

The Travell Counselor's Corner



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[Travell School Counselor Website](#)



March: Kindness & Empathy

Throughout the winter months, all Travell students have been working hard at *identifying emotions in both themselves and others*. These foundational skills can be thought of as the prerequisites to **empathy**. Without them, it can be extremely difficult to understand such an abstract concept! Last month, teachers kicked off the third unit of Second Step, which is titled “**Kindness and Empathy**” by participating in Random Acts of Kindness week and continuing to engage in school-wide activities throughout February in its entirety. Below, you will find a window into what types of conversations your children have been having here at school, as well as some you may wish to take part in as a family to encourage kindness and empathy at home.

In Grades K-1, the main focus will be on “**kindness**”. Children will be asked to **identify** acts of kindness and then provided the opportunity to **engage** in certain acts of kindness themselves. Some examples they may practice through role play include: Sharing, asking someone if they would like a hug, inviting someone to play, checking in with someone to see if they are ok, offering to help or asking someone if they would like company. They will explore feelings that come up when they are the *giver* of kindness as well as the *receiver* of kindness. Feel free to encourage the role play of kindness at home and help your children come up with as many different examples of kindness as possible! A **quick daily practice** could be identifying one kind act you witnessed and one kind act you participated in that day. A next step could include a reflection on how they each made you feel.

In Grade 2, children will begin to focus on “**empathy**” and how it helps lead us to kindness. When we are able to *put ourselves in someone else's shoes*, we are better able to determine the most appropriate act of kindness for that situation. **For example**, would it be most kind to allow someone their alone time at this moment or could they use a friend to give them some advice? Ask your children if they can identify a person they have empathy for. Ask them to describe the situation, identify the emotions, and name any kind acts that can help. And, as always, continue to **lead by example** & point out examples of empathy in different real world situations!

In Grades 3-5, the focus will begin to shift toward the ways in which having empathy can enrich our lives. One important connection for children to make is that empathy is what helps *create new friendships* and *build stronger ones* along the way. This will be a major discussion point in Grade 3. However, by Grade 4, they will also begin to use language such as **point of view** and **perspective taking**. Children will once again use role play and class discussions to practice asking the types of **questions** that will enable them to gain the insight and clarity they need to better understand the thoughts and feelings of others. Only then, can they best display empathy and proceed with kindness! Be sure to ask your Grade 4 students about their **Kindness Coupons**! It should be interesting to see which acts of kindness they chose for who and hear the why behind it! By Grade 5, children will be asked to think about empathy in a more *global* context, not just as it pertains to themselves and immediate surroundings. For example, they will be asked to think about how empathy can be used to identify and solve problems for others in their community.

At home, you can consider asking your children to name someone they consider a good friend and describe why they believe this to be so. You can expand by asking your child to list some of the things they can do or already do to display good friendship to others as well. **Together**, you can discuss the things that make you feel better when you are sad, angry, anxious or embarrassed. *Point out how your answers might differ from your child's.* This is a good way to reinforce the idea that simply checking in with others is already showing empathy! Asking them if you can help and to share what specifically they might need to work through certain emotions is kind!

In addition, you can consider discussing the benefits of understanding all the different points of view *within your own family*. Could having more empathy for one another have helped in past situations or future situations that may arise? Has there ever been a time when asking questions helped you to learn something new and better understand a different perspective? **Share this information with your children.** Talk about the different feelings we experience when we really feel heard and understood **vs.** dismissed, ignored or mistaken.

And lastly, with those oldest children, see if they are able to identify something that has changed for the better in our community lately and discuss the role that **empathy & kindness** may have played in making this change. Do additional problems exist within the community? Can you brainstorm different solutions and have a **conversation** about the way these solutions might affect different groups within the community? Have there ever been “intended solutions” to problems that actually made certain community members feel worse? We might be surprised with the way our young and *oh so observant* minds respond to these types of questions!

On a related note: As we move into the “busyness” of another holiday season, spring sports and activities, and perhaps most of all, preparing for “spring break” taking place so early this year, it is important that we remind ourselves not to sacrifice quality time spent with our children. Giving children your undivided attention (even for short amounts of time) can provide them with assurances about the importance of family and help keep them mentally and emotionally strong. All of the discussion points shared above are just samples of some topics you could use to not only connect school to home, but to connect on a deeper level as a family. At times, it seems our children actually do a better job of showing empathy and kindness for “strangers” or others they encounter in their surrounding environments than those they spend the most time with and feel closest to such as classmates, teammates, peers, close friends, and of course family.. *especially siblings at times!* Therefore, these discussion starters can help children see how applicable it all is in their true day to day lives, as opposed to viewing it as another concept they must learn in school and show mastery of when others are watching.

However, simply taking a moment to check in and connect each day is of course the priority, not necessarily the activity itself or content of the conversation. On my website, you will find some more information about this as well as additional resources that provide suggestions on quick, yet effective ways to connect with your children on a daily basis. One of the articles speaks about the importance of **checking in after your longest separation** of the day; in this case, it is probably right after school! It could be easy to get caught rushing from one place to another, but taking just a few quick minutes to pause could actually pay off in the long run. And, surprise (!), these strategies do not just work for children! We can use this same concept as a reminder to check in with our spouse after a long day, and perhaps most importantly, ourselves! Using **empathy and kindness** to ask the question “*What do you need?*” or “*What do I need?*” or even stating “*I’m here*” can make all the difference 