

# Adult Behaviors to Encourage Empathy

- Adult responses are related to children's development of empathy.

## POSITIVE EFFECT ON CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

- Moralizing: "When you pull Susie's hair she cries; it's not nice to pull hair."
- Prohibition with explanation or statement of principle: "Hitting is not allowed in our classroom. It hurts our friends and it isn't fair."

Identify children's feelings and ask children for a better choice. Give affirmations and thanks for appropriate behavior.

## NEUTRAL OR NEGATIVE EFFECT ON CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

- Withdrawal of love, physical, or verbal: "I can't hug you when you've been mean."
  - Feedback without affirmation for appropriate guidance: "Russell is crying because you hurt him."
  - Prohibitions without explanation: "Don't ever do that!"
  - Physical restraint and physical punishment
- When adults instruct children in altruistic acts, practice what they teach, and verbally reinforce children's helpful acts they will foster prosocial behavior.
  - Maturation influences moral codes, but so do intelligence, motivation (including the particular situation), the need for approval, and self control. The family and school social context plays a significant role in empathy: including a child's moral compass and development of a conscience.
  - Authoritative caregiving skills important for children's development include a high level of close and nurturing behaviors with a high level of expectations.
    - Clear boundaries that are consistent, fair, flexible, age-appropriate, and consider the individual
    - Mutual respect, role-modeling of all skills, effective communication
    - Teach children to "read the world". Analyze and discuss why you do what you do.

# Enhancing Emotional Intelligence: Skills to Help Children Like Themselves and Others

(The following skills are important for personal and social success)

**Self-Awareness** – When you are in touch with your feelings you will be more likely to hear emotional messages that will help you make wise choices.

1. Teach feeling words to children.
2. Mirror what you see children feeling.
3. Teach children to understand how their feelings affect them.

**Mood Management** - When you are able to manage moods you can turn negative feelings or reactions into positive feelings or reactions (i.e. anxiety to calmness, sad feelings to happy feelings, ineffective anger to effective anger expressions.)

1. Teach children appropriate alternatives when they are feeling down.
2. Ask, “what could you do to feel better?”
3. Teach children how to calm themselves when they are anxious.  
-breathing techniques - - time-out from the situation- - “deep freeze”-

**Empathy** – When you are sensitive to others’ feelings you better understand them.

1. Teach children to think about and notice others’ feelings.
2. Talk about individual differences.
3. Teach children to modify their behavior accordingly.

**Social Skills** – When you are able to get along with others including your ability to compromise, harmonize, and lead, you become socialized.

1. Teach children about compromise.
2. Model desired behaviors  
-manners- -forgiveness- -negotiation skills- -helping skills- -effective communication

**Impulse Control and Motivation** – When you are able to delay gratification you possess important life skills for decision-making, problem solving, and other.

1. Teach children patience, expect patience, set boundaries and enforce them.
2. Talk about the steps involved to master a situation and help children set goals.
3. Teach children to see the positive (every negative choice has a positive choice.)

Resource: Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam.