

## Growing Compassionate Spirits

by Lisa Kane  
Early Years Teacher

### Model compassion

What did you do the last time you heard a friend was sick? Did you jump into action and visit with some soup or flowers? Did you send a WeChat message to say that you were thinking of them and to get well soon? Or, did you shake your head and mutter "I don't have time for this..."

You are your child's first teacher. They look to you as the source of all knowledge and yes - they see and hear everything! Learning compassion starts with you.

For young children, it's the small things that are meaningful - a hug when they are sad, sharing books and toys with a friend, an acknowledgement of others' sufferings and difficulties.

### Teach your child about feelings

Children are naturally curious and this extends to understanding others. Even at the age of two a child will reach out to comfort a crying friend. The early years of a child's life are crucial in developing empathy, kindness and compassion, and it starts with an ability to understand feelings.

Read stories, sing songs and explore feelings and emotions in a safe, secure and fun way. Teach your child the names of feelings, even sadness, anger, disappointment. Enable your child to talk about the feelings they have, for example "I feel angry when..." Discuss how the body feels and looks with different feelings, think of and teach strategies to accept and overcome difficult emotions.



**Roberts warms Karina's hands after playing outside...**



**Charlotte is developing her understanding that facial expressions give clues to how someone is feeling...**

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### Celebrate acts of kindness and care

Notice and comment on your child's acts of kindness and care in an authentic way, for example, "It was very kind when you helped Suzie to fill her water bottle, that made her happy". Be specific about the child's action - this helps to reinforce and encourage the positivity and affect of such behavior.

Notice kindness in others and share these observations - "That was so caring of Rachel to get Bob's coat for him - he will be warm when he goes outside!" Your child will start to look for the good in others and celebrate their acts of kindness and compassion too.

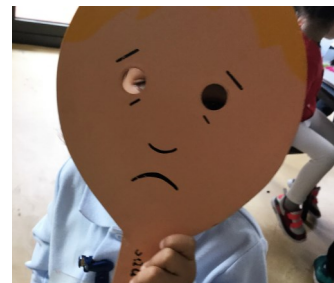
For older children, it can be overwhelming when they see news on the TV that shows conflict and suffering. Shift the focus to actions that are arising in these situations - acts of humanity and compassion, the positive work of individuals, volunteer groups and agencies. With younger children, look for local charity and action projects. Perhaps they could help to bring unused toys or books to a local orphanage.

### Be patient

**Teaching compassion is a life-long project - not one that happens after one conversation. It is something that is grown over time, through thoughts, words and action; modelled, generated and inspired. Start with the small things in your child's life and as they grow, so will their patience, tolerance, acceptance and open mindedness - all facets of compassion and qualities of caring, kind and compassionate spirits.**



**Wojtek helps Nemo's sister to feel safe when she sits with the big kids...**



**Natalie explores how different emotions may feel...**

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### Story books that teach compassion

***Dotty* by Erica Perl and illustrated by Julia Denos**

Ida is a girl who takes her imaginary friend with her to school. One day, Ida realizes that not everyone views imaginary friends like she does — until one important person shares her special friend with her.

***Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon**

Little bat Stellaluna soon realizes that even though she may look different from little birds, they can still be friends.

***How to Heal a Broken Wing* by Bob Graham**

"No one saw the bird fall." No one except the little boy who, with his parents, take the injured bird home and care for it until it is ready to fly free.

***Clifford: Thank You, Clifford* by Sonali Fry Illustrated by John Kurt** Clifford is always ready to help his friends on Birdwell Island . . . sometimes in rather unusual ways!

(available at [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com))

### Kindness and compassion in the community

**AT WISS:** Volunteer time at our Saturday School at WISS...Purchase unique gifts at our WISStival—funds raised are donated to Coleurs de Chine...Have a coffee with a friend—10% of purchases from café shall be donated to our Cambodia project.

**IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY:** Give time for local care organisations

<http://www.h2hsh.com/>

<http://rotaryshanghai.org/>

[www.homesweethome.org.cn/en/individualinvolvement](http://www.homesweethome.org.cn/en/individualinvolvement)



Finding out about different feelings through stories and song...



Reading feelings in others' facial expressions, sorting and labeling emotions...