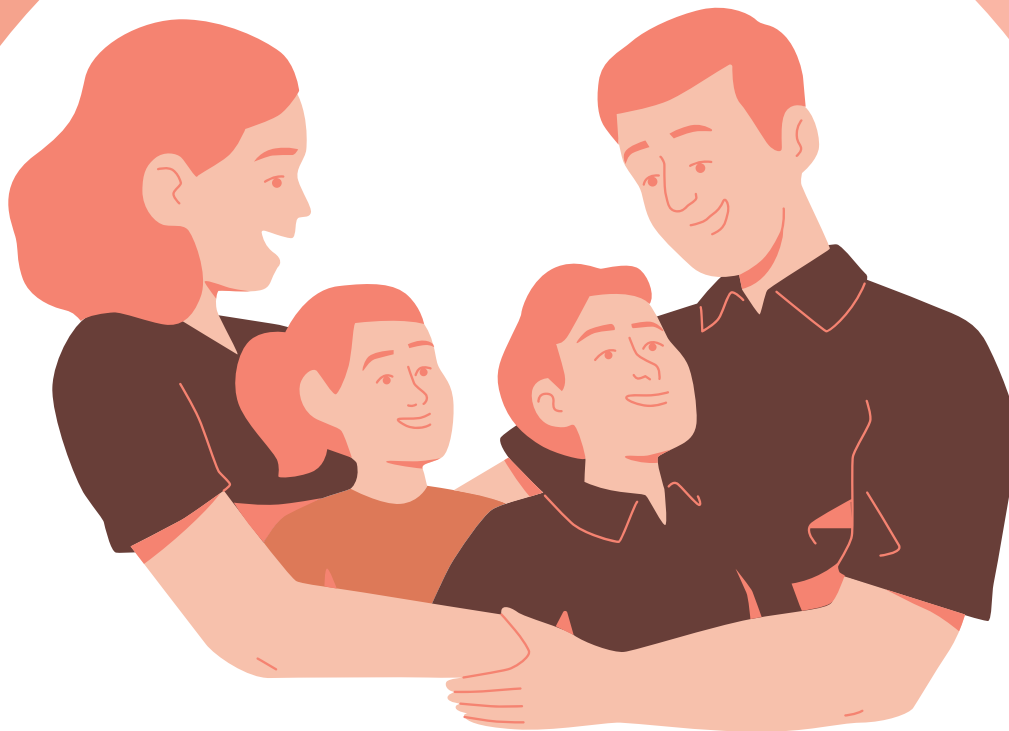


How to Parent with Empathy

Can you recall a time when it was hard to hold your tongue? Find out how you can express empathy towards your child, and reinforce what your child is learning about empathy in school.



What is empathy?

In Character & Citizenship Education lessons on Family Education, students learn that **empathy is about demonstrating care and consideration for the feelings, thoughts and points-of-view of others.**

What does empathy look like?



Students practise **active listening** and learn to **respond in a sensitive way**, which strengthens peer and family relationships.

Ways for Parents to Show Empathy

Supporting your child helps in stress management. Resist the urge to be naggy or overly instructive. Instead, try showing curiosity and concern in the following ways.

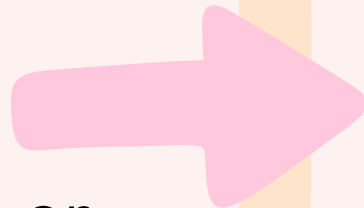
Emotional Engagement

- Actively listen when they share their concerns or struggles.
- Ask thoughtful follow-up questions.



Support

- Validate what your child is feeling.
- Offer comfort by expressing concern or sympathy.



Phrases to use...

- It sounds like you're feeling anxious....
- I'm sorry that you are having a hard time with this...
- I can see you might be frustrated. Can I sit with you until it calms?

Ways for Parents to Show Empathy

Showing empathy while disciplining is challenging as there is a fine line between discipline and excessive harshness. Children need care, encouragement and space to learn from mistakes and improve.

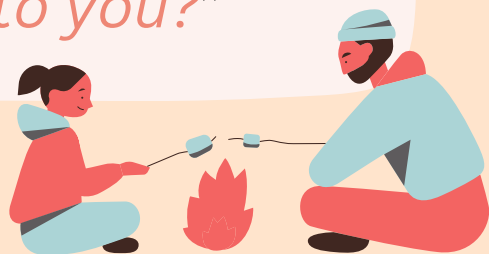
Connection before Correction:

Empathy can help connect you and your child, especially during difficult conversations. Seek to understand your child using the following tips.

Connect

Bridge intergenerational differences with interest.

“Can you help me better understand why you did this/ why this means so much to you?”



Solutions

Steer the conversation towards relevant solutions (if your child is open to advice) while acknowledging your child's needs.

Guide

Reinforce good behaviour, and guide them to manage their behaviour and restore affected relationships.

The Effects of Harsh Parenting

Did you know that reacting with anger can negatively impact how the brain develops and how it functions? A 2021 study by the University of Montreal* found that frequently yelling or getting angry at children is associated with children having a smaller brain in adolescence.



*Sabrina Suffren, Valérie La Buissonnière-Ariza, Alan Tucholka, Marouane Nassim, Jean R. Séguin, Michel Boivin, Manpreet Kaur Singh, Lara C. Foland-Ross, Franco Lepore, Ian H. Gotlib, Richard E. Tremblay, Françoise S. Maheu. **Prefrontal cortex and amygdala anatomy in youth with persistent levels of harsh parenting practices and subclinical anxiety symptoms over time during childhood.** Development and Psychopathology, 2021; 1 DOI: [10.1017/S0954579420001716](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579420001716)

The Benefits of Empathetic Parenting

Greater connection and trust in a parent

Better relationships and conflict resolution skills

Prevents violent behaviour and improves mental health

The child becomes a more supportive parent as an adult



Withhold judgement and extend a listening ear if that is all your child wants.

Offer supportive responses through a warm tone or actions. This helps your child to better regulate their own negative emotions.



Hold space and time for your child's big and complex emotions to be felt before giving advice



Role modelling Empathy at Home

As parents, make effort to actively listen, show care, support and appreciation towards older family members.

Overcome the challenges in relationships with elderly relatives by remaining open-minded and resolving differences respectfully.

Encourage your child to express gratitude, understanding and empathy to their grandparents or elderly relatives.

