

Learning to value others

Some girls in Grace's year four class were taking turns at skipping. Grace watched them closely and decided she would like to have a turn too. She asked to join in but Sally said, "It's too hard for you."

Grace had an intellectual disability. This meant she sometimes took longer to learn things. She was also not as well coordinated in sports as the other girls.

"Come on. Let me have a turn," said Grace. "Anyone can have a turn," said Deepa. "Have your turn after me."

So Grace tried to skip over the rope, but it got caught at her feet. "Try again", a few of the girls said. "You have to jump just as it hits the ground." Grace tried again. They gave her extra tries because she was learning. On the last try she managed two skips in a row. "You did it," said Deepa. Grace was really proud. "I did it!" she said. "And you helped me."

Learning to see another person's point of view

Learning to see another person's point of view is important for getting along with others and building positive friendships. Understanding others helps children know what to do in social situations and is the basis for developing caring and responsibility.

It's not always easy for children to see the point of view of someone who is different from them. Being different could mean having a disability, coming from a different country, being a different age or gender, or having different values and interests. Children who are seen as different may be left out of activities.

They may face discrimination because others think they are not as good, as talented, or as important as they are. Discrimination can have very negative effects on children's self-esteem and mental health and wellbeing.

Skills for empathy

Taking others' needs into account involves values of caring, compassion and acceptance of others. It also involves emotional skills for empathy. Learning to empathise with another person means learning to 'walk in their shoes.' It means being able to recognise and value their feelings and needs, even though they may be different from your own.

Skills for empathy develop over time and include:

- recognising your own feelings
- recognising others' feelings
- listening to others' opinions
- thinking what it would feel like if you saw the situation their way
- thinking how you can respond in a caring way
- doing something to help.

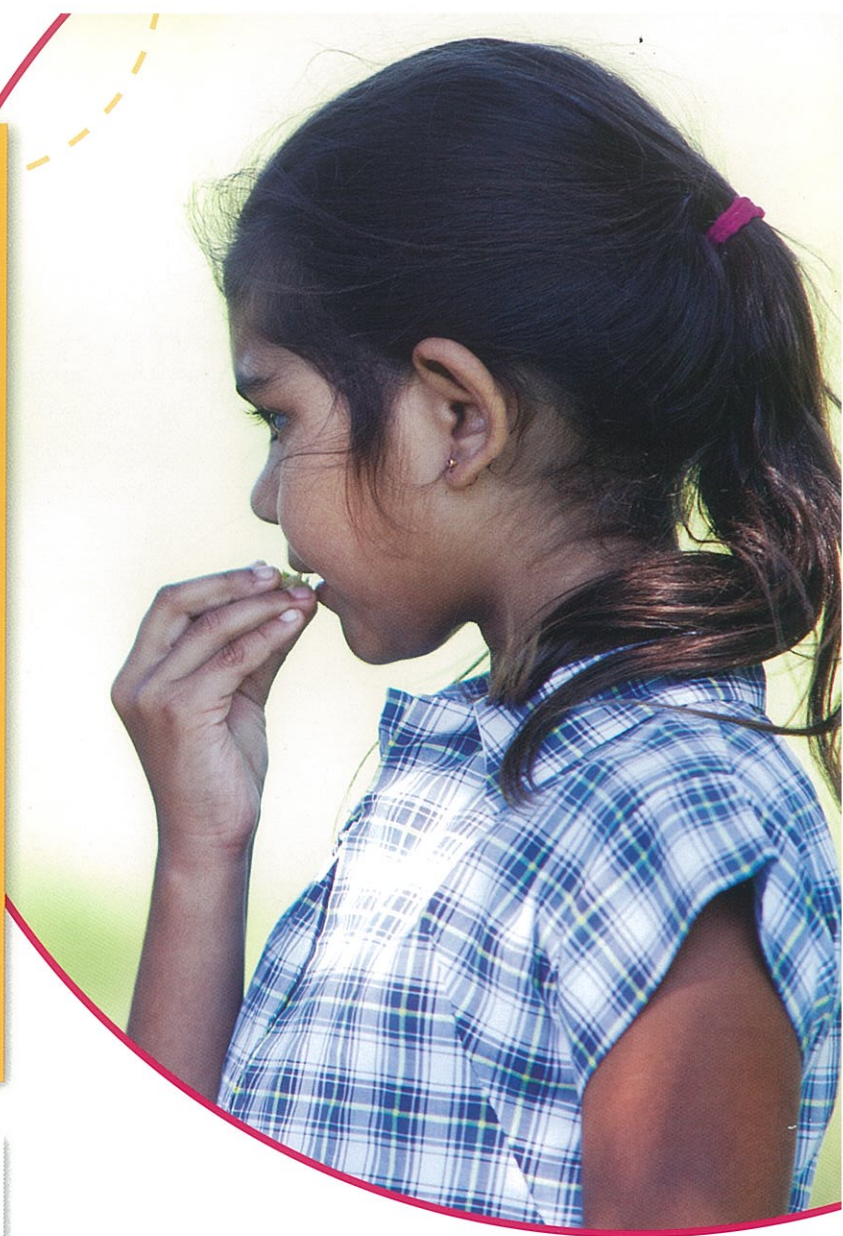
Some children find it easy to tune into feelings. Others need more guidance to learn empathic skills. Adults have an important role in supporting children to learn kindness and empathy.

A little kindness can sometimes go a long way. Learning to skip has made Grace's day. Watching and supporting her has helped everyone else feel good too.

How parents and carers can help

Research has found that the examples shown by caring adults have a big influence on children's empathy. Parents and carers (as well as school staff) can also foster empathy by promoting values of caring and compassion and coaching children to be kind and thoughtful towards others.

- Model empathy by tuning into children's feelings (eg "Ouch! That must have hurt," or "You must be feeling disappointed that your friend can't come over").
- Help children think about how feelings affect other people (eg "How do you think your friend might be feeling?").
- Help children develop skills for understanding other people's points of view by discussing the effects of discrimination and the importance of respectful and caring attitudes towards everybody.
- Talk about situations that involve empathy (eg "What I liked about the story was how kind the hero was," or "That was a mean thing to do. Don't you think she should have helped her friend?").
- Notice when children are kind and let them know you value their behaviour (eg "That was a very thoughtful thing to do. I really appreciate it!").



How to support children to accept and include others

- Teach children that there is nothing wrong with being different and that each of us is different to somebody else.
- Teach children that everyone has a right to be respected.
- Help children develop skills for positive friendships and cooperative play.
- Parents and carers of children with special needs can talk to the staff at their children's school about how to support their strengths and about encouraging other children to include them.

Valuing others means seeing difference as something positive. It means trying to understand how others think and feel, and knowing that this helps you as well as them.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing



Principals
Australia
Institute
Learning. Leading.