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Development of Empathy

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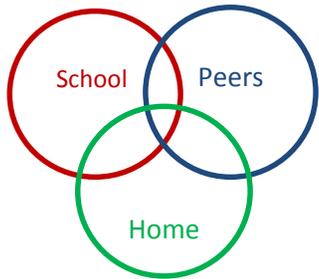
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The Development of Empathy

What is Empathy?

Empathy is a person's ability to understand someone else's emotions. Prosocial behaviors and talking skills are promoted with empathy and vice versa. Aggression and bullying are also tied to a lack of empathy¹.

Empathy is learned primarily during youth in three places: At home, in school, and amongst peers.



There is an overlap between the three as peers interact at home and in school through prosocial behavior and parents interact with teachers to overlap school and home.

What is a Role Model?

Children see you for extended periods 5 times per week for several years. This gives you considerable impact on their lives. Kids learn by example and, therefore, you must show them empathy². Here are some ways to model empathy:

- Be understanding with the children and vocalize your understanding⁴.
- Emphasize the Golden Rule, treat others the way you wish to be treated².
- Let the children view you as a human, do not uphold a perfect personality otherwise the lesson will not be able to be grasped¹.

What is Prosocial Behavior?

Empathy is fostered by peer interaction at school and can be observed through prosocial behavior, or someone's tendency to engage others. Here are some ways to encourage it:

- Create group activities (However, you must make sure every child participates)³.

- Offer the children a simple ice breaker activity to allow them to find similarities between each other¹.
- Changing the seating arrangement to allow children to become exposed to more students for extended periods of time¹.
- Ensure everyone participates in class discussion to encourage communication amongst peers¹.

What is Parent Interaction?

This is how the school and home aspects connect. Your interaction with the parent(s) is pivotal in how children develop empathy.

Be sure to:

- NOT simply state, "Johnny is a good student" during parent meetings so that parents can be informed on their child's social development and can help foster it⁴.
- Discuss how the child interacts at home in order to gain insight on the child's behavior outside of school to help understand the child's needs⁴.
- Immediately contact parents if anything concerns you so as to stop the problem from both school and home⁴.