

## Teaching Empathy Skills

I suggest that readers look at how to develop empathy for adults which is shown as a link on my website (<https://stephadam.co.uk>) before reading this section. Research has shown that 'cognitive empathy' (the ability to mentally think about things from another person's point of view) and 'affective empathy' (the ability to recognize and respond to others' feelings appropriately) are still developing during adolescent and last until the age of 21 years (Overgraaw et al. 2017).

Empathy is the central component of emotional intelligence, which is determined as the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and alleviate conflict.

The skill of being empathic helps adolescents to deal with social problem-solving, managing their own feelings, recognising other people's emotions, and empathy can go a long way in preventing bullying (Overgraaw et al. 2017). Studies also show that adolescents who are empathetic have better relationships with their peers and teachers, and perform better in school (Overgraaw et al, 2017).

Below is a list of ideas to help you to teach your adolescents this skill:

### TV shows

Discuss their favourite TV shows with fictional characters and ask them if they identify with a particular person in the show and why. Then, ask them to imagine what the main characters might be feeling from the list of faces shown on my adult link. They are anger, fear, sadness, disgust, happiness and surprise. Discuss with them how the characters show empathy towards each other (or not). Labelling these feelings will help them think about their own emotions and understand others. Inquire how they would respond to a real person who shows that he/she feels sad, angry and so forth.

### Modelling

Modelling is very important. It is okay for you to display emotions. For instance, tell them about an event when a friend of yours was in trouble. Explain what you were thinking about at the time and what you did to help them.

### Understanding different points of view

Ask them to consider a time when they were being unkind to one of their friends. How do they think their friend felt in that situation, and what would their friend want to happen to change the situation? How would your adolescent feel if the same response was given to him/her?

### Help them to problem-solve different situations

For example, if situations like these arose:

"How would you like to be treated if you were the new boy in the class?"

"If someone was being unkind to you, what would you want your friends to do to help?"

There are online sources to help you further with your quest to teach your adolescents empathy. A good site to start with is: (<https://parents.au.reachout.com/common-concerns/everyday-issues/things-to-try-bullying-behaviour/help-your-teenager-develop-empathy>).

### References

Overgaauw S, Rieffe C, Broekhof E, Crone EA, Güroğlu B. Assessing Empathy across Childhood and Adolescence: Validation of the Empathy Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (EmQue-CA). *Front Psychol*. 2017; 8:870. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00870.