

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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"Love one another, as I Have Loved You":

6 Tips for Teaching Children Empathy



■ by Jessica Parks, MSW, LCSW

Parents spend a great deal of time and energy teaching children the skills of living. We teach them to say "please" and "thank you," we teach them to brush their teeth, we teach them to tie their shoes, to do their homework, to drive a car, to dress for a job interview. Throughout their lives, we are modeling and teaching countless skills. There is one skill that is necessary in every phase and every situation in human life, yet parents often overlook it or are unsure of how to teach it. That skill is **EMPATHY**, or the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. As 1 Corinthians 12:26 describes this skill, *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together* (ESV).

Teaching children empathy results in their increased capacity to see the face of Christ in others. Children who cultivate the skill of

empathy are more respectful, thoughtful, and kind. Empathetic children are less likely to bully. Empathetic children are less likely to tolerate bullying behavior in others.

How do we begin to teach this crucial skill? Here are some ideas:

6 Tips on How to Teach Empathy

1. Help children label their own emotions
If your child is crying, you might say, "I see you are feeling sad" while offering comfort. This prepares the way for your child to be able to see and understand their own and others' emotions.

2. Play a game
Make a game out of making exaggerated facial expressions and having them guess what emotion you are feeling. Then have them try it and you guess!

3. Help them identify what they have in common with others
Kids often are curious about differences that they see (like when a friend uses a wheelchair or a stranger dresses

differently than they are used to). Acknowledge these differences, and work with them to identify traits that they share ("Yes, she uses a wheelchair to get around. And I notice that she has a rocket ship on her backpack. I wonder if she likes science like you do?"). This helps them see that we share more than divides us as children of God.

4. Be a model

Model kindness and empathy in your behavior toward others. Children are

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Living with Bipolar

■ by Kim Pronoitis, MA, LCPC

Depression presents itself in many different ways. Bipolar depression is different than unipolar depression as one experiences high highs and low lows. Like many mental health issues, bipolar is on a spectrum with some being more severe than others. Bipolar is a lifelong disorder, however, when treated correctly and educating about the illness, one can lead a productive successful healthy life. Bipolar is sometimes hard to detect as some highs are not total manic highs and some lows can present themselves as a unipolar depression would – it is best to consult a licensed mental health professional.

The Importance of Education and a Strong Support System

Living with someone who struggles with bipolar disorder can be challenging. When the illness goes undiagnosed, loved ones describe the person as difficult to get along with. It is extremely beneficial for family members to educate themselves and have an understanding

of the disorder. It is also vital to have a good support system and support groups serve families and their loved one well in this area. It is one thing to have a basic understanding of the illness, but another to grasp the conceptual understanding of living with a struggling family member. This is why I encourage establishing a good support system in addition to education for family members and loved ones. Of the people who suffer with bipolar illness, the ones leading the most successful lives are compliant with their medication, have a good support system and attend counseling and/or groups.

Bipolar is Something a Person HAS, Not Who They ARE

One key point to understanding bipolar is to understand the person themselves. First,

We need to change this portrayal so that people do not continue to suffer in silence and are not afraid to seek help. As Christians we are called to care for the sick and suffering. People with bipolar disorder are sick and suffering and need to be treated like anyone else with a debilitating illness.

You Are Not Alone - REACH OUT

It is not uncommon for those who struggle to self-medicate and engage in maladaptive coping skills. It is estimated that about half of those who struggle with bipolar disorder also struggle with addiction, which always complicates the issue. It is more beneficial to reach for help from a mental health professional or a support system.

In therapy I often reiterate that you can't change what you don't acknowledge. As if it serves some sort of healthy purpose, many prefer to live in denial. Going untreated can ruin lives and relationships. Our mental health and physical health are one body. Like any other part of our physical body our brain is part of our health. Just as someone with high blood pressure or diabetes needs medication to balance the chemistry in certain parts of the body, medication is needed to make sure the chemistry in our brain is in balance.



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always observing the adults around them.

5. Role Play

Run scenarios with them and ask how they think others may feel. You could do this with characters in books, in discussing their day at school, in watching the news, or in any other situation where you are discussing other people.

6. Empathy in our World

Help them “zoom out” from simply trying to understand the emotions of family and friends. Talk with them about people impacted by persecution, violence, etc. Encourage them to explore their own emotions about these things, then help them to think about the emotions those impacted may experience.

Empathy is an essential skill for living a life that embraces kindness, calls out and stands up to bullies, and connects with others. Through helping children develop capacity to understand and experience others' emotions, you equip them to join the worthy calling to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8, NRSV). ■



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remember they are people who struggle -- often times, I like to tell my clients that they need not see themselves as a bipolar person, but a person who struggles with an illness. This allows people who struggle with the diagnosis to become aware that they are still human, and having human emotions aside from the bipolar falls within the healthy norm. People with bipolar disorder want to be treated as others would like to be treated.

Jesus Call to Care for the Sick and Suffering

People with mental illness need support not only from friends and family, but from society as well. Society needs to stop stigmatizing mental illness, or hold prejudice against those who suffer. Our mental health, like our physical health, needs to be taken care of – it is part of personal care. Support is vital to the success of dealing with any ailment - cancer, diabetes, brain damage, physical handicaps, including mental illness. The stigma that our society places on those who struggle with mental health issues can cause fear of judgement and delays in seeking treatment. Television, movies, and the media have portrayed mental illness as something to fear.

When I said, “My foot is slipping,” your unfailing love, Lord, supported me.

Psalm 94:18

As a therapist, I encourage you not to put your mental health on the back burner. There is no need to be fearful of your mind, or mental health. Do not be afraid to reach out for help and remember the FEAR acronym (F- false, E-evidence, A-appearing, R-real.) Reach out for yourselves; reach out for your loved ones. You are NOT alone! In Psalm 34:4 David talks about being delivered from fear, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.” ■



Kim Pronoitis is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and sees clients in our Tinley Park, IL location.

the Science behind your Thoughts

■ by Gregory Rodriguez, MA, LCPC

In that first session with a new patient, I ask about the reasons why they have sought counseling. A majority of the time they describe their struggles as emotional distress. Anxiety, fears, anger, depression, and shame seem to be the most common. Today's research shows that up to 80% of physical, emotional, and mental health issues can be a direct result of our thought life¹. The key is to understand the science that connects our thoughts and emotions.

I came across a story in Timothy Jennings book, *The God-Shaped Brain*, which reinforces the research. In the 1970's, a man named Sam Shoeman was diagnosed with liver cancer and told he only had a few months to live. Shortly after his death, the autopsy revealed that the doctors were wrong. He had only one small tumor contained within the liver - not a life-threatening stage of cancer. He did not die from liver cancer; he died from believing he was dying from liver cancer. Incredibly, our thoughts and the emotions they invoke can change our physical brain structure, ultimately changing who we are and who we are becoming.

The Science that Connects our Thoughts and Emotions

The aspect of our brain with which we are most familiar is the thinking one. Consider how much time you spend in your head, focused on thoughts. We are far less acquainted with the feeling part of the brain, the prime influencer behind most of our behaviors. That part of the brain feels, reacts, creates, and remembers, but not in words. Instead, it focuses on sensations and feelings, many occurring outside of our conscious awareness. Virtually all our core feelings - anger, joy, love, grief - directly influence our behaviors. Although feelings are not always based on facts, they can override our ability to remain logical, affecting the choices we make and our ability to cope and deal with stress.

Emotions Taking Over

Here's how that happens - two things are always going on inside of our brain²:

- 1) Electrical - in the form of our thoughts
- 2) Chemical - in the form of our emotions.

Picture your thoughts as a boat racing across your brain, while behind the boat picture your emotions as the wake created by the racing boat across the water. Each time you find yourself thinking those same old thoughts, for example, "I'm a failure" (thought), and then feel sad (emotion) because you believe that thought, your body secretes chemicals which change your brain structure. You are essentially creating a neurological pathway linking your thoughts to your emotions and storing them in parts of your brain and cells in your body via an electrical charge that are found in some of the molecules of those chemicals secreted by those emotions.

Don't Believe all Your Thoughts

- "I'm not worthy"
- "I'm a failure"
- "I've been rejected so there must be something wrong with me and that's why I'm alone"
- "God can't use me unless I'm spiritually strong"
- "God can't love me because I'm a sinner"

I see many clients with unhealthy thoughts. In my work as a Christian therapist, I help my clients expose and change thoughts that are actually false. Unhealthy false thoughts do, in time, change our brain chemistry. The chemical changes can result in anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Proverbs 23:7 states, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Our thoughts about ourselves play a big role in who we are and our ability to deal with life's challenges and expectations.

Replace False Thoughts with God's Truth

Allow Jesus to renew your mind through the washing of the Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you take your thoughts captive to Christ, to think new thoughts about yourself, replacing those old thoughts that made you feel unloved, unworthy, and empty. Let Jesus replace them with His Love, His truth, His comfort, trusting in the healing process and begin to live by the power of His love! ■

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5



¹ Leaf, Caroline, *Who Switched Off My Brain*, 2007
² Clinton & Laaser, *The Fight of Your Life*, 2015

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