

# Build Social Awareness



When children have the ability to understand and empathize with others, they are able to form solid connections with classmates, teachers and friends. They are also able to think about situations from different points of view. Social awareness allows kids to feel compassion for others—even when their background and culture may be different. Families can help children develop their social skills so they can interact, cooperate and problem-solve positively and respectfully with people from a variety of backgrounds.

**QuickTips**

## Benefits of Social Awareness

Social awareness allows children to connect with and understand others. Children who are socially aware:

- **Form strong relationships** with peers, teachers and family members.
- **Feel compassion and empathy** when interacting with others.
- **Are passionate about helping others.** They stick up for peers and help those who are less fortunate.
- **Exhibit self-control.** Social awareness helps kids understand what behaviors are expected in different situations.

## Teach Through Reading

An easy way to boost your child's social awareness is by reading and discussing books about diversity and compassion. Here are a few titles to add to your family's reading list:

- **Come With Me** by Holly M. McGhee.
- **Last Stop on Market Street** by Matt de la Peña.
- **Emma and the Whale** by Julie Case.
- **Resist: 40 Profiles of Ordinary People Who Rose Up Against Tyranny and Injustice** by Veronica Chambers.
- **New Kid** by Jerry Craft.
- **What is Given from the Heart** by Patricia McKissack.
- **Each Tiny Spark** by Pablo Cartaya.

## Be a Social-Awareness Role Model

One of the best ways parents can teach children respectful behavior toward others is to model it. Are you setting an example of respect? Take this quiz to find out:

1. **Do you obey laws** meant to protect people, such as obeying the speed limit? Do you speak about the importance of doing so?
2. **Do you speak respectfully** of teachers and all they do to help children learn?
3. **Are you courteous and polite?** Do you accept people's right to beliefs and opinions different from your own?
4. **Do you make it a family rule** to treat others as you would like to be treated?
5. **Do you demonstrate moral reasoning?** Let your child see you wrestle with such questions as, "What is the right thing to do?" "How would I want to be treated in this situation?" "What are likely consequences of my actions for others?"

### How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are modeling social awareness for your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

**Source:** CASEL's Widely Used Framework Identifies Five Core Competencies, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

## Recognize Feelings

It's not always easy for children to recognize other people's feelings and needs. But there are some simple ways you can help your child develop this skill. Here are a few:

- **Role-play.** Pretend to be sad. How can your child tell when a person is sad? Talk about facial expressions, body language and other things that may be clues. Then take turns acting and guessing different emotions.
- **Talk about the characters' emotions and actions** in the books you read together. Discuss how those actions made other characters feel. Ask how your child would feel in a similar situation.
- **Watch a show.** See if your child can figure out how a character is feeling by noticing body language, facial expressions and tone of voice.
- **Ask questions.** Encourage your child to ask others how they feel and then ask what they need. For example, would they like a hug, or would they prefer to be left alone?



*"You can only understand people if you feel them in yourself."*

*—John Steinbeck*

## Practice Empathy

Having empathy—sensing and understanding how others feel—will deepen your child's awareness of a situation. To help your child develop and practice empathy, teach her to:

- **Consider the needs of others.** Tell your child, "It's great that you and your friends play tag together every afternoon. But what about Sarah? How do you think she feels watching you guys play? Do you think she would like to be included?"
- **Discuss different ways people might feel** under similar circumstances. One child might be excited to meet a new friend, while another might be nervous and shy.
- **Respond appropriately.** Your child can return a smile with a smile. She can listen if the other person wants to talk, or she can suggest an activity to take the person's mind off her worries. For example, your child could say, "Let's get out of here and go for a ride around the neighborhood."



## Focus on Helping Others

Teach your child the importance of being a responsible and caring member of a community. Together, you can:

- **Help elderly neighbors.** Go shopping, run errands or help with yard work.
- **Make a get-well card** for a friend who is ill.
- **Join a worthy cause.** Even young children can participate in charity drives. They can help make cookies for a bake sale, decorate boxes for donations or join you in a walk-a-thon.
- **Use your strengths.** If writing is something you and your child enjoy, write letters to officials about issues. If you are outgoing people, welcome new people to your town.

*"If you judge people, you have no time to love them."*

*—Mother Teresa*

## Appreciate Diversity

It's important for children to see all people as equal and to accept and recognize the strengths of people of all races, ethnic groups, religions and abilities. To guide your child:

- **Remember that you teach by example.** Do you use slurs? Have you formed opinions about people based on their color, religion or culture? If so, your child may, too.
- **Talk about your own family background.** Unless you are a Native American, someone in your family came here from another country. Remind your child that at some point, everyone has struggled to fit in.
- **Let your child know** it's never OK to judge, insult or treat someone badly because of their appearance or background.
- **Talk about prejudice and stereotypes.** Help your children recognize these behaviors when they see them. Remind your child that background does not show how smart a person is, how good they will be at sports, or even what kind of food they like.
- **Explain that rules and laws** have not always treated everyone fairly, and that we are trying to change that.
- **Welcome people of many backgrounds** into your family's life. Encourage your child to do the same.