

JUNE 2025 | ISSUE 10

MILESTONE MOMENTS

A Collaboration by M.A.P and MINDSHEART



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As the June holidays unfold, many of us find ourselves cherishing the extra time with our children—whether it's through family outings, shared meals, or simply enjoying slower mornings together. These moments are more than just a break from the school routine; they're opportunities to connect, reflect, and grow as a family.

This month, we're diving into a theme that feels especially timely: **empathy**. In a world that often moves too fast, ***empathy reminds us to pause, listen, and truly understand the people around us.*** It's a skill that not only strengthens relationships but also shapes our children into kind, thoughtful individuals.

The holidays provide the perfect backdrop to explore this. Whether it's through helping a sibling, understanding a friend's perspective, or even showing kindness to themselves, these small moments can leave a lasting impact. Let's make this holiday not just a time of rest, but also a time of growth—for ourselves and our children.



Spotlight or Sideline?

Have you ever watched your child quietly comfort a friend after a quarrel, or offer a helping hand to a classmate during recess? These small, everyday moments—often unnoticed in the bustle of Singapore's school life—are the seeds of empathy taking root. Think back: when was the last time your child showed understanding beyond what you expected?

In Singapore, we often talk about values like respect and harmony. **Empathy is present in school character lessons and community campaigns, but it can sometimes be overshadowed by the focus on academic results and discipline.**

Our multicultural society means our children are constantly exposed to different backgrounds, languages, and traditions. **Empathy is what helps them build real friendships, navigate differences, and feel at home in a diverse world.** It's also what equips them to handle setbacks, support others, and grow into adults who make a difference.

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Sometimes, the quietest acts of kindness are the ones that shape our children the most.

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When children learn to recognise and understand the feelings of those around them, **they become better at resolving conflicts and bouncing back from disappointments**—whether it's a disagreement with a friend or a tough day at school. They're **more likely to reach out to someone who's struggling, offer encouragement, or stand up for what's right, even when it's not easy.**

As you continue reading, consider: How could a little more attention to these small moments help your child thrive—not just in school, but in life? Sometimes, the quietest acts of kindness are the ones that shape our children the most.



Beyond “Be Nice”: The Real Roots of Empathy in Children



BY MOSES WONG, FELICIA CHUA
M.A.P LEARNING AND CONSULTANCY

Empathy—it’s a big word for a little heart, but it’s one of the most important things your child will learn. Think of it as their superpower for understanding and caring about others. It’s what helps them build friendships, solve playground dramas, and grow into kind, thoughtful humans. But here’s the thing: **empathy doesn’t just pop up like magic. It grows and changes as your child does.** Let’s dive into how this works, how each stage builds on the last, and how you can help it along—without feeling like you need a psychology degree!

What Exactly is Empathy?

Empathy isn’t just about saying, “Oh no, are you okay?” when someone’s upset. **It’s about really feeling what someone else is going through and showing you care.** Picture this: your child sees their friend drop an ice cream cone. Empathy is what makes them offer a hug or share their own cone, if they’re feeling extra generous. **It’s a mix of understanding feelings and taking action.**



The Early Years: Little Sprouts of Empathy

Toddlers and preschoolers are like tiny explorers, figuring out the world—and themselves. At this stage, **they're naturally a bit self-centered** (note: it's not selfish, it's just how their brains work). But don't worry, the seeds of empathy are there. You might notice your toddler handing you their favourite toy when you're upset, even if it's sticky with snack crumbs. **That's their way of saying, "I see you're sad, and I want to help."**

These early acts of caring are the **foundation for future social skills**. By learning to notice and respond to others' feelings, young children **start to build trust and connection**. This **sets the stage for teamwork, sharing, and cooperation**—skills they'll need in school and beyond.

Primary School: Empathy Takes Root

Once your child starts school, their world gets a lot bigger. They're meeting new friends, learning to share, and figuring out how to work as a team (like group projects and soccer games). This is when empathy really starts to grow. They might come home and tell you about a classmate who was left out during recess or a friend who was upset about a bad grade. These moments are golden opportunities to talk about feelings and how to support others.



As empathy takes root, **children become better communicators and problem-solvers**. They learn to **see things from different perspectives, which helps them resolve conflicts and build stronger friendships**. These skills are **essential for navigating group dynamics**, both in and out of the classroom, and lay the groundwork for leadership and collaboration in the future.

Teens: Empathy in Full Bloom, Mostly

The teenage years—a rollercoaster of emotions. While teens are often navigating their own ups and downs, they're also capable of deep empathy. They might volunteer for a cause they care about, stand up for a friend, or even surprise you with a heartfelt "thanks" for something you've done (yes, it happens!). Just remember, they're still learning, and sometimes their own feelings might overshadow their ability to tune into others.

Empathy in adolescence helps teens form **deeper, more meaningful relationships**. It **encourages them to think about their role in the wider world**—whether that's supporting a friend, contributing to their community, or standing up for what's right. **These experiences shape their values and sense of responsibility, preparing them for adulthood, the workplace, and citizenship.**

A Journey Worth Every Step

Empathy isn't something you can force—it's **something you nurture**. And as your child grows, so will their ability to care for others. Each stage builds on the last, helping them become not just kind kids, but compassionate adults ready to make a difference. **It's a journey, but one that's worth every step.** After all, the world could always use a little more kindness, right?

The Empathy Equation: The Hidden Curriculum



BY MOSES WONG, FELICIA CHUA
M.A.P LEARNING AND CONSULTANCY

As educators and tutors in Singapore, we see every day how empathy shapes the way children learn, grow, and connect—not just with friends and teachers, but also with their families. So why is empathy as crucial as any academic subject, and how does it help children thrive in all areas of life?

Empathy in Practice

In Singapore's diverse classrooms and homes, children encounter peers and family members with different backgrounds, abilities, and emotions. These **everyday experiences are powerful opportunities for empathy to grow**. Whether it's a child helping a classmate who's struggling with a lesson, or showing kindness to a sibling after a tough day, **these small acts teach patience, respect, and understanding**.

At home, **empathy strengthens family bonds**. Children who learn to understand and share the feelings of others **become more attuned to the emotions of their parents and siblings**. This leads to **open communication, easier conflict resolution, and a more supportive home environment**. Over time, this **builds trust and emotional safety, giving children the confidence to express themselves and seek support when needed**.



Everyday experiences are powerful opportunities for empathy to grow.





Empathy in Singapore's Unique Context

Singapore's education system is known for its high standards and impressive results, but it also brings unique challenges—most notably, a highly competitive culture and significant exam stress.

Empathy helps children navigate these pressures. In classrooms where empathy is valued, children support one another—whether it's reassuring a friend before a big test or simply listening when someone is upset. This support **helps individual students feel less alone, more understood, and better able to manage their own stress.** This not only helps them **build strong friendships, but also gives them the confidence to be themselves, both in school and beyond.** When children **experience empathy from others, they are more likely to believe in themselves and keep trying, even when things get tough.**

Why Empathy Matters?

As teachers, we see every day how empathy changes children for the better. **When children learn to understand and care about how others feel, they grow more confident and self-assured—unafraid to ask for help, express their feelings, or try new things, even when challenges arise.**

Empathetic children handle setbacks like tough tests or disagreements with greater calm and resilience. Because they're used to considering different perspectives, they also become better at **finding solutions to their own problems, which helps them stay motivated and focused in their studies.**



Empathy helps each child feel seen and valued in the classroom, making it easier for them to join discussions, share ideas, and **learn without fear of judgment**. This sense of belonging boosts self-esteem and encourages ongoing growth. In Singapore's diverse classrooms, **empathy also teaches children to appreciate differences, and navigate social situations with kindness and respect**. These skills are at the heart of strong relationships—not just with friends and classmates, but also with parents and siblings—helping children listen, understand, and resolve conflicts peacefully.

From the Educator's Perspective: Habits That Undermine Empathy.

Through daily interactions with students and families, we have seen many common observable patterns often emerge in many families that can make empathy harder for children to develop.

Results Rule Everything:

It's not unusual to hear children mention that most conversations at home are about grades or achievements. This focus often leads kids to believe their value comes from what they accomplish, not who they are, because they are so used to prioritising results.

The Comparison Game:

Many children share stories about being compared to siblings or classmates—comments like "How come ____ can score better than you?" come up often. These remarks can make children feel like they're constantly being judged against others. As a result, they sometimes hold back from celebrating others' successes or offering support, worried they won't measure up.

Brushing Off Feelings:

Phrases such as "It's not a big deal" or "Stop crying" are frequently overheard, and over time, children start to believe their feelings aren't important. This can lead to students keeping their worries to themselves making relationships with others feel less warm and connected.

3 Simple Ways to Nurture Empathy at Home:

1. Listen with Full Attention

Put aside distractions and really listen when your child speaks. Let them share their feelings without rushing to fix or dismiss them. This simple act **shows your child that their emotions matter—and teaches them to do the same for others.**

2. Model Kindness and Understanding

Children learn empathy by watching the adults around them. Show patience, kindness, and respect in your daily interactions, whether with family, friends, or even strangers. **When they see you respond with care, they're more likely to follow your lead.**

3. Talk Openly About Feelings

Encourage your child to notice and talk about emotions—both their own and those of others. Ask questions like, "How do you think your friend felt?" or "What made you feel that way?" This **helps children understand and connect with how others are feeling.**

Conclusion

Every child's journey is shaped by the lessons we teach—not just through textbooks, but through the kindness and understanding we model every day. Together, we can help them build a future where **empathy isn't just a lesson—it's a way of life.**





Raising Empathetic Kids: Stronger Friendships and Solving Problems



BY GERALD BOH

CLINICAL DIRECTOR, MINDSHEART LLP

In Singapore schools, children learn a lot from each other every day—not just from books. **They learn by playing, sharing, and even sometimes arguing.** As a psychologist, I have seen how small acts of kindness and understanding can make a big difference in a child's life. If you are reading this, you are already helping your child. Every parent can help their child grow empathy, and your efforts are important.

Empathy Across Childhood

From my years working with children and families in Singapore, I have seen how empathy helps children at every age. Young children often show empathy in simple ways, like giving a hug to a friend who is crying. These small acts show that **they are learning to care about others, especially when adults like you show them how.**

When children go to primary school, empathy becomes clearer. I have seen children invite a friend who is left out to join their game, or comfort a friend who is upset. These small moments make the classroom a kinder place. It is always nice to see how **children who notice others' feelings become stronger and better at solving problems together—and parents like you help this happen.**

With older children and teens, empathy grows even more. **Teenagers who understand how others feel are better at making friends and handling tough times.** This does not happen overnight. **It takes time, support, and good role models.** Your kindness and encouragement help your child become more caring and confident, step by step.

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How to Help Your Child Develop Empathy

You might be surprised how much your everyday actions help your child learn empathy. Even on busy days, small moments like talking about feelings or giving a kind word can make a big difference. **You do not need to be perfect. Just trying your best is enough.**

Here are some simple ways you can help your child:

- **Talk about feelings often**

When your child is happy, sad, or upset, help them say what they feel. You can say, "You look happy!" or "I see you are upset." **This helps your child learn to know their own feelings and notice them in others.**

- **Show empathy yourself**

Children learn from watching adults. When you are kind to others—like helping a neighbor or listening to a friend—your child sees what empathy looks like.

- **Ask about others' feelings**

When something happens at school or with friends, ask your child, "How do you think your friend felt?" or "What would you do if you were in their place?" **This helps your child think about how others feel.**

- **Read stories together and talk about the characters**

Books are a great way to learn about feelings. While reading, you can ask, "How do you think the character feels?" or "What would you do if you were in the story?" **This helps your child practice seeing things from another person's point of view.**



- **Notice and praise caring actions**

When you see your child being kind—like sharing a toy or helping a friend—tell them you noticed. Say, “That was very kind of you,” or “I saw how you helped your friend, and that made a difference.” This **encourages your child to keep being caring**.

- **Be patient and supportive**

Children do not always get it right the first time. If your child has trouble understanding how someone else feels, **guide them** gently. Say, “Sometimes it is hard to know how someone else feels. Let’s try to imagine what they might be thinking.”

Remember, **building empathy takes time**. Celebrate small steps, and know that your effort matters.



Empathy in Action: Solving Problems and Building Friendships

It is normal for children to have arguments or find it hard to **show empathy sometimes**. When your child works through a tough moment, it means they are learning and growing. With your support, they will get better at understanding others.

Empathy helps children solve problems. When children can understand how others feel, **they are better at working through disagreements and finding solutions that work for everyone**. For example, if two children argue over a toy, a child with empathy might say, “You can play with it first, I know you really wanted to.” This kind of thinking comes from **seeing things from another’s point of view and wanting to help them feel better**.

Empathy also helps children manage their own feelings. When they can understand others’ feelings, they are **less likely to get angry or upset**. Instead, they learn to stop, think, and respond in a way that **builds stronger friendships**.

Final Thoughts

Your role as a parent is very important. By showing kindness, talking about feelings, and praising caring actions, you help your child grow into a kind and confident person. **Empathy is a big part of a child’s growth. It helps them make friends, handle their feelings, and do well in school and life.**

Together, we can help children grow up caring about others and knowing how to connect in a meaningful way.



TEACHER, HELP!

My child shows little empathy toward others. Could this be a sign of deeper emotional or developmental issues?

Ms C.

Dear Parent,

We appreciate your concern about your child's empathy. As educators, we want to reassure you that every child grows at their own pace—empathy is a skill that can be nurtured with the right support.

Today, helping children develop empathy may look different than before. In the past, empathy was often taught through direct, face-to-face family and community interactions. Now, children's worlds have grown to include screens, digital platforms, and online communities. While these offer new ways to learn about diverse perspectives, they can also make it harder for children to recognize and respond to real-life emotions in others. The pace of life is faster, and there is less time for quiet conversations that build deep emotional connections.

This is why you might notice your child showing less empathy. The world is more complex, and empathy cues are not always as clear as before. Your concern is understandable—many parents share similar questions.

There are new approaches you can try. Gentle discussions about digital empathy and diversity are important. Encourage open conversations about feelings at home, using stories, real-life examples, or videos. Role-play and drama can make learning empathy fun and meaningful.

With time and encouragement, most children develop a strong sense of empathy. Your involvement is already making a positive difference.



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