



Developing Empathy in the Home

Bob Sornson, Early Learning Foundation

Empathy is the ability to understand how someone feels because you can imagine what it is like to be them. It is part of a strong positive emotional state in which we can treat others with respect while still setting appropriate limits on how others behave around us. Empathy is the heart of a great family culture.

Empathy does not offer excuses for bad choices. As a parent, sometimes empathy must be followed by a consequence, or by allowing some sadness to come into the lives of our children. But with empathy, we can give consequences with love rather than anger.

Empathy is the foundation of all healthy relationships. Here are some tips for developing an empathetic family culture:

1. Start by building a family environment in which your children feel safe and secure. Children who are highly stressed or afraid of physical or emotional harm give attention to their own well-being, and have less ability to notice the well-being of others.
2. Family routines build a sense of predictable security for children. Well established routines also help your kids practice self-regulation skills as they learn how to wait calmly, persist, focus, and delay gratification. Consistent, calm routines for morning, bedtime, family meals and chores help children learn how things work in your family.
3. Help children develop listening and observation skills by taking time for family meetings, family meals without tech distractions, and family adventures.
4. Self-regulation skills are the foundation for empathy. Don't take self-regulation skills for granted. Find ways to purposefully help children learn to be calm and strong on the inside.
5. Consider developing a clear set of expectations for how you wish to treat each other in your family. Take time to talk about it. Respectful speech and behavior build a powerful sense of connection.

6. Use great literature and tell stories about the people you admire to inspire kids to understand the experience of others.
7. Model empathy. Your kids are watching!
8. Relationships matter. Empathy is the ability to understand how someone feels, but caring about others precedes giving effort to noticing the experience and feelings of others. Encourage your children to build relationships which inspire them to trust and care for others.

This article is featured on NBC News: The Maria Shriver Project.

<http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/maria-shriver/life-ed-teaching-kids-empathy-n221151>

Empathy Resources

[Start Empathy](#), an Ashoka initiative

[The Empathy Road Map](#), a free comprehensive guide featuring strategies for bringing empathy into the classroom.

[Activating Empathy: A Road to Changemaker Classrooms](#). A free on-line course for educators.

[Five-Minute Film Festival: Nine Videos on Kindness, Empathy, and Connection](#) by Amy Erin Borovoy

[Empathy: The Most Important Back-to-School Supply](#) by Homa Tavangar

[The Center for Building a Culture of Empathy](#). Interviews and information on building a global movement toward empathy.

Great Books for Children and Adults:

["Charlotte's Web"](#) E.B. White

["Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ,"](#) By Daniel Goleman

["Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids,"](#) By Carol McCloud and David Messing

["Ramona the Pest,"](#) By Beverly Cleary

Books on Empathy by Bob Sornson:

["Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning about Empathy"](#)

["Stand Up and Speak Up for Yourself and Others"](#)

["Teaching and Joy"](#)

["The Juice Box Bully"](#)

["Creating Classrooms Where Teachers Love to Teach and Students Love to Learn"](#)



Bob Sornson, Ph.D. was a classroom teacher and school administrator for over 30 years, and is the founder of the **Early Learning Foundation**. He is dedicated to helping schools and parents give every child an opportunity to achieve early learning success, which is the foundation for success in life.

Bob is an international leader calling for programs and practices which support early learning success, high quality early childhood learning programs, and parent engagement. Dr. Sornson's workshops and keynote presentations are known for his storytelling, humor and interactive style. He can be contacted at bob@earlylearningfoundation.com.

Bob's publications include:

- ***Essential Math Skills* (Shell Education)**
- ***The Essential Math Skills Inventory* (Shell Education)**
- ***Stand Up and Speak Up for Yourself and Others* (Ferne Press)**
- ***Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning about Empathy* (Love and Logic Press) 2014 Mom's Choice Gold award winner**
- ***Fanatically Formative* (Corwin Press)**
- ***Creating Classrooms Where Teachers Love to Teach and Students Love to Learn* (Love and Logic Press)**
- ***The Juice Box Bully* (Ferne Press) 2011 Mom's Choice Gold award winner**
- ***Meeting the Challenge* (Love and Logic Press)**
- ***Teaching and Joy* (ASCD)**
- ***Preventing Early Learning Failure* (ASCD)**
- ***Love and Logic on the Bus* (Love and Logic Press)**
- ***The Essential Skill Inventories, K-3* (Early Learning Foundation)**
- ***The Math Moms and Dads Home Program, Pre-K to K*, (Early Learning Foundation)**
- ***The Math Moms and Dads Home Program, K to 3* (Early Learning Foundation)**
- ***The 30Minute Motor Skills Development Plan* (Early Learning Foundation)**