

EMPATHY IN ACTION

Empathy is being able to understand and acknowledge another's feelings and needs. The first step to building empathy is being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and feel what that person is feeling. Just as important is the second step – ***acting in a way that you would want others to act if you felt the same or if the same thing happened to you.*** Read and discuss the following stories with your children to help them understand and learn the importance of demonstrating empathy toward others.

Story 1: Joe is a first grader who loves to play with toy cars. He gets some new Hot Wheels for his birthday and brings a couple to school to show his friends at recess. Afterwards, he leaves the cars on top of his cubby along with his hat and gloves. When it is time to go home, the hat and gloves are still where he left them but the cars are gone.

Questions:

- Have you ever had something stolen from you? How did you feel or how would you feel if something was taken from you?
- How do you think Joe felt when he couldn't find his brand new cars?
- What could you say or do to show empathy for Joe?

Story 2: A group of fifth graders are bowling. Everyone is having a good time until John decides to start teasing Eric. First he gets behind Eric and imitates the way he bowls. All of the other kids think its funny and laugh. Then, while Eric isn't looking, John puts ketchup in his soda. Eric takes a drink and spits it out. This time everyone but a girl named Ellen laughs. Ellen is beginning to feel bad for Eric and also feels bad about herself for not speaking up to defend him. Finally, John pulls up Eric's shirt while he is bowling. Eric runs off. While everyone else is laughing, Ellen tells John that he is being mean and he needs to stop it. John says he was just joking around.*

Questions:

- Have you ever been teased by another child? How did you feel or how would you feel if someone teased you?
- How do you think Eric felt when John teased him? How do you think Eric felt when the other kids laughed at what John did?
- What could you say or do to show empathy for Eric?
- Is it a good choice or a bad choice to tease? Why? Is it a good choice or bad choice to laugh at someone being teased? Why?
- What do you think about what Ellen did and said? If you were Ellen what would you have said or done when John said he was just joking?

Empathy and TRUSTWORTHINESS: These examples can also be examined from the perspective of demonstrating trustworthiness – being truthful and having the courage to do the right thing even when no one is looking. Trustworthy people set a good example and do not steal. They demonstrate empathy when they stand by friends and family when it is the right thing to do.

The Key School Character Education Committee has chosen Empathy to be our theme for 2013-2014. Watch for educational materials throughout the year on how you, as parents, can help to foster empathy in your children.