



Have a Heart: Teaching and Cultivating Compassion

When we show kindness, caring, and a willingness to help others, we are showing **compassion**.

While often used interchangeable with sympathy being compassionate brings with it a desire to assist someone else in a challenging situation rather than just feeling “pity”.

We are all in need of compassion from others as we struggle with our lives. But equally important as receiving compassion from others is to be able to feel compassion for others. While we think this comes naturally it actually needs to be taught and modeled for us as children if we are to become compassionate adults. Without compassion in our lives we are unable to enact laws that protect others, provide care for those in need and live in peace with our family, friends and community.

When we are raised in stable, loving homes then understanding and seeing compassion at work occurs regularly as we are taught to resolve difference with our siblings, help each other in the family, speak politely, and apologize if we hurt someone else. However, for many children in our society and in the world who live in unsafe, self focused and violent environments compassion is not modeled or taught. For these children they cannot feel compassion for others because they have not experienced compassion shown to them. How do we teach and cultivate compassion in our children, homes, communities and world? We offer these suggestions.

- 1) **Be kind to others** especially to our children. When we treat others with kindness then they learn to be kind. Talk about being kind and share ways and times we are kind to help children understand its importance in building positive, loving relationships.
- 2) **Speak respectfully** to everyone even children. When we speak and act respectfully we show our children that everyone is valued and deserves to be treated with dignity.
- 3) **Use good manners** by saying please and thank you. Be grateful for the help of others. Acknowledge other peoples support and assistance with appreciative words and gestures.
- 4) **Be quick to apologize** to everyone even children. We forget to say “I’m sorry” to our children when we are rude or hurtful. When we model seeking forgiveness we teach children to forgive others.
- 5) **Be helpful without being asked.** When we help others we model cooperation,, team work and service to others. This teaches children the importance of being supportive, responsible and belonging whether at home, school or in the community.

To teach and cultivate compassion in our children and with others we must first cultivate compassion in ourselves.

- How can we be kinder at home, work, in our community?
- How can we show more respect toward others especially those with different beliefs or views than ours?
- To whom can we show gratitude for their assistance and support?
- With whom do we need to seek forgiveness for our actions and whom do we need to forgive for their actions?