

Empathy: Helping children manage big feelings.

Mature Empathy: The heart of emotional intelligence. It is about understanding and accepting others' perspectives, not taking on their pain as your own.

Immature Empathy: Below are common blocks to empathy. They keep us from teaching children how to manage tough emotions and accept responsibility.

- . **Gushing with sympathy** encourages others to get caught up in their feelings. We think it shows that we care, but it just helps them stay stuck in their feelings.
- . **Giving unsolicited "fix-it" advice** seeks to solve problems without managing feelings. The pitfall here is that unattended feelings come back again and again.
- . **Offering humor** distracts instead of engaging emotionally. It is a defense against healing connections.
- . **Sharing similar experiences from your own life** removes them from their own experience and feelings.
- . **Saying "everything will be fine"** says they shouldn't feel as they do and risks being false since the future is unknown.

Reflection Activity: Which type(s) of empathy did you receive from your parents? _____

Which type(s) do you tend to offer to children? _____

To other adults? _____



Doing it Differently: The D.N.A. Process

Describe: "Your face is going like this."

Name the feeling: "You seem angry." (Use a questioning tone.)

Acknowledge the desire: "You wanted a turn and didn't know how to ask." If you have no idea what's going on, ask, "Something happened?"

The D.N.A. process helps the child move from an upset state to a calm one so he is more likely to be willing to solve the problem. Describe, name, acknowledge, and then teach a new skill or offer encouragement.

In our example above, you would follow D.N.A. with teaching, "When you want a turn, tap your sister on the shoulder and say, 'Turn, please.' Practice that now."

Here are some other examples:

Your foot is going like this. You seem anxious. You want to do well in the parade but you aren't sure what it's going to be like. Breathe with me, you can handle this. It's going to be just like we practiced. Keep breathing.

You: Your face is going like this. You seem frustrated. Something happened?

Child: I hate writing!

You: Oh, I see! You wanted your name to look just right. That takes lots of practice. You're learning! Keep working at it. You can handle this.

You: Your face is going like this. You seem sad. Something happened?

Child: She called me an ugly cow.

You: You wanted her to treat you with respect and you didn't know the words to say. When someone calls you a name, say, "I don't like it when you call me names. Use my name." Let's practice that now, and I will come with you when you talk to her.