



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## Why Empathy Matters



We all want our children to grow up to be happy, healthy, well-adjusted adults. According to recent research, empathy plays a role in affecting children's future health, authentic happiness, relationship satisfaction, and ability to bounce back from adversity. Studies have shown that children who are empathetic are better adjusted emotionally, well-liked, more sensitive in general, physically healthier and score higher academically than those without empathy.

Empathy is defined by *Zero to Three* as “the ability to imagine how someone else is feeling in a particular situation and respond with care.” According to educational psychologist Dr. Michelle Borba, “In today’s world, empathy equals success...the Empathy Advantage will give our children the edge they need to live meaningful, productive, and happy lives... and thrive in a complex new world”. In addition, according to Mary Gordon, founder and president of *Roots of Empathy*, empathy is a key ingredient to ending

the bullying epidemic that we face in our world today.

So how do we go about raising children who are empathetic?

- ♥ **Infants** – establish a secure, strong, loving relationship with your baby and respond to his needs with care.
- ♥ **Toddlers** – teach *emotional literacy* – the ability to identify, understand and express emotions.
- ♥ **Preschoolers** – develop *perspective taking* skill – the ability to put oneself in another person’s position and imagine what the other person may be feeling and thinking from his point of view.

This newsletter will discuss these foundational pieces to developing empathy, and will present strategies for at each age level – infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

### This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child’s development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

# Infants

The seeds of empathy are planted in infancy by how adults relate to and respond to babies. By lovingly responding to your baby's emotional needs, he learns that he can count on you and trust you, and a bond is formed. When a child feels accepted and understood by the adults in his life, he learns how to accept and understand others as he grows.



An infant uses you as a gauge as he learns about emotions. Around six months of age, babies use “social referencing” – baby will start to look to a loved one to assess their reaction to a person or situation. The expression on your face will affect how he reacts. For example, if you respond warmly to a visitor, baby will feel that the visitor is good and safe. This is why parents are encouraged to be upbeat and reassuring – not anxiously hover – when saying good-bye to their child when left with a caregiver. It sends baby the message that “this is a good place” and “you will be okay.”

Here are some strategies for establishing a secure, strong, loving relationship with your infant:

- ♥ Smile, laugh, talk, sing and read together every day.
- ♥ Play face-to-face games, like peek-a-boo, with your infant. Keep your face about 8-18 inches from your baby's face.
- ♥ Provide *responsive care* – match your caregiving to what baby needs. For example, if your 9-month old starts grabbing at the spoon while you are feeding him, you can give him a spoon to hold in his hands while you continue to feed him with another spoon.

## Activity for Infants: *Labeling Emotions*

Adapted from *Creative Resources for Infants and Toddlers*

What You Need:

None

What to Do:

1. Constantly observe baby. When he is displaying an emotion such as distress, disgust, or interest, respond immediately.
2. Using your knowledge of the situation, describe and label the infant's emotions. For example,
  - ♥ “Maddie, you are crying. You must be hungry. Let's warm a bottle and eat.”
  - ♥ “Isaac, you are smiling. You are happy. You like when daddy holds you in his arms.”

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



# Toddlers

During the toddler years, children start to gain the awareness that they are individuals and that others may have beliefs, desires, and feelings that differ from their own. Once children reach this level of self-awareness, they experience more complex emotions like embarrassment, frustration, and disappointment.



Teaching children emotional literacy by helping them learn the words for various emotions is important because, over time, it gives children the ability to talk about their feelings, instead of acting them out through tantrums. Help your child make sense of his feelings by using words to describe emotions.

Here are some strategies from *Zero to Three* to help your child identify emotions:

- ♥ Talk about the feelings of others. For example say, *"Noah is feeling sad because you took the ball he was playing with. Please give Noah back that ball and then you choose another toy to play with."*
- ♥ Use "I" messages. This type of communication models the importance of self-awareness. For example say, *"I don't like it when you hit me. It hurts."*

## Activity for Toddlers: *Feelings Face Matching Game*

### What You Need:

- 8 cardboard squares or index cards
- 4 pairs of feeling faces (e.g., happy, sad, angry, scared)  
included in this packet, or use photographs or drawings
- Scissors
- Glue

### What to Do:

1. Make "feeling face" cards by either using real photographs of your child/family members making different feeling faces. Print two copies of each or use the illustrated faces.
2. Cut the pictures to fit the size of the cardboard squares and glue it to the squares. Remember to have two sets of each picture.
3. Play the game: Lay one set of the picture cards picture-side up spread out on the floor or a table. Place the other set of the picture cards in a stack picture-side down.
4. Have your child flip over the top picture card in the stack, and find the matching one on the table.
5. Say the name of the feeling as your child flips each one over. For example say, "That girl is making a happy face. Can you find the matching happy face on the table?" Continue playing for as long as your child is interested.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*



# Preschoolers

Your preschooler may soon exhibit the skill of *perspective taking*. Perspective taking builds upon emotional literacy, as it requires us to put ourselves in another person's position and imagine what the other person may be feeling and thinking from his point of view. This is important because when we are able to imagine a situation from someone else's perspective, we gain a better understanding of their motives, and if applicable – we are able to change our own behavior so we don't offend them.



At this stage, children still often confuse their own perspective with others. For example, he may think that giving his favorite toy to another child who is crying would cheer her up since that cheers him up. With experience, he will start to understand that other people may have perspectives that differ from his own.

Here are some strategies to nurture *perspective taking* in your preschooler:

- ♥ Share with your child emotional experiences you've had. Include details such as how that made you and others feel. For example, "I cried and cried when my dog was lost, but my friend Jan didn't feel as sad as I did because it wasn't her dog."
- ♥ Help your child problem-solve situations to make someone feel better. Give him ideas like going to get an ice pack, helping another child up off the ground, or finding something fun for the child to do. Ask, "Which do you think he would like best?" "Why?"

## Activity for Preschoolers: *Story Time Questions*

What You Need:  
Children's book

What to Do:

1. Read the book to your child, changing the tone of your voice to match the emotions of the story. For example, use a quiet voice when something sad is happening.
2. Ask your child the following types of questions during and after reading the story:

- ♥ "How is the character feeling?" "How do you know?"
- ♥ "What happened that made the character feel \_\_\_\_\_?"  
"What happens that makes you feel \_\_\_\_\_?"
- ♥ "What did the character do when he/she felt \_\_\_\_\_?"  
"When you feel \_\_\_\_\_, what do you do?"  
"What else can you do when you are feeling \_\_\_\_\_?"
- ♥ "What could you do to help a friend who is feeling \_\_\_\_\_?"

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)





## How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

### Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles, e.g., facial muscles, fingers, hands and toes
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Build trust in you and other important people
- ♥ Recognize himself as separate from others

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Increase his observation, listening and understanding skills, and attention span

### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Build skills in comparing, sorting, and grouping
- ♥ Develop his thinking and problem-solving skills



## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Praise his efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

### Banana Pops (serves 2)

Adapted from *Keiki Can Cook!* by the Hawai'i State Dept. of Health

#### Ingredients:

- 1 large banana, cut into ½ inch pieces
- ¾ cup vanilla yogurt
- 2 Tablespoons of oat and honey granola cereal

#### Directions:

1. Divide the sliced banana pieces between two plates.
2. Place 2 tablespoons of yogurt on each plate.
3. Place 1 tablespoon of granola cereal on each plate.
4. Have your child use a fork to pick up a slice of banana and dip it into the yogurt, then roll it in the cereal.
5. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.



## Resources

### Unselfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World

<https://www.parenttoolkit.com/expert/michele-borba>

Michele Borba, Ed.D. pinpoints the forces causing the empathy crisis and offers a nine-step plan to help parents and educators cultivate empathy in children, from birth to young adulthood. Watch a short video by the author entitled “5 Ways to Boost Your Preschooler’s Empathy.”

### Zero to Three Parenting Resources: How to Help Your Child Develop Empathy

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/5-how-to-help-your-child-develop-empathy>

This resource offers practical tips to help infants and toddlers develop empathy and understand that others have different thoughts and feelings than they do.



## Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai‘i State Public Library** [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### Infants and Toddlers

***Baby Faces*** By Margaret Miller

In this captivating and expressive board book, emotions are linked to facial expressions with simple terms such as “yucky,” and “yum-yum.”

***My Many Colored Days*** By Dr. Seuss

A book about feelings and moods, not only does it help teach colors, but it also starts to set the groundwork to give children dialog for their feelings.

### Preschoolers

***On Monday When It Rained*** by Cherryl Kachenmeister

In simple, straightforward text and marvelously expressive pictures, the author and photographer have captured the thoughts and feelings of one small boy. Whether he is proud or scared, lonely or excited, the boy’s face mirrors his emotion with the wonderful directness of childhood.

***Today I Feel Silly: And Other Moods That Make My Day*** by Jamie Lee Curtis  
Silly, cranky, excited, or sad — everyone has moods that can change each day. And that’s okay! Follow the boisterous, bouncing protagonist as she explores her moods and how they change from day to day.



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