and become a habit. Here are some examples of how to call attention to uncaring behaviors: "Making fun of Aaron by yelling out that he couldn't hit a basketball was very cruel." "Telling Bert to leave

because you wanted to play with Sally was inconsiderate.” “Not turning down your stereo when Grandpa asked you to was rude.”

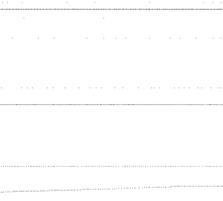
Ask, “How Would You Feel?” Now that you have pointed out the uncaring behavior, help your child understand why the action was unacceptable. Ideally, we want our children to think about how their behavior affected the other person, but empathy does not always come naturally. A good place to start is by asking questions that help your child think about how she would feel if someone had done the same behavior to her. You might ask, “Lucas, how would you feel if Aaron yelled out in front of everybody that you can’t hit?” “If someone said that to you, how would you feel right now?” “Would you want to be treated like that?”

Recognize the Consequences of the Behavior The third part is to help children put themselves in someone else’s shoes and think how it feels to be the recipient of uncaring actions. Feeling from another person’s perspective is often difficult for children, but by using insightful questions we can gently guide them in considering the other person’s feelings—the foundation of empathy. Here are a few examples of questions that help children realize the impact of their uncaring actions: “Switch places and pretend you’re Aaron. How do you feel right now?” “Put yourself in her shoes. Tell me what you think she’s thinking.” “What do you think he would like to say to you?”

Express and Explain Your Disapproval of the Uncaring Behavior Finally, explain why you consider the child’s behavior to be unacceptable and insensitive. In plain language, explain what concerns you about the behavior and how you feel about uncaring actions. This is the moment for you to make sure your child clearly understands what is wrong about the behavior and why you disapprove. It will help your child shift her focus from herself and consider how her actions can affect other people. “I’m very concerned when I hear you treating people badly without considering

their feelings. I expect you to treat your friends the same way you would want to be treated.” “I am upset when you talk in that tone to me. It is disrespectful and uncaring, and I expect you to treat people with respect.”

The true parenting challenge is to use those unplanned moments when a child’s behavior is unacceptable as learning tools to help your child develop



MORAL INTELLIGENCE BUILDER

Finding Real Ways for Kids to Gain a New Point of View

Many children lack empathy because their experiences have never allowed them to think about perspectives other than their own. Here’s a learning assignment that enhances children’s ability to feel from another point of view. It starts by asking your child to imagine having a disadvantage, such as living in a homeless shelter, having a learning disability, or being blind, deaf, or motor impaired. Any predicament that your child has not experienced will do. The goal is to stretch your child’s thinking about the situation so that he sees it from a different view. Then have him write, talk, or draw his view of what it might feel like if he had to live with the situation himself.

Next, invite him to actually experience the situation: visit a homeless shelter, juvenile hall, a prison, a nursing home, or a soup kitchen. Many teachers ask students to experience a disability by wearing a blindfold, sitting in a wheelchair, or not communicating using their voice for a period of time. When you return, have the child write about it again or talk about it, asking, “Is your perspective the same or different?”

Finally, go back and volunteer at the same place you thought about and then visited. Help the child really get to know the people, and then ask, “What happened to your feelings about the people now?”

Too often we rob children of really experiencing a situation from another point of view so that they never truly empathize with the individuals. There is no substitute for experiencing the real thing—especially when it comes to developing empathy. Look for opportunities for your child to experience different perspectives so that he can really understand what it feels like to walk in someone else’s shoes.

empathy. These are always the best lessons; they help the child discover for herself why she should be kind, and allow her to see that her uncaring actions may affect others.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE CRISIS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMPATHY

- To teach kids empathy, you must show kids empathy. The best moments to teach empathy are usually not planned—they just happen. Capitalize on those moments to help your child understand the power that “feeling with others” can have.
- Expand your child’s emotional intelligence by asking often, “How do you feel?” Children must be able to identify different emotional states in themselves before they can become sensitive to the feelings of others.
- Know what your kids are watching and listening to; protect them from cruel, degrading, desensitizing images that can corrupt their empathic development.
- Children are likely to be more empathic if they understand why empathy is important and how it affects others. So point out the positive impact empathy can have on others.
- If you want your child to feel for others, expect and *demand* that your child feel for others.
- Tune up your empathic behaviors so your child regularly sees you show concern for other people’s “hurts and needs.” Then act on your concerns to comfort others so that your child can copy your actions.
- Provide opportunities for your child to experience different perspectives and views in your community—for example, by visiting nursing homes, homeless shelters, centers for the blind, pediatric wards, soup kitchens, veterans’ hospitals, and political campaign headquarters. The more your child experiences different perspectives, the more likely she will be able to empathize with others whose needs and views differ from hers.