

RAISING COMPASSIONATE KIDS

How to raise kids who are kind and considerate is a hot topic these days. With so much bullying happening in the world, both in schools and via the Internet, it seems more important than ever to raise kids who can be thoughtful and empathetic towards other people.

Children have an inborn capacity for compassion. Although you can take steps to raise a compassionate child who is kind to others yet strong enough to stand up to hurtful words and actions when necessary, the most important thing to remember is that children may listen to what we say, but they model themselves on how we behave. This means that if you practice and demonstrate compassion (with yourself, your child and the other people in your world), your child is very likely to emulate that behavior.

Here are some ideas to help you integrate compassion into your everyday life in ways that you can share with your child:

Volunteer. Show your child that all people deserve kindness by serving together at a soup kitchen or volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. Let your child choose a volunteer activity that builds on interests they already have (for instance, the Humane Society if they love animals or reading aloud to the blind if they love to read).

Get a pet or a small plot of dirt to cultivate. When a child is invested in the care of another living thing, they learn about nurturing themselves and others and are less likely to engage in bullying. And most pets and plants require time outdoors, so you'll both get a good dose of fresh air!

Practice listening. Darcia Narvaez, a writer for Psychology Today, says: "...if you are treated with empathy, you will treat others the same way." When your child is hurting, instead of responses like "keep your chin up" or "boys don't cry," invite your child to share his or her feelings. Particularly with younger children, hug them to provide soothing reassurance that it's okay to experience and express feelings of distress. When they feel loved and fully heard, it will be easier for them to listen to others with an open and compassionate heart.

Limit time with violent video games and television shows. Numerous studies have shown that media violence promotes aggression and desensitizes kids to the consequences of violent behavior.

Travel to a foreign country or a neighborhood very different from your own. Traveling to a place where people have a different culture, language and music shows a child that differences can be both interesting and fun!

Activities that promote compassion mean you'll be bonding with your child in ways you can both feel good about. In addition, activities like volunteering or growing a garden serve another purpose-they remind both of you that you have something valuable to offer the world. Your child's growing self-respect can help turn the tide of bullying and the devastating effect that this has on children's lives.

