

## Empathy Age 1 Summary

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### Why Empathy?

Your child's secure and trusting connection with you is pivotal to their emerging empathy for others. You can support their growing empathy as you interact and share love and conversation.

**Tip:** Be sure you talk about anger at a calm time when you are not stressed or upset!

**Tip:** Intentional communication and healthy parenting relationships will support these steps.

**STEP 1**  **GET INPUT**

**Getting to Know and Understand  
Your Child's Input**

- Consider how your child reacts when upset, angry, or frustrated.
  - How do they show you? Children this age may cry, yell, hit, bite, or throw things. They can be soothed by cuddling and rocking and learn to self-soothe when upset.
  - If a child cries, offer to hold them or provide comfort items like a favorite teddy bear or a blanket. Do not attempt to talk anything through when a child is distraught. Focus on calming down first.
  - If a child hits or bites in anger or frustration, stop and say, *“Ouch. That hurts my arm, and it makes me feel sad,”* or *“I see you are frustrated.”*
- Consider how your child reacts when they are happy or excited. How do they show you? Children at this age clap their hands, imitate others, smile, squeal, and laugh when they are happy or excited.
- Consider how your child reacts when they are scared. How do they show you? Children at this age are more aware of their surroundings, which can make them afraid of new things or sounds. They may cry, withdraw, or hide.
- Each time your child expresses any big feeling, be sure to name it: *“You seem angry”* or *“You seem happy.”* This will build their vocabulary, increase their self-awareness, and help them manage their feelings.

As you react to your child in ways that soothe, you will find they will feel a greater sense of your understanding and responsiveness, making your interactions more two-way than one-way.

**STEP  
2****TEACH**

## Teach New Skills

- Model empathy while interacting with your child. Modeling empathy can be one of the most excellent teaching tools.
  - Share the focus. As you spend time with your child, follow their lead. As they pick up new toys or explore a different part of the room, notice and name what they are exploring.
  - Notice gestures and listen for thoughts and feelings. Attempt to figure out what your child is trying to tell you through their sounds, gestures, and facial expressions. Name it when they express a feeling on their face or through their body. *"I noticed your face is red, and your shoulders are tense. You look angry."*
  - Children require your attention to thrive. Try to build a special time into your routine when you are fully present to listen to what your child has to tell you. Turn off your phone. Set a timer if needed. Then, notice your body language. Ask yourself, "What is my body communicating, and how am I demonstrating that I'm listening?"
- Read together. Use reading time and select a book of faces to help your child learn to identify the different emotions of other children. Point out how you can tell each child's feelings and practice recreating those cues with your child.
- Make your thinking and feelings explicit. Talk about how you feel, why, and what signs you give, mainly when uncomfortable. *"I feel happy right now because I like to dance with you to the music. Can you tell? I am smiling."*
- Talk aloud about how you respond to your big feelings: *"I'm going to take a few deep breaths before trying again and see if that helps."*
- Develop empathetic thinking by talking about how others might be feeling.
  - *"Your friend is crying. I think she is feeling sad."*
  - *"Do you see the little boy over there? His face is frowning. Let's go over and see if he needs our help."*

**STEP  
3****PRACTICE**

## Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your child to interact with new people of all ages with you close by.
- Create a consistent routine with regular nap times, play times, and meals. Routines create a sense of safety and security so your child can focus on learning and growing.
- Narrate your day as you do your household chores or run errands in your community. This narration will offer your child a sense of connection and provide practice in some of the building blocks of empathy, such as listening to your thoughts and feelings.

STEP  
**4**



SUPPORT

## Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Learn about your child's development. Each new age presents different challenges. Being informed about your child's developmental milestones offers you empathy and patience.
- Recognize effort using "I notice" statements like: "*I noticed how you saw she was sad.*"
- When you can see your child is scared of new people or situations, offer confidence in your child's ability to face the unfamiliar. In a gentle, comforting voice, you can say, "*This is my friend. He is very kind.*"
- Actively reflect on how your child feels when approaching challenges. "*You seem worried about going into this new store. I'll hold you so you feel more confident.*" Offering comfort when facing new situations can help your child gain a sense of security and face them rather than backing away.
  - You can also offer comfort items to help your child face new challenges. "*Would your bear help you feel better?*"

STEP  
**5**



RECOGNIZE

## Recognize Efforts

- Recognize and call out when things are going well. It may seem obvious, but it's easy not to notice when everything moves smoothly. Noticing and naming the behavior provides the necessary reinforcement that you see and value your child's choice.
- Recognize small steps along the way. Don't wait for significant accomplishments—like the full bedtime routine going smoothly—to recognize effort. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, snuggle and read before bed after getting through your bedtime routine. Or, in the morning, once ready for school, take a few minutes to listen to music together.

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