

MY KIDS ONLY THINK ABOUT THEMSELVES!

Throughout the years of my counseling practice I have observed many adults that were not taught as young children how to be sympathetic. Their lack of sympathy not only makes it very difficult for them to be sympathetic to others, but they also tend to have difficulty being sympathetic to themselves, and in allowing others to be sympathetic to them. Lack of sympathy can be devastating to relationships, as well as making it extremely difficult for an individual to get through difficult situations, such as poor health, loss of a job, mid-life transitions, etc.

Many people, including trained professionals, falsely assume that all adults instinctively know how to be sympathetic. They act as if sympathy is something a person catches, like a cold or the flu; either you have it or you don't. They don't understand that sympathy can be—in fact, *must* be taught and learned.

Some children are by nature sympathetic towards a person they perceive as hurting. However, for the most part, parents need to make a conscious and conscientious effort to teach their children and teenagers how to be sympathetic.

SOME PRACTICAL WAYS TO TEACH SYMPATHY ARE:

1. **Model sympathy to your spouse and children** by asking how their days went, doing one of their chores if they are sick, doing something special for them when they are down in the dumps, etc.
2. **Emphasize the need for your kids to complete chores**, not only as a way to earn money for their needs but because it will help you by relieving some of your workload.
3. **Praise acts of sympathy** and apply negative consequences



when your children do not show sympathy. For example, set an earlier bedtime for your kids if they have not been quiet and allowed a sick person to rest.

4. **Let your kids know how you are feeling** and what they can do to help you. Don't keep your feelings in, attempting to act strong if you are feeling weak. If you are sick or discouraged about a project that is not going well, let your kids know.
5. **Help your children to actively consider the needs of others.** Encourage them to send a card to a fellow student that is sick, donate some of their toys to a local charity, or give out birthday party invitations privately and not at school where all who were not invited can observe.
6. **As you watch TV shows together, point out examples** in which people are not sympathetic to one another.
7. **Expect respect and sympathy** from your kids. Don't do things over and over for them without also receiving from them in return. Some parents

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(especially mothers) tend to do and do for their kids without getting anything in return. Some kids will only learn to be sympathetic if you are firm with them. Refuse to drive them someplace if they have not completed a chore you asked

them to do. Be sure to tell them why you won't drive them, and encourage them to think of your needs next time.

8. Involve your children in community activities that foster their concern for the welfare of others. Encourage them to

contribute a portion of their allowance to your church; join walks for hunger or other causes; bring food to a needy person and take the kids with you; encourage them to go on short-term mission trips when they enter the teenage years.

A CHALLENGE TO YOU:

1. Were your mother and father sympathetic to each other when you were a child? Were they sympathetic to you?
2. Were you taught how to be sympathetic as a child?
3. Select two or three of the ideas listed above and make a conscious effort to implement those ideas; then try several other ideas.