



the family values toolkit

For Children Birth to Age 2

This Month's Featured Value Is: **Empathy**

Empathy is the quality that underlies love, caring, and compassion. When you empathize with others, you put yourself in their place and recognize them as human beings with feelings just like you, allowing you to act toward them as you would have them act in return.



What Can Parents Do to Nurture This Important Value?

First, Set Goals:

Help your child become conscious of his or her own feelings and recognize emotions in others.

Signs of empathy are apparent even at birth. Newborns cry when they hear another infant crying, and very young babies imitate the expressions of others. These actions show how the human brain is primed to respond to others. Every time parents responds lovingly to an infant's needs, they're helping form the basis of the child's ability to love and empathize.

A 12-month-old may display rudimentary empathy by trying to feed her mother, for instance, but may simply stare at a child who is crying. But by 2, children often try to comfort other kids as well. What they don't yet realize is that people's needs differ (i.e., the pacifier that gives them comfort may not do the trick for someone else). Parents are essential to teaching the nuances of empathy.

Next, Take Action! Try These Activities:

- ✓ **Play "Feeling Faces."** In this game, you make a face, point at yourself, and say, "happy," "sad," "angry," "surprised," etc., to describe it. Encourage your child to imitate your expressions. Draw simple pictures with the expressions as well. This will help your toddler begin to recognize feelings in others, making it easier for him or her to empathize as he or she grows older.
- ✓ **Praise your child when he or she shows concern for or comforts another child.** A toddler as young as 18 months may bring a toy to a crying child to comfort him. Praise your child when you observe this behavior and tell your youngster that you are proud of how caring he or she is.

Then, Report Back!

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