



CULTIVATING COMPASSION IN THE CLASSROOM





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When students show compassion to each other and, by extension, learn to show it to themselves, the classroom community becomes a safe, welcoming environment.

The Importance of Compassion in the Classroom

Compassion is concern for another's well-being with a desire to help. When teachers show compassion, they prove that each student is a valued, important member of the class. This investment in students' social and emotional well-being strengthens the teacher-student relationship and the entire classroom community, creating a non-threatening place where real learning can occur. When compassionate teachers provide emotional support, students feel safe and supported to solve their own problems.

In a welcoming and respectful class, students may be more likely to act on feelings of compassion for their peers through acts of kindness. The result is a tight-knit network of support that extends beyond school to enrich relationships within one's family and one's community.



Fostering Student Compassion in the Classroom

Like any other social and emotional skill, compassion can be cultivated with practice. What does compassion look like in the classroom? Compassion may take the following forms (Caldwell, 2017):

- Active listening
- Positive encouragement and reinforcement
- Respectful behavior toward the teacher, peers, and the classroom
- Awareness of students' feelings
- Gratitude for help received
- Forgiveness for mistakes





Teachers have an important role to play in helping students learn how to show compassion for others. Children subconsciously absorb messages about the behavior and values of others they spend time with, making teachers critical role models for cultivating prosocial behavior (Ho & Funk, 2018). Consider the following ways that you can inspire compassion in your classroom:

- Model compassion for students. Greet them by name, ask about their interests, and show them that you care about what is happening in their lives in and out of the classroom.
- Practice compassionate listening to help all students, especially those who engage in attention-seeking behaviors (Caldwell, 2017). This judgment-free listening validates emotions and lets students feel heard. After discussing the following characteristics of compassionate listening, give students the opportunity to practice it in pairs.
 - ▶ Display neutral body language with eye contact to show listening without judgment
 - ▶ Listen without the need to offer advice or solutions
 - ▶ Ask the speaker questions that prompt them to delve more deeply into their feelings

- Use the following mindfulness visualization strategies to get students thinking about the feelings and emotions associated with kindness:
 - ▶ To guide students to see themselves as helpers, ask them to reflect on a time they showed kindness to a peer and to focus on how it felt to be compassionate to another.
 - ▶ Have students reflect on a time when they were shown compassion. Incorporate deep breathing to focus attention on their bodies' reactions to the feeling of receiving help.
- Give students some control so that they feel they have a voice. Let students come up with classroom rules or practice problem-solving by having student groups brainstorm strategies for getting homework done on time.
- Make a kindness garden to display acts of student compassion. Watch as your classroom's garden blooms with each act noted down (GLSEN, n.d.).

Incorporating compassion into your curriculum doesn't require lots of time, expensive supplies, or a hefty budget. You can encourage compassion on a daily basis by modeling kindness, patience, and understanding. When students see the classroom as a place of belonging where their thoughts and feelings truly matter, they will be better equipped to solve their own problems, as well as to lend a helping hand to those in need.



References

Caldwell, M. (2017, January). How to listen with compassion in the classroom. Greater Good.

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