

This week's skill:

Empathy



Empathy – understanding and responding to the feelings of others – is an essential skill. Empathy is important for relationships and the development of tolerance, compassion and respect.

Vital to the development of empathy is the ability to identify and recognise our own feelings. The skill of recognising emotions was extended this week to include being sensitive to the feelings, interests and needs of others.

Although the session focused on responding to feelings of sadness and anger, responding appropriately to feelings of fear and happiness in others is also important to relationships.

What your child learnt this week

We reviewed ways of recognising feelings of sadness and anger in other people. Your child learnt that we can help others who are hurt or upset. The types of things that can make people feel better include:

- asking them to play;
- sharing toys;
- giving a hug;
- talking with them;
- being their friend;
- offering to help them.



Encourage children to respond to the needs of others.

Supporting this skill at home

Last week, a two-step method for helping your child learn to recognise and manage his or her own emotions was introduced. This method can be extended to help children understand the feelings of others, including happiness, fear, sadness and anger.

Step 1: Recognise feelings in others.

- Your child will model his or her behaviour on yours. Show that you recognise the feelings of others by your actions. Show your child that you recognise his or her feelings.
'I can see that you're angry about missing out. It doesn't seem fair, does it?'
- This week, comment on the feelings of others to your child, and what causes feelings.
'Emily is upset about losing her balloon. I think that's why she doesn't want to play.'
'Lachlan is so proud of his painting because he spent so long on it.'
- Learning empathy involves understanding. Take time to talk to your child about feelings. Encourage him or her to think about how he or she feels in particular situations.



Giving someone a hug to make him or her feel better is a sign of developing empathy.

Step 2: Encourage children to respond to the needs of others.

- When you or your child recognise feelings in others, encourage your child to think of the best thing to do.
'James is feeling upset. What would be a good thing to do?'
- Helping children to find the solution, rather than providing it for them, enables children to learn how to solve problems independently.
- Initially, you might need to suggest ways in which your child can help. Children learn best however, when they have to solve problems and make choices themselves.
'Max, you could ask Tom to play or you could give him a hug. What would be a good thing to do?'
- Praise your child's efforts at empathy. Use labelled praise when your child recognises the feelings of others and acts to help.
'Thank you Gemma for getting me a tissue. You could see that I was crying. That was a great thing to do to help.'
'Tim, I saw you help Kayla when she fell over. You made her feel better, well done.'
'Max, you told Sam how you thought his tower was great. I'm sure you made him feel proud.'