

Feeling the Feelings

Unlike Sympathy - an expression of care and concern - Empathy is a genuine desire to "feel with" another person - to step into their shoes and connect with their emotional perspective. This acknowledgement and validation of feelings enables compromise and problem-solving.

The impact of Trauma on Empathy

When children have experienced relationships as rejecting, uncaring or inconsistent, they may react with initial mistrust, confusion or anxiety. Remember that Empathy may have been lacking in past relationships.

Negative responses to Empathy can be stressful for us. We must resist the urge to minimise, reassure or lead with discipline. This runs the risk of the child complying out of fear or with lingering resentment.

Looking after our Empathy

- Feeling more short-tempered or exhausted lately?
- Perceiving situations to be hopeless or even pointless?
- More prone to assigning blame?
- Focusing more on control and compliance?

All of the above are signs of compassion fatigue. When stress overwhelms our ability to empathise, we need to engage in self-care and seek support from others for debriefing & non-judgemental reflection.

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The E in PACE
A Care-giving Formula by Dan Hughes

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EMPATHY

Some Examples of Empathy

"You are SO upset about this right now. This is really tough!"

"It hurt so much when she didn't ask you to play. You were probably thinking 'Why did she do that?' It was a real shock."

"You wanted to have another turn so badly. You were so excited about it and it's so unfair that we ran out of time".

"It seems to you like he hates you. That must be really hard. I know you like him a lot, so this is pretty confusing".

"I know it's hard for you to hear what I'm saying."

"Me saying 'No' has made you angry with me. I get why you don't want to talk to me right now".