

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

- Play Feeling Charades with your child, taking turns guessing the emotion the other person is demonstrating or describing. Use your entire body and/or tone of voice to demonstrate the emotion or describe the physical changes you experience.
- Use a variety of “emotion words” to help your child name how he or she is feeling and how his or her body feels inside (stomach in knots, hot cheeks, butterflies in stomach).
- Play music or dance to express a certain emotion and then switch to another emotion. Or, play different types of music (such as upbeat or slow tempo) and ask your child how it makes him or her feel.

Predicting Feelings

- While reading books together, pause throughout the story and invite your child to think ahead and predict what the character will feel next.
- 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 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 dog comes over and licks you.*
 - *Someone tells you that you did a great job.*

Explaining Feelings

- Ask your child what it means to be a feelings detective.
- When reading books together, pause after the characters express feelings and invite your child to think back about events or thoughts that explain those feelings.

- Help your children notice clues about why someone feels a certain way.
 - *That child's parent is helping him down from the top of the tall slide. Why do you think he is crying?*

Empathy

- Model empathy by showing an awareness and understanding of your child's feelings—even if you don't share or agree.
 - *I can see that you're angry, but it's time to turn off the computer and get to bed.*
- Explain your own feelings (both positive and negative) to help your child understand how and why others feel.
 - *It makes me so happy when I see you being kind to your sister by sharing your crayons with her.*
- 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 that she couldn't come to your birthday party? It probably hurt her feelings and made her feel very left out.*

Understanding Stereotypes About People

- Ask your child what a stereotype.
- Ask your child what he or she would say to someone who said that ALL kids (or grandparents or teenagers) are a certain way.
 - *They all eat cereal for breakfast, like to watch movies.*
- Ask your child what can be done instead to find out what someone is like.

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 an example of how he or she has changed this year.
- Focus on "process rather than product" -- praise your child for attempted efforts rather than what was accomplished.
 - *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.