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DEVELOPING EMPATHY IN TEENS

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Abstract: While most people have mastered concrete thinking skills by the time they enter secondary school, our executive functioning skills such as planning, organisation, decision-making and self-control, are all areas that can take much longer to establish themselves. Related to all these executive functioning skills, research has now shown that "Cognitive empathy" and "Affective empathy" are also still developing during the teenage-years. "Cognitive empathy" can be described as: the ability to mentally think about things from another person's point of view (otherwise known as perspective-taking). "Affective empathy" is the ability to recognize and respond to others' feelings appropriately. These skills helps us with social problem-solving, managing our own and other people's emotions and avoiding conflict. There are also two separate parts of the brain responsible for Affective and Cognitive Empathy. Cognitive Empathy appears to relate to the medial prefrontal cortex and Affective empathy is grounded in the limbic region of the brain, which regulates emotions.

Keywords: "Cognitive empathy", "Affective empathy", Empathetic Behavior, Empathy.

Аннотация: Хотя большинство людей к моменту поступления в среднюю школу овладевают конкретными навыками мышления, наши исполнительные навыки, такие как планирование, организация, принятие решений и самоконтроль, — это все те области, для формирования которых может потребоваться гораздо больше времени. Что касается всех этих навыков исполнительного функционирования, исследования показали, что «когнитивная эмпатия» и «аффективная эмпатия» также все еще развиваются в подростковом возрасте. «Когнитивную эмпатию» можно охарактеризовать как способность мысленно думать о вещах с точки зрения другого человека (также называемую взглядом на перспективу). «Аффективная эмпатия» — это способность распознавать чувства других людей и реагировать на них соответствующим образом. Эти навыки помогают нам решать социальные проблемы, управлять своими эмоциями и эмоциями других людей и избегать конфликтов. Есть также две отдельные части мозга, отвечающие за аффективную и когнитивную эмпатию. Когнитивная эмпатия, по-видимому, связана с медиальной префронтальной корой головного мозга, а аффективная эмпатия основана на лимбической области мозга, которая регулирует эмоции.

Ключевые слова: «Когнитивная эмпатия», «Аффективная эмпатия», Эмпатическое поведение, Эмпатия.

There's still plenty we don't know about teens' empathy. For instance, what equips teens to empathize with individuals from marginalized groups, with new peers or dating partners, or with their own future children? Learning how to nurture empathy in adolescence is vital for building a more compassionate society.

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Empathy is a crucial skill for teenagers to develop as it helps them understand and relate to the feelings of others. Here are some ways to help teens develop empathy:

www.wordlyknowledge.uz Volume: 2, Issue: 2, 2023

1. Encourage Perspective-taking: Encourage teens to put themselves in someone else's shoes. This can be done through discussions about different points of view or by asking them to imagine how they would feel in a similar situation.

2. Model Empathetic Behavior: Teenagers learn by example, so model empathetic behavior in your interactions with others. Show them how to listen actively, show concern, and offer support.

3. Teach Active Listening: Teach teens the importance of active listening, where they focus on what the other person is saying without interrupting or judging. This helps them understand the emotions and experiences of others.

4. Discuss Real-world Scenarios: Engage your teen in discussions about real-world scenarios and ask them to consider how they would feel in those situations. This can help them understand and empathize with others who may be going through similar experiences.

5. Volunteer and Community Service: Encourage teens to get involved in volunteer work or community service. Being exposed to different life situations and interacting with people from diverse backgrounds can help them develop empathy.

6. Read Books and Watch Movies: Encourage your teen to read books or watch movies that highlight diverse experiences and perspectives. This can help them gain a better understanding of the feelings and experiences of others.

7. Encourage Self-reflection: Help teens understand their own emotions and experiences, as this can make them more empathetic towards others. Encourage self-reflection and expression of their feelings.

8. Validate Their Feelings: It's essential to validate your teen's feelings and experiences. When they feel understood and supported at home, they are more likely to show empathy towards others.

9. Address Bullying and Prejudice: Talk to your teen about the harmful effects of bullying and prejudice. Help them understand the importance of treating others with kindness and respect, regardless of differences.

By implementing these strategies, you can help teenagers develop empathy and become more compassionate individuals.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. It involves being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and to understand their emotions, perspectives, and experiences.

Developing empathy involves several key principles:

1. Active Listening: Paying attention to what others are saying without interrupting and showing genuine interest in their perspective.

2. Perspective-taking: Trying to understand the situation from the other person’s point of view and considering how they might be feeling.

3. Non-judgment: Avoiding making assumptions or judgements about someone else’s experiences or emotions.

www.wordlyknowledge.uz Volume: 2, Issue: 2, 2023

4. Open-mindedness: Being open to new ideas and experiences, and being willing to accept that others may have different perspectives.

5. Compassion: Expressing care and concern for others, and being willing to offer support or help when someone is in need.

Developing empathy takes practice and patience, and it involves being open to learning from others and being willing to grow and change based on new understandings. It's an important skill for building strong personal and professional relationships and for creating a more compassionate and understanding society. Empathy is a quality that has come to the forefront of social and professional conversations over the last several years—and with good reason! Not only is empathy a quality that can aid adults in the workplace, but it’s also an important quality to focus on in childhood development.

Developing an empathetic heart and mind can help children, and especially teens, become more conscientious, self-aware, and sensitive to the needs of others, which can translate to greater ease in creating friendships, social relationships, productive conversation, and so much more. Check out these insights from psychologists and other experts on how to nurture empathy in teenagers, plus five great ideas for teaching empathy to teens.

What Is Empathy?

To convey the importance of empathy for teens, it’s necessary to first understand what empathy is. According to mental health education resource Verywell Mind, empathy is defined as “the ability to emotionally understand what other people feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine yourself in their place.” There are different levels and expressions of empathy, but essentially it has to do with the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.

Why Is Empathy Important?

Empathy is an important emotional response that has many benefits. Some of the benefits of developing empathy for teens include:

Ability to build stronger relationships with other teens and educators

Increased tolerance and acceptance of others

Reduced likelihood of bullying

In addition, adults who practice empathy are generally shown to have greater success, both personally and professionally. So, teaching empathy to teens can help equip them for a brighter future in many ways.

How to Teach Empathy to a Teenager

Here are seven tips for you to encourage the development of empathy in your household and assist you with teaching empathy to teens. Most of these are also great empathy activities for middle school students, and can help build a foundation for empathy in their formative years.

1. Be a positive role model.

One of the best ways to learn is through modeling desired practices. Do your best to model empathetic behavior in your daily life, and especially in your interactions with your teen. Give them your full attention. Ask them how they feel and ask questions about why they feel that way.

2. Play devil’s advocate.

www.wordlyknowledge.uz Volume: 2, Issue: 2, 2023

Teenage life comes with its own set of struggles and challenges, many of which will be centered around personal relationships and disagreements. When your teen runs into a disagreement, encourage them to see the other person's point of view, and put themselves in their shoes. Can they see where the other person may be coming from? This is a great way to discuss and implement empathy (and also a great practice for teaching empathy to middle schoolers).

3. Look to history for empathy-teaching moments.

Being a teenager offers the benefit of being able to look to difficult historical events that are not recommended for younger students. Learning about acts of injustice and social catastrophe, such as the Holocaust, can educate teens about empathy on a larger and more historically-driven scale.

4. Highlight lesser-told stories to encourage historical empathy.

Similar to observing and discussing large-scale historical events to promote empathy, another great tactic is to specifically seek out lesser-told stories of injustice and struggle that might prompt discussion on empathetic response. This allows teens to "analyze history through multiple perspectives," and tap into the power of historical empathy.

5. Use art and photography for empathy-teaching moments.

Another unique way to encourage empathetic thinking in teens was made popular by The New York Times in their "What's Going On in This Picture" series. This series presents a photo without a caption and prompts students and readers to make their own observations on what might be happening in the photo.

In addition to the empathy exercises for teens mentioned above, here are some other great learning resources from Connections Academy® that can help teach compassion and empathy to students:

How to Teach Children Compassion

5 Social Emotional Learning Skills to Support Your Student

4 Ways to Teach Kids Kindness and Help Save the World

Focus on teaching your teen empathetic practices and watch their relationships, engagement with school and extracurricular activities, and self-esteem grow as a result!

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