



CREATING EMPATHY – GRADES 2-4

Creating Empathy 7-9 years (grades 2-4)

Teacher information: In one experimental study, 110 school kids (aged seven years) were enrolled in a reading program. Some students were randomly assigned to engage in conversations about the emotional content of the stories they read. Others were asked only to produce drawings about the stories.

After two months, the kids in the conversation group showed greater advances in emotion comprehension, the theory of mind, and empathy, and the positive outcomes "remained stable for six months."

Loving-kindness and compassion meditation.

Studies show that as little as two weeks of training in compassion and kindness meditations can lead to changes in brain chemistry that are linked to an increase in positive social behaviors, including empathy. These meditations also lead to increased positive emotions and social connectedness, in addition to improved health.

Loving-kindness meditation involves thinking of loved ones and sending them positive thoughts. Later, children can expand their positive thoughts to more neutral people in their life as well.

The four traditional phrases for this meditation are, "May you feel safe. May you feel happy. May you feel healthy. May you live with ease." The exact wording used is not important; it's about generating feelings of kindness and warmth.

With compassion training, children visualize experiences in which they felt sad or upset, then relate to these experiences with warmth and care. They then repeat the exercise with other people, starting



with close loved ones, followed by a difficult person, and finally extending compassion to humanity in general.

Engage in cooperative board games or cooperative construction.

Research shows that successful experiences with cooperation encourage us to cooperate more in the future. Collaborating with others can encourage children to build positive relationships and to be open to developing more positive relationships in the future. These experiences also involve discussions and debate, teaching children to consider other perspectives.

Ideas for cooperative board games or cooperative construction include:

- Play with Legos, working together to build something specific
- Race to the Treasure! (a board game in which children collaborate to build a path and beat an ogre to the treasure)
- Outfoxed! (a cooperative whodunit game)
- Stone Soup (an award-winning cooperative matching game)
- The Secret Door (a mystery board game in which children ages 5+ work together to solve the mystery behind the secret door)

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