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Empathy: Capturing Your Child's Ability to Care

Developing your child's moral and emotional abilities may be near the top of your list as a parent. But how do you teach children to feel compassion for and understanding of others?

Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of others, to feel what they feel, and respond in an appropriately helpful and compassionate way. While children are born with the capacity for empathy, we must nurture empathetic behavior skills early on.

Infants: The foundation for empathetic behavior is built during the first year of life. The parent-child relationship helps shape trust and attachment. By consistently and lovingly responding to their baby's needs, parents begin teaching empathy.

Toddlers: During the toddler years, it is important for parents to begin teaching children how to name what they feel. Toddlers are not always capable of identifying or managing strong feelings, so it is important for parents to show the maturing child how to identify feelings and connect feelings and actions with those of others.

Pre-schoolers: Difficulty sharing and throwing tantrums when asked to "take turns" can be daily occurrences for pre-school age children. During this stage, learning how to share is one of the best tools for nurturing



empathy. Parents can help initiate sharing by using a kitchen timer to help remind children that their friend deserves to play with the toy, too. When your child shares or plays in a caring manner express appreciation and explain why you are proud of him.

Once your child reaches age four, cognitive (thinking ability) development has progressed and she has begun associating her emotions with the feelings of others. Children now realize that others do not see and feel the exact same way that they do. Develop this behavior by pointing out the impact of actions and asking the child to think about how she would feel if roles were reversed.

Source: <http://www.pal.au.edu/discipline/empathy.php>.

Understanding Your Child's Aches and Pains

Do throbbing legs, muscle aches and midnight wake-ups with your child sound familiar? Your little one is probably experiencing growing pains. While you encourage them to run and play or soothe them back to sleep, you're probably uncertain as to whether it's time to take them to the doctor.

What does it mean when the diagnosis is growing pains? Growing pains normally occur in about 25 to 40 percent of children, generally between the ages of 3- to 5-years and 8- to 12-years. The cause: most likely the jumping, running, climbing (and falling) that your active child enjoys during the day. Medically, growing pains have nothing to do with growth as there's no evidence that growth hurts.

What to look for

Growing pains concentrate in the muscles. So if your growing toddler is experiencing growing pains, she will probably complain about her thigh, calf area or behind her knees. Your child will respond to being held, massaged and cuddled.

Joint pain may signal a serious disease. If you see red, tender or swollen joints, it may be time to head to the doctor. If your child is displaying uncharacteristic

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behavior, is tired or weak, has a fever, rash, or loss of appetite, it's time to see the doctor. These are not signs of growing pains.

Remember that growing pains are a diagnosis of exclusion, meaning that your doctor would rule out other conditions before a diagnosis of growing pains is made. A medical history check and physical exam will usually accomplish this.

How to help

Like any muscle pain, there are simple ways to help a child experiencing growing pains. First, massage the area or use a heating pad to help the muscles relax. Next, make sure you encourage your child to stretch their muscles after playing. If that doesn't seem to help you can also give your child ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

Sources: http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/aches/growing_pains.html#.



If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or call 1-866-693-GROW (4769), to talk to a professional and find out how you can get connected with various resources in Minnesota.

Raising Health Conscious Children



Packed schedules, rushed routines, quick meals and screen time are just a few of the challenges that pose a challenge to children's health. Living a healthy lifestyle is a learned behavior. Children need to know what we do to be healthy and why we do it. They also need to experience it rather than just be told. This helps them with making good choices for themselves in the future.

Here are a few ways you can begin to help your child understand the importance of maintaining lifelong, healthy habits:

- **Model Healthy Habits** - Children need to see healthy choices being made around them so they can use that knowledge to make choices for themselves later.
- **Have Regular Conversations** - Talk with your child about how our bodies grow, how we prevent illness, why we sleep, how we feel. These conversations are most meaningful when they occur during the actual experience.

- **Provide Opportunities to Practice**- Allow opportunities for your child to be involved in the decision or choose for themselves with your guidance. This will prepare them to make good decisions when you are not there to guide them.

As long as children are getting constant and consistent messages about living a healthy lifestyle and they are actively involved in the process, you are preparing them to make healthy living decisions in the future.

Source: http://parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/age3_5/topicsAZ/PKDEV_001763.

Test your knowledge about growing pains...

- T F Growing pains always concentrate in the muscles.
- T F Red, tender or swollen joints are a common symptoms of growing pains.
- T F Massaging the area or using a heating pad to help the muscles relax, are effective methods for alleviating growing pains.

Answers: 1) T, 2) F, 3) T

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