



## Social Awareness

One of the core skills of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is social awareness. According to Daniel Goleman in *Emotional Intelligence* (2005), developing social competence allows one to shape encounters, persuade, influence and inspire others, and thrive in intimate relationships. Empathy, or the ability to feel what others are feeling, is the foundation of social awareness.

We all want our children to grow up to be caring, capable, and responsible adults. Empathy is a skill that is used from childhood through adulthood in education, personal and social situations, business, volunteerism, and every other aspect of our lives. Empathy involves identifying and understanding another's situation, emotions, and motives. It is the ability to see the world through another person's eyes. Empathy allows us to treat others with kindness and respect. Empathy reduces violence and cruelty to others.

To teach children to be empathic they first need to be taught the value and meaning of their own feelings. It is important to teach our children how to identify different emotions such as anger, frustration, guilt, fear and joy. Once they are able to identify their own emotions, we can teach them how to identify others' feelings through facial cues, tone of voice and body language. It is also important to

teach good listening skills. Children who are empathic tend to have more positive relationships and do better in school. Conversely, children who are unable to interpret social cues, often are shunned or neglected by classmates.

Parents are the best teachers of empathy. Children who grow up in a caring, empathic family will be more likely to develop those skills. As with any skill or behavior, modeling is one of the best tools parents can use to teach empathy.

The whole family can benefit from talking about empathy. Parents can encourage siblings to talk about how their and others' actions make them feel. Empathy can help siblings negotiate compromises to problems and build cooperation with each other.

Empathy is one of the foundational skills parents can teach children to help them to a lifetime of success.

*People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*

- Bonnie Jean Wasmund



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### WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Help your child identify his/her feelings. Use many different emotion words like: anxious, disappointed, cheerful, confident, frustrated, excited, nervous, etc.
- Affirm your child's feelings with empathy and acceptance.
- Teach your child to read the feeling cues of others like: body language, eye contact, and facial cues.
- When reading a story or watching TV, ask your child about the feelings of the characters.
- Role play with your child. How would you feel?

### SEL RESOURCES

#### Websites:

Collaborative for Academic Social Emotional Learning:  
[www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)

Dr. Robert Brooks:  
[www.drrobertbrooks.com](http://www.drrobertbrooks.com)

#### Books:

*Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships.* (2006) Goleman, Daniel.

*Teaching Empathy: A Blueprint for Caring, Compassion and Community.* (2009) Levine, David A.

*Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues That Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing.* (2002) Borba, Michele, Ed.D.