

## DEVELOPING EMPATHY IN OUR CHILDREN

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In the last few years, we have experienced a global pandemic, national turmoil, and a war in Ukraine. And our kids have experienced these right along with us. An [article by the American Psychological Association](#) states, "In a 2020 survey... 71% of parents said the pandemic had taken a toll on their child's mental health." Many families are impacted by mental health issues, and kids are likely to have peers who are struggling. As parents, how can we teach our kids to empathize with others and show compassion, like Jesus?



Though we can serve as examples to our kids, Jesus serves as our greatest example. He ate with socially ostracized tax collectors, defended outcasts, and transformed people by healing their minds and renewing their strength. He showed the deepest act of compassion by taking on the greatest burden of humanity: our sin. Through reading about the life of Jesus, our families can learn to walk with others through their difficulties.

As a family, try these ideas to raise your awareness of mental health struggles and develop empathy for those who are hurting.

- **Study the gospels:** The gospels are full of instances where Jesus walked beside people who were hurting spiritually, emotionally, and mentally, as well as physically. Was his response ever to judge them? No. It was to respond with empathy, compassion, and acts of mercy.
  - Jesus Raises a Widow's Son—When Jesus went to the town of Nain and saw a widow at the city gate grieving her dead son, his heart went out to her in her grief. In an act of mercy and compassion, he miraculously raised her son from the dead. Like Jesus, we can see the hurt and sorrow in others and be caring friends. ([Luke 7:11-17](#))
  - Jesus and Zacchaeus—Zacchaeus was a proud, wealthy tax collector, and he probably didn't have any friends. He probably felt very lonely and very sad. But, despite his sin, Jesus offered him friendship. And his life changed for good. ([Luke 19:1-10](#))
  - The Workers are Few—Jesus went through all the towns preaching the good news, and he saw how much hurting and pain there was throughout the crowds and how lost they were. He had compassion on them, so much so that he called his disciples to aid him in healing their suffering and in spreading the good news. We can teach our kids how Jesus calls each of us to love and care for one another, and in doing so, glorify God. ([Matthew 9:35-38](#))
- **Awareness:** As a family, become aware of mental health struggles. Pray for people dealing with mental health issues, and find comfort in the fact that God is with them. By being a friend and showing compassion, we can let God's light shine through us and give others hope. If your kids have friends who they are concerned about, talk about it together. Remember that sometimes seeing friends struggle can be overwhelming or cause uncertainty. Discuss how people with mental health issues may feel, and explore ways you can be kind and compassionate towards them, but also how your kids can maintain healthy boundaries for themselves as they seek to love others like Jesus. Here are some resources with tips to help you navigate these conversations:

- [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [Key Ministry: Tips for Parents](#)
- [UNICEF](#)

Instead of shying away from talking about mental health issues with our kids, God wants us to become informed, have open and honest conversations, and empathize in the way of Jesus. Remind your kids that everyone is a child of God. He loves each and every one of us and cares deeply when people are struggling physically or emotionally. Ephesians 4:32 tells us to “be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.” When we live as examples by having empathy and showing compassion towards others, our kids will develop empathy and do compassionate acts as well.

Want to do a deep dive? Check out Family Fire's article [Learning How to Practice Empathy](#).

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<https://kidscorner.net/parent-blog/developing-empathy-in-our-children>  
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