

Conflict resolution for kids



From guest contributor Dr. Michele Borba

Arguing. Quarreling. Yelling. Door slamming. Crying. Hurt feelings. Sound familiar? Arguments are a big part of why kids can't get along, and conflict is also a part of life. One of the most essential skills you need to teach your child is how to handle conflicts so he can survive the social jungle and life. Learning how to deal with all those problems that crop up is a big part of growing up and an essential life skill.

The key point is that not only must your child learn how to solve problems but do so in a peaceful, calm way so that all the kids involved feel like they've won. That's called a win-win scenario and it's the best way to reduce arguments and restore friendships. Doing so will not only dramatically boost your child's friendship quotient, but also improve harmony on the home front. And wouldn't that ever be a plus?

On a day-to-day basis, the problems our kids face are tough: prejudice, sibling conflict, academic and youth sport pressures, rejection by friends, cliques and gangs, bullying, trying to get along, as well as the frustrations of just growing up. These are issues we used to think only affected older kids; the fact is they are impacting our children at a younger and younger age.

Although we can't protect our kids from problems, frustrations

and heartaches, we can arm them with tools to better handle them. The more we help them learn to resolve conflicts peacefully, the greater the likelihood they'll develop into more self-sufficient, and resourceful individuals able to deal any issue—and do so *without our guidance*.

5 Steps to Help Kids Solve Conflicts Amicably

Use the following as a guide to help your kid minimize fighting and learn to solve problems peacefully. Each letter in the acronym, "STAND" represents one of the five steps in conflict resolution and helps kids recall the process. I developed S.T.A.N.D. when I was teaching special needs kids who had difficulty recalling information. It worked so well for them, I began to use it in my private practice with kids. The best news is that I have students coming back years later saying, "I'm still taking that STAND, Dr. Borba." YES!!!!

Take a S.T.A.N.D. to Solve a Problem

S – Stop and calm down. Keep emotions in check.

T – Tell what's bugging you. Listen to each side. Stick to facts!

A – Assess alternatives. Brainstorm your options.

N – Narrow the choices to "win-wins"

D – Decide on the best one that you both agree upon -and do it!

Remember, the best way to teach any skill is by “Showing” not “Telling.” So model each step, and then rehearse it over and over until your child can do each step without you. Learning how to deal with problems in the comfort of your home is also the greatest place for kids to learn by trial and error. Keep reinforcing a realistic approach to help your kids solve problems until they can confidently do so on their own. Finally, make sure you are modeling how to solve problem. Kids watch their parents conflict styles and copy.

Step 1. S = Stop and Calm Down

The first step to solving problems peacefully – or conflict resolution – is teaching kids how to calm down and tune into their feelings. The reason is simple: it’s impossible to think about how solve a problem if you’re upset. Once in control, you can begin to rationally figure out why you’re upset and then find an answer to your dilemma. So teach your kid to take a slow deep breath to calm down or walk away until he’s calm. If emotions are high amongst the two kids, do intervene: “I see two angry kids who need to calm down so they can figure out how to solve their problem.” *Tip: You might need to separate the kids until their anger is under control.*

Step 2. T = Take Turns Telling What the Problem Is

The trick in this second step is to teach and then enforce these two critical rules:

- **No put downs or name-calling:** You *must* listen to each other respectfully. (And that takes time!)
- **No interrupting:** Each person gets a chance to talk. You might ask each kid to say what happened, summarize each view, and then end with, “What can you do now to solve this problem?” Make suggestions only when your kids really seem stuck.

Three Tips:

1. One trick: Tell kids to start their explanations with the word “I” instead of “You” then describe the problem and how they want it resolved. Doing so helps the speaker focus on the conflict without putting the other kid down. For instance: “I’m ticked because you never give me a turn. I want to use the computer, too.”

2. If emotions are high, give kids the option of writing or drawing their view of the problem instead of saying it to each other. It’s particularly helpful for younger or less verbal kids.

3. The goal should be to help each kid try and feel what it’s like to be in the other kid’s shoes. One way to do this is by having each kid put into their own words what the other kid has told them.

Step 3. A = List the Alternatives to Resolving It

Next, kids need think of alternatives so they have ways to finding a resolution. Whether your child is a preschooler or

an adolescent, the basic rules of thinking of solutions (or brainstorming – or “storming your brain for ideas”) are the same:

Brainstorming Rules for Kids

- Say the first thing that pops into your mind-every idea counts.
- Don't put down anyone else's ideas.
- Change or add onto anyone's idea.
- Try to come up with ideas that work for both sides.

Don't offer your help unless kids really seem stuck! The only way they will develop the confidence to figure things out alone is if you let them. To keep kids focused, say they must come up with five (or two or three for younger kids) different solutions before you return. Then leave for a few minutes. Stretch the time depending on the children's age and problem-solving skills.

Teach Little Ones to Use a “Hand Pocket Solver”

A fun idea for younger kids is to teach them to use a “Hand Pocket Problem Solver” (aka their hand!) Hold their hand in yours and go through problem solving steps. You will have to do this dozens of times but it will kick in!

Thumb: Say what's bugging you (the problem)

Pointer, Middle Man, Ring Man: Name 3 ways to solve it (ANYTHING!)

Pinkie: Name the best choice.

Step 4. N = Narrow Choices

Narrow the options down to a few choices. Hint: You will have to go through this a few times but the process is so important. These are the steps that teach decision-making – the same steps your tween or teen will need later to make good, wise, and safe choices alone.

Here are two rules to help kids get closer to resolving the problem:

- Rule 1: Eliminate solutions that are unacceptable to either kid because they don't satisfy their needs.
- Rule 2. Eliminate any solutions that aren't safe or wise (or against our home rules).

Step 5. D = Decide the Best Choice and Do It!

The final step helps kids learn how to make the best decision by thinking through the consequences of their choices. You can teach kids to think about the consequence of their remaining choices by asking: ***“What might happen if you tried that?”***

Another way to help kids decide on the best choice is by helping them weigh the pros and cons of each remaining possibility:

- *“What are all the good and bad things that might happen if you chose that?”*

- *“What is the one last change that would make this work better for both of us.”*

Once they decide, the two kids shake on the agreement or take turns saying, “I agree.” And then they must stick to that agreement. Yes, it will take time – so keep on. Remember, your real goal is to help your kids learn to act right and make safe, wise choices without you. So keep guiding your kids until they can do the steps– and then step back so they will.

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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Fun ways to help kids learn the power of kindness



From guest contributor Dr. Michele Borba

When my children were little, we played a game called the Silent Fuzzy Pass. Fuzzy was a bright orange, ragged old stuffed animal that I suppose was a bear though it's debatable. Each night, Fuzzy "mysteriously appeared" on one of my son's pillows because the receiving child had been especially caring that day-and trying to sneak it there was always challenging. I only needed to put Fuzzy out once for the game to be effective.

The very next day-and the next few weeks-the boys were on a "kindness alert," watching for a brother to say or do something nice so that they could later try to guess who Fuzzy would visit that night. All day long they would run to me with "kindness reports": "Zach was really nice. He shared his toys with me." "Jason was kind. He let me choose the game we played." The only rule was that the boys had to explain why they felt the deed was kind. Later that night they would run to their pillows to see who Fuzzy had visited. The nonrecipients would tell the honored brother why Fuzzy probably chose him by reciting the kind deeds they remembered him doing earlier. Then the discussion would turn to their telling the brother how much they liked receiving his kind gestures, and the smile on the listener's face was always priceless.

I still don't remember how our "Fuzzy visits" got started. It probably was one of those spontaneous parenting moments when my kids' "kindness level" needed readjusting, and the idea just came. But it was amazing how such a simple little strategy could be so effective in boosting the virtue in my family. It sure taught me a few things: I learned that by really targeting kindness for a few weeks at home, my sons focused more on the behavior, and doing so helped them acquire a repertoire of kind deeds. I also learned the importance of letting my children know that their kind deeds positively affected others. Their kind gestures blossomed in our home-and it was so simple!

I've used these virtue-building lessons with my kids as well as students ever since. And it also seems that research shows that that easy little "spur of the moment" technique is one of the best ways to boost our children's kindness muscles.

The Science of Kindness

Studies firmly support the theory that by practicing small acts of kindness, people are often guided to perform more widespread acts of compassion *even though that may not have been their original intention.*

Samuel and Pearl Oliner discovered this phenomenon in their famous landmark study in Europe involving the rescuers of Jews from the Nazi persecution. Their book, *The Altruistic Personality*, is profound. In their interviews with the rescuers, a significant number said they had first planned to give only limited help, but their commitment grew once they became involved. The same phenomenon will take place with children once they recognize that their acts of kindness are

appreciated. The more opportunities children have to experience what it feels like to be the giver of kindness, the more likely they will incorporate the virtue as part of their character. *We need to make sure our children have those opportunities to extend kindness.*

3 Ways Kids Can Practice Doing Kind Deeds

What follows are a few ideas parents, teachers, and club leaders have used that encourage kids to practice doing kind deeds.

1. Create a Kindness Center Piece

A family from Toledo shared this heart centerpiece activity with me; it not only makes a charming decoration but also nurtures kindness. Gather your family together and brainstorm a list of kind deeds kids can do for just about anybody. Set one criterion: the deeds must all come “straight from the heart” and can’t be something you purchase.

Here are a few simple kindness suggestions other kids have come up with: say hello, ask how they are, offer to help, share something (anything!), give a compliment, invite them to play, listen and wait, give a pat on the back, ask someone to have lunch with you, teach a game to a friend, let the other person “go first,” write a thank you note, hug someone you love, open the door, give praise, do an errand for someone, give a high five, recycle, rake the neighbor’s leaves, wave to a stranger, bring a flower to your teacher, let them choose first, smile

Next, help your kids cut out fifteen to twenty-five colored paper heart shapes about three inches wide. On each heart, write a different kind deed. Then have kids decorate the hearts with whatever art supplies you have handy—glitter, stickers, marking pens, doilies, and paper scraps. Tape the back of each heart onto a pipe cleaner. Now place the “heart flowers” into any vase.

Every morning, invite each family member to pull a heart shape from the centerpiece. Encourage him to do the kind deed for people sometime that day. Each night at dinner, have everyone take turns describing his kindness-giving experience. Be sure to point out that people react differently to kindness and that not everyone may seem appreciative, but kind deeds are always the right thing to do.

2. Assign Secret Kindness Pals in Your Class or Home

This idea is a great way to help children learn that giving can be just as fun as receiving. Start by writing each child’s name on a paper slip; put them all in a basket, bag or other container. Each participating child then takes a turn pulling a slip; the pulled name becomes the child’s secret kindness pal. Explain that her task for the next week—a few days for younger kids—is to do a *secret* act of kindness toward her pal each day. Emphasize that the pal should not “see” the child performing the deed—that’s what makes it secret and what makes the game so intriguing.

Some of the secret deeds kids come up with are just plain wonderful. I’ve had students draw pictures, write a song, pick a flower bouquet, and string a necklace. My own kids secretly cleaned a brother’s room (a true first!), did laundry, and

even ironed a shirt (though this was definitely a time when the thought was what really counted, *not* what the shirt looked like later).

My favorite example came from a Girl Scout troop in New York. Each girl's secret buddy was a cancer patient in a pediatric ward. Each day for a month, the girls did secret kindly deeds for the children, such as leaving e-mail messages for them on the hospital computers, bringing toys, making colorful posters to wish them a happy day, baking cookies, and even making tapes of their favorite music to give. The patients adored the gestures, but the girls got even more enjoyment from doing the secret caring deeds.

When I did this activity with students, I always allowed a few minutes before dismissal to ask: "Has anybody done something nice for you? What was it? How did it make you feel? Who do you think your secret pal was today?"

The discussion always generated ideas for more secret kind gestures and also clearly let the senders know that their gestures were appreciated. Warning: the key to the activity's success is keeping the secret pal a secret-which is almost impossible for some kids (like one of my own sons -so try to keep things lighthearted even if the secrecy rule isn't strictly adhered to. Feel free to give younger kids hints for ideas they might try to keep things hush hush.

3. Make a Giving Tree Filled with Kind Deeds

One of the cutest ideas I've seen for helping kids practice kindness was done by a Boys and Girls Club in Atlanta. The

leaders first read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, a wonderful parable about a tree and a boy who grow old together and finally that recognize the greatest gift is giving of yourself. Next, they stood a large leafless tree branch in a pot and placed it in the middle of the room. The leaders then asked the kids to think of kind gestures they could do for someone when she looked sad or lonely like the tree. Each child's idea was written on a six-inch leaf shape precut from colored paper, then hung to the branch with a paper clip.

In a short time, their Giving Tree was covered with kind ideas, such as give a hug, smile, call her at home, ask her to play, sing a song, say a kind word, share something, ask what you can do, draw a picture. The leaders finally said, "Each day during the week when you come to the club, go to the Giving Tree, find an idea you could do for someone to make his day brighter, and then do it. It will make not only his day better, but also yours."

Parents, scout leaders, and teachers have told me they also made Giving Trees to help promote kindness with children. All you need is a small branch, plaster of paris, construction paper, scissors, paper clips, and a can. In fact, a fun family outing is taking a walk together just to find "the perfect branch."

There are dozens of simple kindness rituals you can do with children.

- **A year-round Giving Tree:** My girlfriend Cindy Morse kept her tree for years standing by her kitchen table. Every holiday, her children decorated the tree: paper bunnies for Easter, Kleenex ghosts for Halloween, American flags

for the Fourth of July, and hearts with kind deeds for Valentine's Day. It's a wonderful family tradition you might want to begin. Cindy now does the same activity with her grandkids.

- **Pull a kind deed every day Giving Tree:** My own family kept a small "Giving Tree" on our kitchen table. We'd periodically add more "kind deeds" written on small paper leaves to the tree. It was the perfect way to start. Each of us could look at one kind deed and then try to remember to do it for someone that day. A highlight of the evening dinner was talking about the kind deed and the impact it had on the individual.
- **A Giving Tree kindness wall at a school:** The Shipley School in Pennsylvania just emailed that they were started a Kindness Wall today. Every student was writing (or drawing) on a Post-it note an act of kindness they had done or seen that day. The wall was wrapping the school! What ideas are you doing with your students or children? Please share! After all, the world needs kindness and it must start with our children. Let's start kindness traditions and keep them going all year round!

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

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Seven ways to build strong character and integrity in children



From guest contributor Dr. Michele Borba

Wondering what can you do to help your kids counter negative influences and stand up for what they know is right? The answer is to nurture a solid moral core that will guide them to stand up for their beliefs and act right without us. And the best news is that we can teach kids the core virtues and skills of strong character and moral courage and can begin when they are toddlers.

Here are seven parenting tips from my book, *Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues That Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing*, you can use to help your kids stand up for their beliefs, buck negative peer pressure, and live their

lives guided by integrity. Just remember: it's never too late—or early—to start.

1. Know What You Stand for So Your Kid Knows

Parents with clearly identified moral convictions are more likely to raise good kids. Because their kids know what their parents stand for and why they do, their kids are more likely to adopt their parents' beliefs. So begin by asking yourself what virtues and moral beliefs matter most to you. Make a list, then narrow them to your top three. These will become your personal moral code and guide you in how you will raise your child. It's also the best way to help your child develop his own moral beliefs. Here are five quick questions to gauge how well you're parenting solid moral beliefs in your child:

- You can quickly name the 3-5 virtues you want most for your child to acquire.
- Your child could name the virtues you believe in most without prompting.
- You reinforce your child whenever he shows your selected virtues in his behavior.
- Your child can clearly see your chosen virtues in your daily behavior.
- You use those virtues as your day to day code of ethical behavior and family living.

2. Walk Your Talk

One great question to ask yourself each day is: "If I were the only example my child had to learn moral habits, what did she learn today from watching me?" The answer can be quite revealing. By watching your choices and hearing your casual comments, kids learn our moral standards. Make sure the moral behaviors your kids are picking up on are ones that you want your kids to copy. How many of these messages apply to you? Do

you...

- Eat a “sample” from a store’s candy bin in front of your child without paying?
- Buy a ticket for a “child under twelve” even though your child is older?
- Drive faster than the speed limit with your child as a passenger?
- Tell your child to say you’re not there when your boss calls?
- Do the majority of your child’s work on a school project, but have him sign his name?

3. Share Your Moral Beliefs and Take Stands

Speaking frequently to your child about values is called direct moral teaching. Parents who raise ethical kids do it a lot. So look for moral issues and talk about them as they come up: from TV shows and news events to situations at home, school, and friends. Tell your kids how you feel about the issue and why.

Share examples of morally courageous heroes such as Rosa Parks, Pee Wee Reece, Harriet Tubman, Abe Lincoln. There are wonderful books and videos in your local library that you can share with your child.

Most important: Stand up for your own beliefs whenever you feel a major value is jeopardized. Your kid needs to see and hear about moral courage so he has an example to copy.

4. Ask Moral Questions to Stretch Moral Development

Questioning is an important parenting tool for enhancing

children's consciences and strengthening moral beliefs. The right kind of questions can help kids expand their ability to take another perspective and ask themselves: "Is this the right thing to do?" Both are critical precursors to taking any moral stand. Here are a few questions parents can ask that stretch your kid's moral thinking:

"How would you feel if someone treated you that way?" "If you don't follow through on your word, what do you think would happen?" "If everybody acted that way (i.e. cheated, shoplifted) what would happen?"

5. Boost Empathy

Kids who stick up for others are kids who feel for others. Empathy is what motivates that feeling, halts cruel behavior and urges kids to take a stand. Here are two powerful ways to nurture empathy:

- **Ask: How would you feel?** Ask kids to ponder how another person feels using situations in books, TV, and movies as well as real life. It forces them to think about other peoples' concerns.
- **Use role playing.** It helps kids imagine others' feelings so ask your child to think how the other person would feel if roles were reversed. "Switch sides: what would the other person say and do?" Young kids can use puppets or toy figures to act out the problem from both sides.

6. Reinforce Assertiveness Not Compliance

If you want to raise a child who can stand up for his beliefs, then reinforce assertiveness—not compliance. Encourage him to share his opinions and stand up for what is right. And do so from early age so he can weather the storm of negative peer

influence. Parents who raise morally courageous kids expect their kids to act morally—even demand that they do.

7. Teach Assertive Skills

The truth is that it takes real moral strength to go against peer pressure and to stick up for your beliefs. So teach your child assertive skills so he can take the right kind of stand whenever he's confronted with a moral dilemma. Here are three ways to boost moral courage:

- **Teach assertive posture.** Teach your kid to stand up for his beliefs by using confident, assertive posture: stand tall with feet slightly apart, head held high, and look the person straight in the eye.
- **Say no firmly.** Stress that he must say his beliefs using a friendly, but determined voice. Then don't give in. His job is not to try changing the other person's mind, but to follow his beliefs.
- **Tell reasons why.** Ask your child to give the person the reason for his stand. It helps strengthen his conviction: "Stop bullying him; it's cruel." Or "No, it's illegal and wrong." Repeating the belief several times boosts assertiveness and helps your child not back down from his stand.

Keep in mind that your child's moral growth is an ongoing process that will span the course of her lifetime. The moral knowledge, beliefs, and habits you instill in her now will become the foundation she'll use forever.

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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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Trustworthiness

Respect

Responsibility

Fairness

Caring

Citizenship

Recognizing, addressing, and preventing cyberbullying



From guest contributor, Pamela Zuber

COVID-19 has changed so much about our daily lives. If we're lucky, we're able to use technology to continue to work, stay informed, and keep in touch with our family and friends.

But technology can be a double-edged sword for some children and young people. While using computers, phones, and other devices allows them to attend school remotely and spend time online with their friends, it can also expose them to cyberbullying.

What is cyberbullying?

In cyberbullying, people post hurtful things about other people online. They might post these messages through

- Email
- Messaging apps, text messaging, direct messaging, or instant messaging
- Social media apps such as Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook
- Online chats, gaming communities, message boards, chat rooms, or forums

Since social media and internet sites are social, others could see these messages, which could magnify the victim's shame, embarrassment, and fear. In addition, it's often difficult to remove some of these posts, so the messages can continue to harass a person long after a bully posted them.

Cyberbullying is particularly insidious because a bully can attack a person from anywhere or anytime. In the past, if a student threatened another student in school, the confrontation may have ended when classes ended. Now, people can use technology to start, continue, or intensify their harassment.

How can we stop cyberbullying?

As horrible as cyberbullying is, there are ways to stop it. There are many online guides that explain what cyberbullying is and how to prevent and address cyberbullying.

In addition, it might be a good idea to remind children and young people that our online lives shouldn't be all that different from our actual lives.

We could remind them that when they post something online, the audience members reading or watching their posts are real people. They have real emotions and can be hurt by hurtful comments.

Ask them, "How would you feel if someone posted something insulting about you?" Your conversation could spur them to consider other people's feelings and help them foster respect for others.

Keeping the lines of communication open can help if you think your children are the targets of cyberbullying. If you talk regularly with your children, they may be more likely to share their problems with you and go to you for help.

Frequent conversations can also help you notice if your children seem nervous or fearful or don't seem like themselves, which could be clues that they're being cyberbullied or if something else is wrong.

Communication fuels cyberbullying, but it's also a tactic for ending it. Reinforcing kindness and respect and providing safe spaces to share can help prevent and stop cyberbullying and other harmful exchanges.

About the author: Pamela Zuber is a writer and editor at Sunshine Behavioral Health who is interested in mental health, addiction and recovery, human rights, gender issues, and several other topics.

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Respect – Lion

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Fairness – Giraffe

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Citizenship – Bear

CHARACTER COUNTS! coloring book

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Special thanks to our friends at the Puppy Jake Foundation and Sticks.

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 describe themselves as “Caring People.”

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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.

Learn more about character education.

Creating a Compact for Excellence for families

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.



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.

Return to learn: citizenship

There is, perhaps, no more important time to be a good citizen than during a global pandemic. Each of us plays a critical role in contributing to the health and well-being of others. Whether returning to the classroom or engaging in online learning, educators, administrators, students, and families have an important role to play in maintaining the health and safety of all parties, and contributing to a positive educational environment.

The Leader-to-Detractor tool serves two important purposes. First, it defines what each role – detractor, participant, and leader – looks like in action. Good citizens are able to change detractor behaviors to participant behaviors, and participant behaviors to leader behaviors. Second, one can use the tool reflectively by asking, “were my actions that of a leader, detractor, or participant, and what do I need to do better or differently tomorrow to be a better citizen?”



Citizenship for Educators: Educators can use the Leader-to-Detractor tool to define what each role looks like in their classroom (virtual or in person). You may choose to include leader to detractor behaviors that are specific to following health guidelines as well. Share these definitions with

parents so they know what your expectations are as well.

Citizenship for Students: Once students have worked with educators or parents on defining what leaders, participants, and detractors look like in action, they can engage in daily self-reflection to gauge their behaviors for the day. Students should note if there are instances in which they are more likely to be a detractor or participant and create and follow a plan to be a leader in every circumstance. Their reflection can be centered on school, home, following health guidelines, or a combination of all three.

Citizenship for Families: Families can use the Leader-to-Detractor tool to identify leader, participant, and detractor behaviors they observe each day. These may be behaviors the student exhibits, or observations of others, whether at the grocery store, at work, or in the community. Ask your student what leader to detractor behaviors they notice in others each day, and what could be done better or differently to be a leader in each situation.

Download the Leader-To-Detractor tool.

Learn more about character education.