

Forest Charter School

APRIL CHARACTER TRAIT OF THE MONTH:



Compassion means we care about others, treat them with kindness, and feel a strong desire to help people in need. It is empathy in action. Helping children take the perspective of another is important in understanding compassion. Slowing situations down and creating space for kids to communicate their needs effectively is difficult in our fast-paced world, but necessary in teaching what compassion means. Notice and give positive attention when your child....

- Does nice things for others without expecting something in return.
- Says encouraging things to cheer others.
- Shows interest in others with intentional kindness and helping behavior.
- Participates in active listening.
- Respects privacy and avoids gossip.

When teaching compassion, it is important to also teach the understanding that people experience compassion and kindness uniquely. Some people prefer a hug or a cookie. Others might respond better to kind words or a note. Also, different situations require different kinds of compassion. It is an abstract concept that kids have to learn in real-world settings in order to better understand its nuance.

Here are some book suggestions: Have You Filled a Bucket Today? (ages 4-9); Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun (ages 5-9); The Invisible Boy (ages 6-9); Wonder (ages 8-12); The Wild Robot (ages 9-12). **Novels For Teens:** The Perks of Being a Wallflower; To Kill a Mockingbird; Night; How it All Blew Up. **Graphic Novels Grade 6 & Up:** New Kid; Sanity & Tallulah; The Dumbest Idea Ever.

Here are some sample activities by age:

5-7 year olds:

1. Before we ones can learn to empathize with someone else, you first have to be able to label the emotions that you feel yourself. When it comes to learning how to label emotions, we have to help young kids find the right words. Use pictures, movies and observations to teach kids to recognize feelings in others.
2. Embrace diversity: help children understand what they have in common with others.
3. For the youngest of kids, everyday life is packed with big emotions, making common experiences the perfect teaching ground for learning sympathy. When your child's playground pal falls down and cries, point that out. "It looks like Sam is sad. Does he look sad to you?" As your child gets more adept at communicating emotions, you can ask how they think events make others feel. "Sam took the toy from Sarah. How do you think Sarah feels right now? How would you feel?"

7-9 Year olds

1. Keep building on understanding emotions. With older kids, you can use the same approach as with younger. You may also wish to give them a bit more space by phrasing it this way: "It looks to me like you're feeling angry right now. Is that right?"
2. Try mindfulness activities: Zen Den <https://youtu.be/wf5K3pP2IUQ>

- Engage in high-level discussions about book characters, the absolute best tool for a child of any age to recognize others' emotions is through stories and books. Reading books with your kids is such a wonderful way to open up meaningful conversations with them, especially discussions about emotions and values.
- Play lots of cooperative board and card games.

9-11 year olds

- Encourage your child to try drama or acting classes.
- After your child has shared what they are feeling, the follow up is "Tell me why you're feeling ____," or "Show me why you're feeling ____." Not only does this help you learn more about your child, it teaches them about the cause and effect of emotions—that certain situations or events can stir up feelings inside them. This sets up the building blocks for later recognizing that the same cause and effect happens to other people.
- Feeling what another person feels by imagining yourself in their position is the key component of empathy. Bring this into conversations.

Ages 12 -14

- Encourage your child to choose volunteer work or start doing babysitting or other age appropriate jobs.
- Ask you pre-teen to label their own feelings by saying: "It seems to me that something's up. What are you feeling?"
- To feel compassion is to feel the need to help relieve another's suffering or to help change their situation. To be compassionate is to be a problem-solver. Talk out some situations, so your child has ideas when they occur in real life. Come back to those everyday situations and stories and ask your child what they could do to help. "Okay, so Sarah is feeling sad. How could you help her feel better?"
- Teaching your child to be both a problem-solver and a problem-preventer encourages them to build compassion. It shows them that actions can have consequences, that it's important to address those consequences when other people are hurt, and it's even better to keep possible consequences in mind and prevent them from the start.

High School

- Discuss current events, by exposing your children to the world in age-appropriate ways, you're giving them the opportunity to take what you've practiced at home and apply it to the world around them. Be observant so you can notice teaching moments as they arise and spark conversation. By making life a constant dialogue with our kids, and by consistently reflecting on stories and experiences, we can help them develop empathy and compassion.
- Keep encouraging volunteer work and a part time job really helps young adults learn compassion
- Understand feelings/emotions-a set of great videos & worksheets <https://childmind.org/healthyminds/students/>

We can, with the patience, effort and love, raise a generation of kids who can change the world.

