

Home-School Connections: Home Activities **Empathy and Critical Thinking Unit**

Your child is learning about **Empathy and Critical Thinking** in the Sanford Harmony social-emotional learning program. The ideas below will reinforce what we are learning in school—there are activities to play, topics to discuss, and behaviors to role-model. These are all designed to fit into your daily routine and provide opportunities to further connect with your child.

Recognizing Feelings

- Use a wide range of emotion labels to help your child describe his or her feelings and to rate the intensity of these emotional reactions.
 - *Happy with a pizza party, happier with a birthday party, happiest with a new pet.*
- When watching a television show or movie, mute the volume and try to identify how the characters are feeling. Talk with your child about the physical or situational cues that help determine each person's emotions.

Predicting and Explaining Feelings

- While reading books together, pause throughout the story and invite your child to think ahead and predict how the character might feel next, or think back to which events or thoughts could explain some of the character's feelings.
- Talk with your child about the different ways people react emotionally to different situations. For example, discuss how each of you (or other family members) would feel in different scenarios and why your feelings are the same or different.
 - *You are about to read something that you wrote in front of a big group of people.*
 - *You are about to take off on the runway in an airplane.*
 - *You have nothing to do for the next hour.*
 - *You just finished a really hard puzzle.*
 - *A neighbor's cat climbs onto your lap.*
 - *Someone tells you that you did a great job.*
- Help your child notice clues about why someone feels a certain way by pointing someone out.
 - *That child is standing all alone at the edge of the playground, but there are a lot of kids playing on the swing set. Why do you think she looks so sad?*

Relating Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviors

- Help your children be mindful of their thinking, or recognize their own thoughts about a person or situation and how these thoughts affect their feelings and choices.

- *It sounds like you really don't want to go to your friend's house this afternoon. Is there a reason why? Is there something you'd like to share?*
- Help your child understand other people's behavior by exploring the kinds of thoughts that could be causing it.
 - *You said you don't like when your sister tags along with you and your friends to the park and it annoys you. What could she be thinking when she follows you there? Is she thinking that it would be fun to hang out with you? What if she's bored (or lonely) at home without you? Why don't we talk to her and see what she thinks?*

Having Empathy

- Model empathy by showing an awareness and understanding of your child's feelings—even if you don't share or agree.
 - *I see that you're angry, but it's time to turn off the computer and get ready for dinner.*
- Explain your own feelings (both positive and negative) to your child to help him or her understand how others feel and why.
 - *It makes me happy when I see you being kind to your brother by reading a story to him.*
- Talk with your child about the consequences of his or her actions (both positive and negative) toward others.
 - *How do you think your friend felt when you said you asked someone else over to play instead? It probably hurt his feelings and made him feel left out.*

Understanding Stereotypes About People

- Discuss with your child what a stereotype is and why it is a problem.
- Discuss with your child what they can do instead of making assumptions about what others are like or what they like to do.

Understanding Stereotypes About Objects, Activities, and Roles

- Discuss with your child why people choose or have different jobs.
- Encourage your child's involvement in a diverse range of activities based on his or her personal preferences, strengths, or areas where he or she can learn and grow.
- Describe different kinds of activities and occupations with similarly positive terms to demonstrate that all are equally valued.

Understanding That People Can Change

- Ask your child for one example of how he or she has changed this year.
- Focus on "process rather than product" -- praise your child for his or her efforts rather than what the accomplishment is.
 - *I see that you are working really hard at trying to tie your own shoes!*

An important part of this program is for students to continue discussing and practicing concepts outside the classroom. Thank you for your involvement in reinforcing at home what is being taught in class.