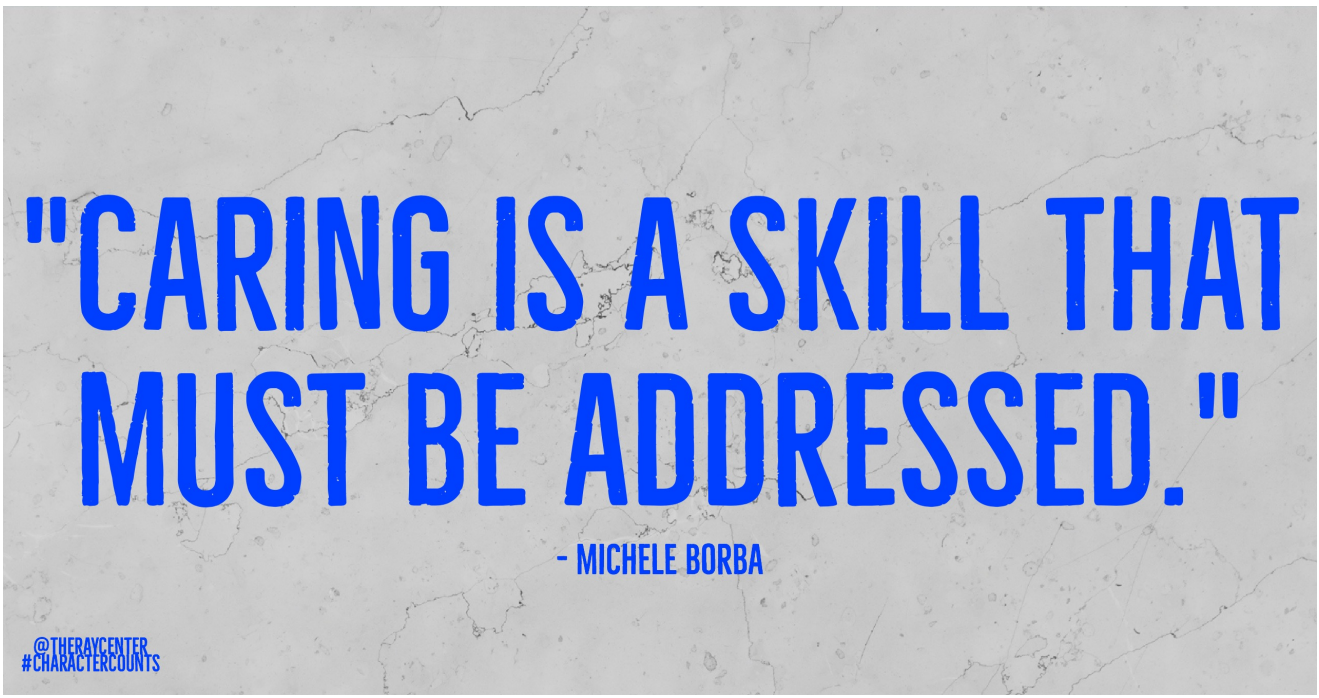


Raising caring kids



"CARING IS A SKILL THAT
MUST BE ADDRESSED."

- MICHELE BORBA

@THERAYCENTER
#CHARACTERCOUNTS

From our guest contributor, Dr. Michele Borba.

Most parents instinctively want their children to develop a strong moral character and to care about others. In fact, according to a recent survey I conducted with *Parents Magazine* of over 2400 mothers, "Caring" comes in high on the list of traits today's moms want their kids to possess. (YES!)

Caring is the trait that helps sensitizes our children to different points of view and it increases their awareness of other's ideas and opinions. It also enhances empathy, which is the foundation of moral behavior. Kids who care will grow into adults who have the skills they need to live successfully in our diverse, multicultural, 21st century world. And caring is a skill that *must* be addressed.

Over 160,000 kids a day are skipping school because of bullying!

We're seeing an increase in bullycide: children (CHILDREN!) who are killing themselves because of vicious bullying.

Research shows a clear breakdown in empathy in our children.

The good news is there's plenty parents can do to bring out and encourage the natural empathy that exists in our kids. Ready to get started?

12 Research-Driven Tips to Raise Caring Kids

Here are tips from my book, **The Big Book of Parenting Solutions: 101 Answers to Your Everyday Challenges and Wildest Worries** that will boost your children's caring hearts and curb their selfish behavior before it's too late.

1. Strike the right balance of love and limits. Parenting is a constant balancing act, and raising kids to be caring, kind, and considerate adults is no exception. Research shows that the best formula for raising kids who are less selfish and more considerate has two equal parts: Unconditional Love and Firm Limits. So ask yourself, "Is my parenting evenly balanced between the two parts?" As a parent, your unconditional love sets the example for forgiveness and what it means to truly care about another human being. The firm limits that you set for your children teach them how to behave within boundaries and sets them up to maintain positive behaviors. When balanced together, they create a formula for behavioral and emotional success for your kids.

2. Be the change you want to see. You know what makes kind and considerate kids? Kind and considerate parents! The simplest and most powerful way kids learn behaviors like kindness and consideration is by seeing them in action. Make sure you are the model you want your child to copy. Be aware that kids are watching you—whether you realize it or not—and they will mimic your own behaviors as they interact with others in their world.

3. Introduce them to their feelings. Before your kids can become sensitive to the feelings of others, they have to be able to correctly identify emotional states in themselves.

Developing emotional intelligence in your child can be as simple as regularly posing the question “How do you feel?” Pay attention to your child’s emotions so that you can use them as cues to explain to them what those different feelings mean, why they occur, and how to deal with them. Once they have a grasp of their own emotions, they’ll begin to recognize them in others, too.

4. Make caring mandatory. Your children are desperate for your approval, and they want to please you by meeting your expectations of them. Kids tend to only work as hard as they have to in order to meet the standards that are set for them, so it’s important to set the bar high from the get-go. If you want your child to care, don’t just hope that he will, expect it. And once he begins to display the caring behaviors that you expect of him, reinforce it through praise and encouragement. Once he knows you’re noticing, and are pleased, he’ll be more likely to keep up the good work.

5. Don’t miss the teachable moments. The best moments to teach your kids about caring are usually not planned—they just happen. When you see someone doing a good deed, acting selflessly, or showing compassion, point it out to your child. Explain to him what the person is doing and how that is an example of the behavior you expect from her. Be sure to pay attention and don’t let those moments pass you by. Instead, capitalize on those teachable moments to help your child understand the power those simple acts of good behavior can have.

6. Manage their mainstream media exposure. Thanks to technology, kids are exposed to more while parents struggle to keep up with what’s being streamed into their homes and their kid’s psyches each day. Know what your kids are watching and listening to: protecting them from cruel and degrading images should be a top priority. The more they see, the more desensitized they become to hurtful language and harmful behaviors that the media may portray as funny or cool. Protect

their empathic development by limiting television viewing, monitoring online browsing, and policing their iPods.

7. Take them for a walk on the other side. Feelings and emotions are abstract concepts that can be hard for children to understand. Try framing scenarios that will help them to see another point of view. This will help them to understand how someone else may feel or to realize that their own feelings aren't the only ones involved when they interact with others. For example, ask you child to imagine being the new student in school who didn't know anyone. And then ask her to imagine how she might feel in that situation. Once she begins to grasp the idea, you can begin to brainstorm ways that she could show kindness to someone who might be in that position.

8. Pause before you praise. It's natural to be proud of your kids and even more natural to want to shower them with accolades and affection. However, constantly praising and rewarding your child can make him think life revolves around him and can actually increase self-centeredness. There's a fine line between confident and cocky, so be careful that you aren't encouraging him to become an ego-maniac. Its okay to praise him, just be sure it's when he has truly earned and deserved it.

9. Perfect their patience. One of the warning signs for selfish behavior is a child who is impatient. Not only does he want his way, he wants it now—and he doesn't consider whet her or not any one else is being inconvenienced as a result. Nip this behavior before it goes too far by stretching your child's waiting quotient: if he asks to go to the park, it's okay to say yes, just don't jump in the car right away. Teaching your child to be patient will also teach him how not to put his own needs in front of those of other people.

10. Enforce a zero-tolerance ban on cruelty. Cruelty doesn't just happen in the classroom or on the playground. Pay close attention to how your child acts in every situation in order

to take a proactive stand against cruelty. Teach her to treat all living beings—her neighborhood friends, the family pet, even the roses in your garden—with care and respect. No matter how minor or harmless you may think an incident tinged with cruelty may be, squelch it immediately. Those behaviors can manifest themselves in negative in harmful ways if they are allowed. Raising a cruelty-free child is the best way to make the world a better place.

11. Shift their focus to putting others first. Selfish children have a tendency to put themselves first. They are the first in line for a piece of cake at the birthday party, the only one (according to them) allowed to play with the new video game, or the sibling who gets to sit in the front seat of the car every single time. To combat this behavior, give your child gentle reminders about those around him, and help him step aside and start putting others first. You may say: No, let Rob have a turn. He's been waiting just as long as you." or "I know you wanted to use the Wii, but let's think of your brother also." And make sure that he still gets to be first every once and awhile. Forcing him to constantly give up his place may breed resentment and an unwillingness to cooperate.

12. Get your kids to give back. Children learn habits at an early age, and the best way to teach them behavioral life skills is to get them involved in a hands-on way. Kids won't learn how to be caring from reading about the concept in a textbook, but from doing caring deeds. Encourage your child to lend a hand to make the world a better place. Help her choose a charity or organization she is interested in and then get her involved. It can be as simple as visiting with an elderly neighbor or helping to prepare a meal for a sick relative.

If you start these habits early, while your children are young, their caring ways will stick with them long into adulthood. But please oh please make sure you are intentional in your quest to raise a caring child.

Learn more about character education.