

Empathy in the Time of Coronavirus

Marcia Baldanza

"I think we all have empathy. We may not have enough courage to display it."

Ralph Fletcher

Empathy is at the heart of what it means to be human. It's a foundation for acting ethically, for good relationships of many kinds, for loving well, and for professional success. And it's key to preventing bullying and many other forms of cruelty. Empathy begins with the capacity to take another perspective, to walk in another's shoes. In this time of uncertainty, let us work hard to teach our children to join us in showing empathy to family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers.

As parents and/or teachers we need to be empathy role models for children. With children and adults encouraged to stay inside and practice social distancing, it's easy for children and caregivers to draw their focus inward toward themselves or their nuclear families. However, research reported by the **Association for Psychological Science** in "**Caring for Others Can Bring Benefits**" suggests the best way to combat feelings of isolation is to grow and strengthen concern and care for others. Developmental psychologist Richard Weissbourd, director of the **Making Caring Common Project** emphasizes the important role parents play in modeling and strengthening their child's capacity to care for others. Helping children understand that the world doesn't revolve around them is a good message for all times, not just now. Both teachers and parents can use newspaper or TV stories to start conversations about other people's hardships and challenges, or simply the different experiences of others in another country or community.

Make caring for others a priority and set high ethical expectations (no matter their age). **Cultivating Empathy in the Coronavirus Crisis** is a really useful blog that offers some ways you and your children/students can show empathy. Small day-to-day interactions can help to go a long way. For example, a girl on our street had



her 11th birthday at home this week, with no friends to help celebrate. Her mom took to the Nextdoor app to ask neighbors to post birthday wishes in their windows. The birthday girl and her family drove around the neighborhood and took photos of the windows with birthday wishes. Later, she shared the pictures in a slideshow for all the neighbors to see. Neighbors coming together to do good for others is indeed a good thing. Checking in on friends and family with a phone call, text, or an email; leaving warm banana bread for a sick neighbor; coming together as a family to learn more about each other; and working hard to be kind when you're cooped up together are some things my family and I are working on. I cannot help but be moved by recent articles and tweets where our humanity shines through, and I share them with my 13-year old son.

Expand your child's circle of concern. In this time of Coronavirus, popular press highlights skills such as grit, empathy, growth mindset, social distancing skills, and more. **Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out: Looking Inside & Across 25 Leading SEL Programs** provides an extensive comparison of SEL programs. I've wondered about SEL programs and their impact on the greater society after students finish formal schooling. I am encouraged by many millennials I know and am related to for their care outside their circles of concern. These include my 22-year old niece living under a shelter-in-place order in NYC, my 25-year old police officer nephew in Texas, and his 23-year old sister who is a nutritionist in a residential facility. These three, and many more, are considered the next Greatest Generation with their facile technology skills, kind nature, and socially conscious attitudes. They are generous, empowering, collaborative and can help stop this virus. I am indeed optimistic!

Resources and References

Caring for Others Can Bring Benefits (APA)

www.psychologicalscience.org/publications/observer/obsonline/caring-for-others-can-bring-benefits.html

Cultivating Empathy in the Coronavirus Crisis (Harvard GSE)

www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-l-d&q=Cultivating+Empathy+in+the+Coronavirus+Crisis

Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out: Looking Inside & Across 25 Leading SEL Programs (Wallace Foundation)

Navigating-social-and-emotional-learning-from-the-inside-out.PDF





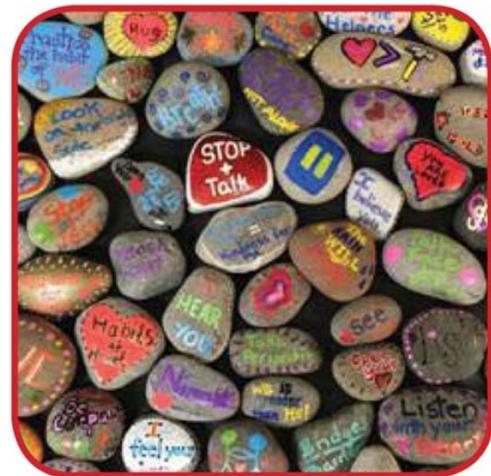
“Let’s Hear It for Empathy!” by Heather Clayton

This issue of **MSCA!** has amazing suggestions for teaching empathy as well as a multitude of resources to access.

<https://justaskpublications.com/just-ask-resource-center/e-newsletters/msca/empathy/>

In this issue, Heather writes about one way her school promoted kindness:

“Getting your students involved in one of the many kindness movements happening across the world can be empowering and go a long way for teaching empathy. **The Kindness Rocks Project** (<http://thekindnessrocksproject.com>) which recognizes the importance of random acts of kindness, strives to make a difference in the world “one rock at a time. At Mendon Center Elementary in Pittsford, New York, we have been a part of the kindness rocks movement. This year, our staff each created rocks of empathy to highlight what we know to be important when practicing and living empathy.” Examples of our rocks are pictured below.



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