

Four Ways to Nurture Kindness



From guest contributor Dr. Michele Borba

Kindness is often considered as a soft and fuzzy skill, but science shows surprising benefits to being nice, including boosting health, reducing anxiety, enhancing self-esteem, increasing gratitude, and even elevating happiness.

In fact, study after study shows that a simple act of kindness also activates empathy, and that's why I named it as one of the nine essential empathy habits in my new book, **UnSelfie**. The more kids practice kindness-that is, without expecting gold stars, "Citizen of the Month" awards, trophies or monetary rewards-the likelier they'll develop the skills to succeed in work and in life and acquire what I call, "The Empathy Advantage."

An important point to remember is that while our kids are born with the potential for empathy, kindness, caring,

charitableness, courtesy, generosity (and all those other glorious traits of humanity), they aren't guaranteed. Researchers have discovered that a strong commonality of those kids who do acquire them is how they were raised. That means parents can be enormously influential in helping their kids be concerned about others needs by prioritizing caring, kindness and compassion in their homes.

It's a slow, gradual evolution, but if you are consciously boosting those traits as a parent now, chances are much stronger you'll have success and your child will develop those traits. We seem to have a lot of "gimme" kids these days and it's because they've learned that their parents will oblige their every whim. (And materialism and self-centeredness are known reduce empathy and compassion). So don't! Establish guidelines and stick to them. Such as?

Try this:

My girlfriend noticed her mother-in-law was overindulging her kids in material gifts and finally told her that was not the kind of kids she wanted to raise. She asked her to please reduce their number of presents and put the money instead in their college fund. And I can tell you that her children (now grown) are very kind-hearted, loving kids who are concerned about *others* .. not what they own.

The key is that the mom determined how she wanted her kids to turn out, and then consciously begin raising them that way. Instilling character and nurturing compassion involves intentional parenting. So gradually stretch your child to think about other people's concerns and needs.

Here are four ideas that might help you raise a more caring, kind children and help them reap The Empathy Advantage:

1. Switch roles

The next time there's a conflict between your child and a friend (or between you and your child) ask her to stop and

think how the other person would feel if the roles were reversed. Then ask her to talk about the problem *as if she were the other person*:

“What would the other person say?”

“How would you feel if you were the other person?”

“What do you think the friend would want to do?”

“If you were in your friend’s shoes, what would he/she want to tell you?”

If she is very young, it is helpful to use puppets so that each puppet can represent the person in the conflict. It builds empathy.

2. Call attention to insensitive behavior

Any time your child acts unkindly, use it as an opportunity to help him become more sensitive to the feelings of other people. Just point out the impact of her actions:

“Telling Bert to leave because you wanted to play with Sally was inconsiderate. How would *you* feel?”

“Not asking Daddy if he wanted to watch a TV show was unkind. How would *you* feel?”

3. Be an example of caring, kindness and generosity

Try to find natural ways to help her “give” to others, so she understands the joy giving can bring. Start by doing it yourself and having her watch and do it with you. Here are a couple of ideas:

“The neighbor is sick; let’s make an extra bowl of soup and bring it to her.”

“Daddy is so tired; let’s surprise him and stack the newspapers so he doesn’t have to.”

Make “giving” natural and fun but help your children learn to

GIVE. And help them learn to do so without expecting anything in return.

4. Expect your child to share and consider others

This is one of the first moral behaviors we need to tune up in our kids starting at around 2 or 3 years of age. When he is two you can structure his sharing: "It's his turn, then your turn, then his turn." Little kids sometimes need an oven timer as a reminder that the other person should still be allowed to play with the toy. Before friends come over, structure "sharing" by asking him:

"What things will you share with your friend?"

"What do you think he would like to play?"

Put away things that are very special that may cause problems. What's important on this one is to help your child learn to think of others' needs and feelings.

The Reality Check here is that while our children are hard-wired to care, that capacity *must* be nurtured for it to develop. So be intentional about raising a caring child! And then keep finding those opportunities for your children to practice kindness until it becomes a part of their mind-set and your kids can describes themselves as "Caring People."

Michele Borba, Ed.D. is an internationally renowned consultant, educational psychologist and recipient of the National Educator Award who has presented workshops to over a million participants worldwide. She is a recognized expert in parenting, bullying, youth violence, and character development and author of 22 books including UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About Me World, The 6Rs of Bullying Prevention: Best Proven Practices to Combat Cruelty and Build Respect, The Big Book of Parenting Solutions, and Building Moral Intelligence. She has appeared over 130 times on the TODAY show and is a frequent expert on national media including Dateline, The View, Dr. Oz, Anderson Cooper, CNN,

Dr. Drew, and Dr. Phil. To book her for speaking or media even refer to her website: www.micheleborba.com. Follow her on Twitter @MicheleBorba.

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A Family Compact for Excellence

Whether working with professional colleagues on a work project, teammates on an athletic team, or classmates in school it is important to establish expectations for how the group is going to do its best work and what each person will do in order to ensure everyone in the group is treated with respect and care.

The same is true for families. In order to ensure that everyone in your family can do their best work and everyone is treated with respect and care, establish a Compact for Excellence using the directions below. A sample Compact is included to help get you started, but each family should tailor their Compact to the specific needs of their family.

- A. Create a list of agreements for what your family must do in order to do your best work and treat each other well. Ask each family member to contribute to the list.
- B. Once your list of agreements is complete, shape that list into simple, relevant statements.
- C. Ask each family member if 1) they feel like any other agreements need to be added, 2) any agreement needs clarification, and 3) there is anything on the list they cannot or will not do.
- D. Once all family members have agreed to the Compact, each

person should sign the agreement and the Compact should be posted somewhere prominent in the household (like on the refrigerator).

- E. Review the Compact every 1-2 weeks to praise what is going well, polish what could be better, and add or clarify anything as needed.

Excellence with Integrity TOOLS™

COMPACT FOR EXCELLENCE TEMPLATE

In order to do our *best work* and treat each other with *respect and care*, we each agree to/not to:

- » Treat people how you want to be treated.
- » Choose your attitude.
- » Take care of your belongings.
- » Be kind to everyone.
- » Listen with your ears and your heart.
- » Follow instructions (the first time you are asked).



Adapted from Lickona & Davidson (2005).

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This activity is one of several extension activities in the Growth Mindset module of The ESSENTIALS, a new resource from CHARACTER COUNTS! for middle and high school students. The ESSENTIALS modules draw upon nearly 25 years of applied research and development in various K-16 education settings, the workplace, and diverse athletic environments. Each module is a blueprint of research-based best practices for developing an essential character and culture skill needed for success in school, work, and beyond. Click [here](#) to order these new resources for your students.

Learn more about character education.

Seven Practices That Nurture Respect in Children



From guest contributor Dr. Michele Borba

Though most teachers admit that there are some students they never forget, the same is true about parents.

I vividly remember a mother of one of my students all because of the way she conveyed respect to her child. She did so beautifully in how she listened. I watched her several times throughout the year on our field trips and in our class parties or just those times she'd wait at the door to pick him up. Each time Ricky would talk, she'd stop what she'd do, get

down to eye level, look into her son's eyes, and listen with genuine interest. She had this wonderful ability to block out everything—or at least make her child feel she was—and give her child her full presence. The time was brief – just a minute or so.

The mom's words usually were nothing more than repeating back small tidbits of what he just said just to let him know she was hearing him. Occasionally she'd add, "Uh-huh," or "Really?" She acknowledged him simply by saying how she thought he was feeling: "You seem so happy" or "Wow, you look proud."

The effect on her son was dramatic: Ricky's whole demeanor brightened when he realized his mom really heard what he had to say. I always wished I could have videotaped her listening skills to play back to other parents. The mom's behaviors were so simple, *but always conveyed respect to her child*. That mom exemplified one of the most powerful, tried-and true character-building practices there is: "The best way to ensure that our kids are respectful is to treat them respectfully."

It should come as no surprise that her child turned out to be one of my most respectful students. He also grew to become a respectful adult.

That's because of this important principle: children learn respect best from witnessing and experiencing respect.

So Mom and Dad: Tune up respect in your own behavior. After all, it's a racy, raunchy world out there. I fear what our kids are witnessing and experiencing disrespect.

Seven Simple Respect-Building Parenting Practices

Here are seven simple parenting practices that help children see themselves as valuable human beings. The practices work to instill respect in your child all because your actions let them know you love, respect, and value them. Your child is

also witnessing and experiencing respect with these practices so he is more likely to adopt and use the virtue.

1. Treat your child as the most important person in the world.

Here is a simple question to ask yourself: *"If I treated my friends the way I treat my child, how would my friends respond?"* (Or would you have any friends left? Hmmm) Beware: very often we say and do things to our children that our friends would never tolerate.

If you want your children to feel valued, treat them as though they are the most important people in the world. One mom told me she asked herself the question so often it became a nighttime habit. It also helped her remember throughout the day to treat her children respectfully.

2. Give love with no strings attached.

No child should have to earn our respect and love; it should be guaranteed with birth. Unconditional love is about loving your kids with no strings attached. It is the kind of love that says: "I'll never stop loving you no matter what you do." Of course, that doesn't mean we're going to necessarily approve all of our children's behaviors.

In some cases when our kids' actions are inappropriate we may need to respond with clear and often passionate correction. But our kids know we'll always be there for them-no matter what-and that's the kind of love our kids need if they are to feel they are genuinely respected and valued. Make sure you give your child love that is unconditional and guaranteed, so no matter what he knows you love him.

3. Listen attentively and respectfully.

If there is one common finding from countless different studies it is that kids say they wish their parents would listen-*really* listen-to them. Attentive listening is a

wonderful way to convey respect.

When your child talks, stop everything and focus completely so that she feels you really value her opinions and want to hear her thoughts. Stop what you're doing and give your child your full presence for the brief time.

Hint: Adolescent boys are often threatened by eye contact, so try sitting side to side.

4. Communicate respect with your whole body, not just with your words.

Most of the time our kids aren't listening to our words nearly as much as they are watching our posture, gestures, and facial expressions and hearing the tone of our voice. So make sure your whole body is communicating respect when you talk to your child. You may say, "I want to hear your ideas," but if your child sees you shrug your shoulders, raise your eye brows, smirk your mouth, or roll your eyes, he is likely to pick up a whole different meaning.

I've yet to meet parents who want their kids to think they aren't interested in their ideas or don't respect their kids' feelings. Yet those are the messages children pick up, all because of how parents react when their children talk.

5. Build positive self-concepts.

Labeling children with such terms as shy, stubborn, hyper, or clumsy can diminish self-esteem and become daily reminders of unworthiness. They can also become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Regardless of whether the labels are true or not, when children hear them they believe them. So only use labels that build positive self-concepts. *One good rule to remember about labeling is this: "If the nickname is not respectful, it's*

best not to use it."

6. Tell them often why you love and cherish them.

The more you show your child you love her, the more your child learns to value and love herself. So tell your child often that you love her, but also tell her what you love about her and express your gratitude that she is your child.

"I love that you are so kind." "I'm so glad I have the fortune of being your mom." "I love you just the way you are." "I respect the way you never give up."

Never assume that your child knows what feelings you hold in your heart about her. Tell her.

7. Enjoy being together.

One of the best ways to help a child feel respected is to let her know how much you enjoy being with her. Put your child at the top of your schedule and set aside relaxed times together during which you can really get to know who your child is. Only then will you be able to let her know why you value, love, and respect her so.

A quick quiz is to ask yourself which traits you respect in your child. Would your child be able to name those traits as well?

So now the real parenting test: Think back over the last few days. What have you done that helps your children see themselves as valuable human beings because your actions let them know you love, respect, and value them? Don't forget that our simple day-to-day actions are often the most powerful ways to nurture respect in our children.

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parenting, bullying, youth violence, and character development and author of 22 books including UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About Me World, The 6Rs of Bullying Prevention: Best Proven Practices to Combat Cruelty and Build Respect, The Big Book of Parenting Solutions, and Building Moral Intelligence. She has appeared over 130 times on the TODAY show and is a frequent expert on national media including Dateline, The View, Dr. Oz, Anderson Cooper, CNN, Dr. Drew, and Dr. Phil. To book her for speaking or media even refer to her website: www.micheleborba.com. Follow her on twitter @MicheleBorba.

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Making Good Decisions in Tough Times



We all make countless decisions every day. Should you wear a face mask while out in public? Attend a social justice protest? Confront someone you disagree with?

Some of these decisions have relatively minor consequences (good or bad), while other decisions could have significant implications for us and others. A tool like the Character-in-Action Checklist (below) can help you navigate complicated choices and make the right decision.

When making a decision, ask yourself:

- Will my words and actions be honest, sincere, and reliable?
- If the situation was reversed, is this how I would hope to be treated?
- What are the consequences of my words and actions if I make this choice?
- Is my decision fair to everyone involved in and affected by my actions?
- Is my decision expressing compassion and kindness?

- Would I want to live in a world where everyone makes this choice?

Not every decision will align with each of the Six Pillars of Character. They can come into conflict with each other and even themselves. For example, sometimes the right decision isn't fair to everyone involved. However, by identifying that a decision may not be fair, you can address the issue, explain why you made the decision, and provide support to those who perceive the decision as unfair. Or, sometimes the right choice may be contrary to a previous commitment, thus not in alignment with the trustworthiness test. Knowing this can help you determine how to honor your word when your decision doesn't allow you to keep your word.

We're facing troubling times and we can all contribute to the greater good by making sound decisions that reflect our best selves.

CHARACTER-IN-ACTION CHECKLIST: SIX PILLARS



When faced with a choice or dilemma, consider the following:

Would my decisions pass each of these tests?	Yes	No
Trustworthiness Test: Would my words and actions be honest, sincere, and reliable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect Test: If the situation was reversed, is this how I would want to be treated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Responsibility Test: What would be the consequences of my words and actions and would I do the right thing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairness Test: Would this be fair to everybody involved in and affected by my actions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring Test: Would my words and actions express compassion and kindness?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Citizenship Test: Would I want to live in a world where everybody did this?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What if it's still not clear what to do?

1. Stop!
2. Think it over some more.
3. Seek additional insight from individuals whose integrity you respect.

Adapted from Lickona & Davidson (2005).

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Communicating with Empathy

The horrific and wrongful death of George Floyd has brought the reality of racial injustice to the forefront of American mind's and dialogue, leaving many to feel unsure how to enter these necessary and important conversations that can positively impact the situation.

Character During Crisis

We are living through challenging and turbulent times. Americans are facing an international health pandemic, financial uncertainty, racial tensions, and civil unrest. It can be easy to feel helpless – wondering what possible impact someone like me can have on such great problems?

How Not to Raise a Quitter

Teach your children to hang in there when the going gets tough, but know when to let them throw in the towel.

Recognizing Good Stress

Recognize what is good stress in your life. What challenge are you currently facing that is making you better (whether you like it or not)?

Seven Ways to Nurture

Tolerance and Acceptance in Kids

One thing is certain, kids aren't born hateful. Prejudices are learned. Hatred and intolerance can also be learned, but so too can sensitivity, understanding, empathy, and tolerance. If today's children are to have any chance of living harmoniously in our multiethnic world, it is critical that parents nurture it.

Sports During COVID-19

COVID-19 has disrupted our lives in countless ways, not the least of which was moving all Iowa schools to online delivery for the rest of the spring semester, and the cancellation of all high school spring sports.