

Development of empathy and perspective taking in childhood

JICS Lunch and Learn

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October 26th, 2023



Pause to begin



Goals of talk today

- Provide an overview of the development of empathy and perspective taking in childhood
- Discuss the importance of these connected skills
- Identify some approaches that can be helpful in parenting to strengthen the growth of these skills
- Create space for sharing experiences and ideas

Perspective taking

Understanding that another person's thoughts and feelings are different from one's own

Theory of mind development (about age 4-5)

Understanding “wanting”

Understanding “thinking”

Understanding that “seeing leads to knowing”

Understanding “false beliefs”

Understanding “hidden feelings”

What are you doing, Denzel?



Source: The Hanen Centre, 2016

Well-developed perspective-taking abilities have been found to:

- improve social relationships
 - improve friendship quality and
 - lower levels of loneliness
-
- Recent meta-analysis found that adolescents with higher quality relationships with their parents showed higher levels of perspective taking



Current Opinion in Psychology

Volume 45, June 2022, 101308



Review

Current understanding of developmental changes in adolescent perspective taking

[Miriam Hollarek](#)^{1 2 3}  , [Nikki C. Lee](#)^{1 2 3}

What is empathy?

Dr. Teresa Wiseman (1996)

1. Taking someone else's perspective (cognitive empathy)
2. Being non-judgmental
3. Recognizing someone else's emotions (affective empathy)
4. Communicating your understanding of a person's feelings



Image: Brene Brown Empathy vs Sympathy RSA shorts



Emerging sense of self

Empathy is closely tied to the emerging sense of self, when children experience that they are separate from—yet connected to—others. Primary caregivers can help babies and toddlers learn about their own emotional experiences by helping them identify emotions and connect meaningful experiences to emotions.

During the first three years of life, children begin to develop the capacity to experience the emotional or psychological state of another person.

Infancy and toddlerhood

Early Infancy (0-2 years):

- **Emotional Contagion:** In the earliest stage, infants can mirror the emotions they perceive in caregivers, such as crying when they see others cry.

Toddlerhood (2-3 years):

- **Imitation:** Toddlers continue to exhibit emotional mirroring but begin to develop basic understanding and imitation of emotional expressions.
- **Simple Empathy:** They may show rudimentary empathy by offering a comforting gesture, like handing a toy to a crying friend, even if it's mainly for self-soothing purposes.



Primary age



Preschool Age (4-6 years):

- **Emotional Empathy:** understand and share more complex emotions - may still struggle to regulate their emotional responses effectively
- **Sympathy:** expressing concern for others and engaging in simple acts of kindness

Middle Childhood (7-11 years):

- **Advanced Empathy:** can better differentiate between their own emotions and those of others.
- **Perspective-Taking:** understand that people may have different feelings, thoughts, and perspectives, and they can take the perspective of others into account
- **Compassion:** willingness to help or comfort others - genuine care about the well-being of others
- **Moral Development:** more aware of moral principles and the consequences of their actions on others, leading to the development of a more complex moral framework

Teen to adult

- **Adolescence and Beyond (12+ years):**
 - **Cognitive Empathy:** In adolescence, empathy further matures as teens become more adept at understanding others' emotions and perspectives.
 - **Empathetic Concern:** Adolescents become better at recognizing and responding to the emotional needs of others, demonstrating a more profound sense of empathetic concern.
 - **Empathetic Resilience:** They develop the ability to maintain empathy even when faced with challenging situations and conflicts.



Why is empathy important* (brief list in school context)

- More classroom engagement
- Higher academic achievement
- Better communication skills
- Lower likelihood of bullying
- Less aggressive behaviors and emotional disorders
- More positive relationships



MAKING
CARING
COMMON
PROJECT

Barriers to empathy and perspective taking

- **Distance**
 - **Denial**
 - **Prejudice**
 - **Authority**
 - Source: Roman Krznaric (author of Empathy: Why it Matters and How to Get It)
-
- **Othering** "a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities." Source: <https://www.otheringandbelonging.org/the-problem-of-othering/>



Supporting the development of empathy – what teachers (*and parents) can do

- Notice and reject stereotypes
- Respect and value differences
- Widen their circle of concern
- Listen closely to peers and adults
- Manage difficult feelings like sadness, anger, and frustration
- Navigate social situations ethically and fairly



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Practices for parents

1. Look out for differences around you
2. Look out for thing in common
3. Be aware of your biases
4. Make it a habit



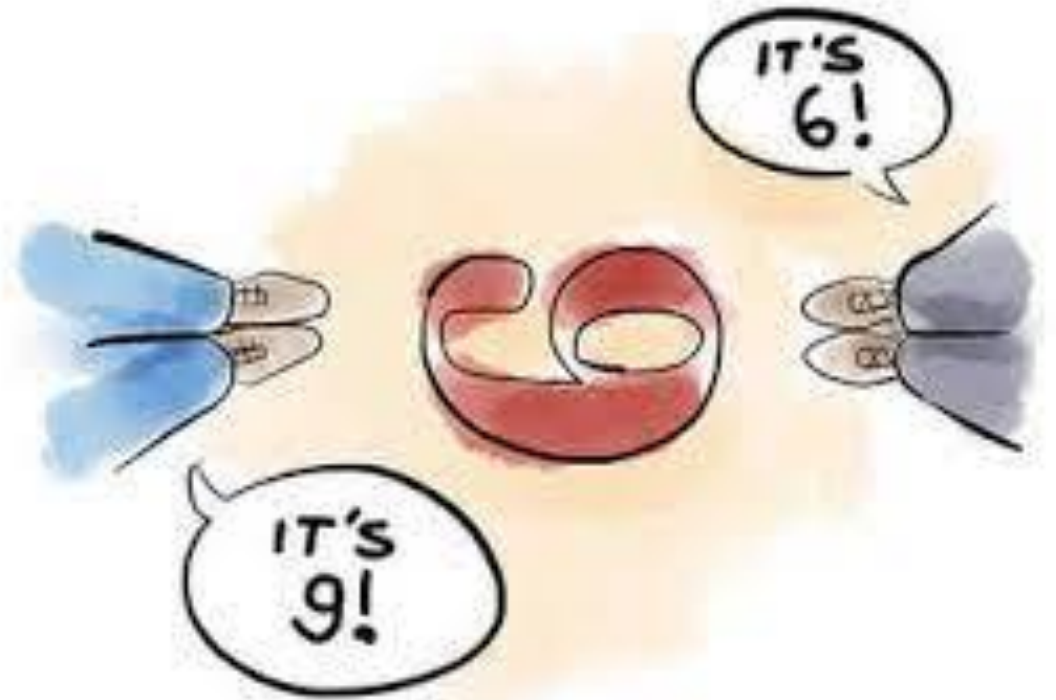
Supporting perspective taking

Follow your child's lead - connecting to your child's experience

Use “tuning-in language” – This means putting your own and your child's perspective into words.

Role play with your child when you pretend together

Use books to talk about the characters' thoughts and feelings – and connect these ideas to the child's own experiences





Example

Respond connecting to the feelings of the other

Instead of saying “‘Why did you do that’

"Sara is sad because you broke her tower. What can we do to make up for that?"

"What it is like for you when someone knocks your tower over?"

How to Nurture Kindness in a New Generation

Jane E. Brody
Nov. 8, 2021
New York Times

Listen and be attentive.

- Instead of trying to find solutions for your children's concerns, "listen with the intent to hear and understand their feelings. Don't jump in and try to fix the issue or attempt to have the 'right' answers to their questions."

It's not just what you say; it's how you say it.

- You won't always know the right things to say, but it's important to acknowledge the child's feelings, avoid being critical, say what you think without judgment and invite feedback.

Take action when possible.

- When dealing with major events and social justice issues, like an environmental catastrophe, the death of a loved one, or protests against injustice, strive to clarify misinformation. (***in developmentally appropriate ways**)

Roots of Empathy at JICS

27-week program – 9 class visits with baby and parent(s)

Reflective questioning

Understanding of temperament, development and individual differences

Built around attachment relationship

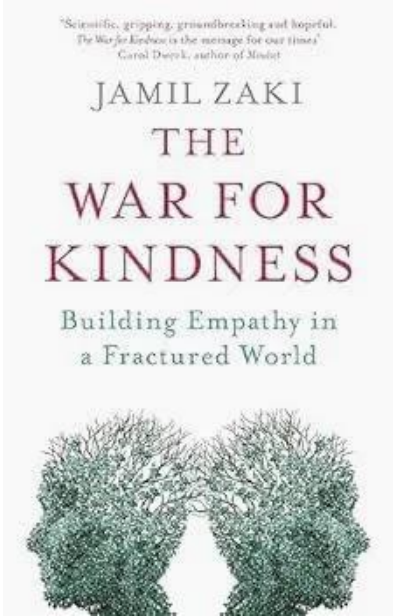
Power of yet



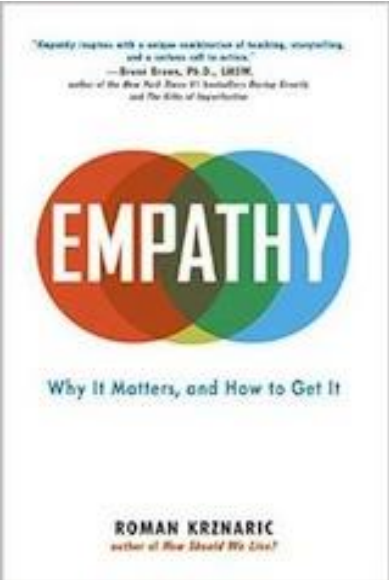
Resources



You 2.0: Empathy
Gym August 31, 2020



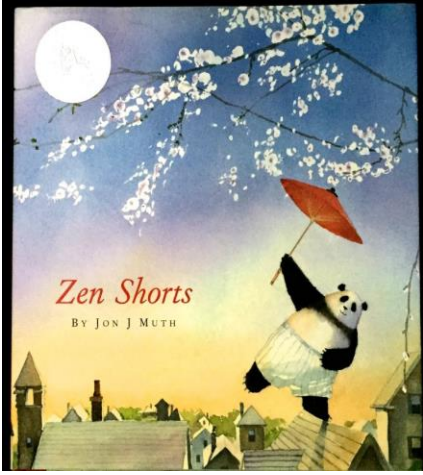
Greater Good
Science Centre
University of California
Berkeley



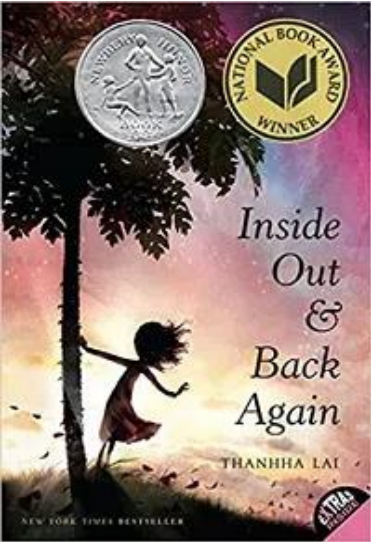
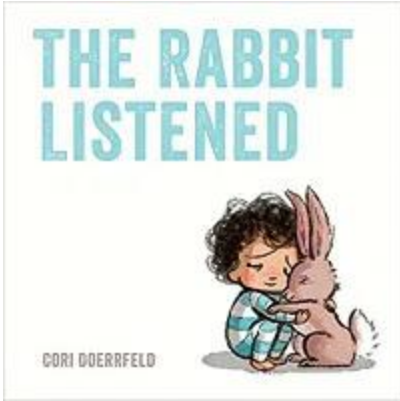
YouTube Sesame
Street Mark Ruffalo
and Murray



Brene Brown Empathy vs
Sympathy RSA short



Selected books – full list of
recommended children's books will be
provided



Lunch and Learn Resource list for developing empathy and perspective-taking

Krista Spence

Novels:

A Boy Called Bat – Elana K. Arnold

Tornado Brain – Cat Patrick

The Fabulous Zed Watson – Basil Sylvester and Kevin Silvester

Mya's Strategy to Save the World – Tanya Lloyd Kyi

Novels in Verse:

A Seed in the Sun – Aida Salazar

Red, White, and Whole – Rajani Larocca

Non-Fiction:

Who Was Series (Various authors)

Kid Athletes, True Tales of Childhood from Sports Legends by David Stabler

Picture Books:

A Stone Sat Still – Brendan Wenzel

My Art My World – Rita Winkler

I Walk with Vanessa a Story about a Simple Act of Kindness – (wordless) by Kerascoet

Adrian Simcox Does Not Have A Horse – Marcy Campbell, Corinna Luyken

The Wall in the Middle of the Book – Jon Agee

Milo Imagines the World – Matt De La Pena

Jabari Jumps – Gaia Cornwall

In My Heart: A Book of Feelings – by Jo Witek

My Blue is Happy- Jessica Young

Lily's Cat Mask – Julie Fortenberry

When we are Kind, My Heart Fills with Happiness – Monique Gray Smith

Hats of Faith – Medeia Cohan

Graphic Novels:

El Deafo – by Cece Bell

Sunny Rolls the Dice by Jennfer L. Holm and Matthew Holm

Besties Work It Out By Kayla Miller and Jeffrey Canino

Non-Fiction Picture books – issue-focused

Divorce is the Worst – Anastasia Higginbotham

Death is Stupid – Anastasia Higginbotham

On The Playground Our First Talk about Prejudice, Our First Talk about Poverty

– Dr. Jillian Roberts