

>> Thank you for tuning in today to the healthy minds, pod cash for the host conversations.

If people who are really good listeners and we asked them to share with us, I'm Lucy Caldwell

and I work for Fairfax County public schools.

Thank you for joining us, Bethany Koza Lack

a mental health and wellness specialist for actually P S

today we're going to talk about activating empathy in children

and this is an important topic and there are many reasons why

feeling understood and cared about is a human need and way we relate to others

such as why empathy is considered essential for building strong communities.

Empathy is the ability to understand and

another person's perspective and to share in what that person is feeling thinking

are experiencing in other words it's having an understanding of what it must be like

to walk in another person's shoes,

while demonstrating compassion for that individual.

So here we are Bethany

where in what month is this of the pandemic

and

we are all just empathy is probably wearing a little bit them on people frankly

people are frustrated a lot of people are angry or

you know you're just seeing these sort of extreme behaviors.

>> And so what can we say and be thinking about empathy now and why does it matter now.

Well thank you for having me back at your day here and and I think this is such a timely discussion right.

We're in the midst of a presidential election.

Where we have differing perspectives and points of view and

and I think that empathy is really powerful in allowing us to maintain relationships with people even when we might not have the same perspective might not see things in the same way that they do

and I just think it's a really powerful relationship skill

that you do learn over time and it does take some time to develop that because it can be hard to see the perspective of others and and really understand how they're feeling so I'm glad we're having this conversation today.

It's probably tough at the holiday dinner table come this year.

When you look at such divisiveness and to help people are feeling and they say well, I'm just not going to invite uncle Todd.

>> To our Thanksgiving dinner this year, I mean who even knows what's going to happen for the holidays are people going to eat in their driveways or you know what are people going to do I wonder about that.

>> Yeah that's that's an interesting if an interesting thought I don't even plan.

And that's our in advance because it's hard to tell we've all learned to basically to stop planning for a little while yes

but so up thinking about empathy tell us some ways that

we model empathy

well, it's so interesting because I've listened to all of your podcast and in nearly every single one.

Everybody is talking about modeling behaviors for our children right and

and when I was thinking about modeling empathy it's it's in our conversations it's

in our everyday skills and and and our everyday interactions with people and and again election seasons an awesome time to have these discussions because you really can't always just block some of those relationships, my mom and I are on very opposite spectrum is when it comes to politics.

And I learned very quickly that you you can't just shut those people out so listening asking questions so that you can better understand how that person is feeling why does that bother you why are you upset by that. How do you think others are feeling about the same topic maybe somebody that's grown up differently or in a different part of the country and I think modeling that those questions and asking people where they're coming from is so huge for our kids. One of the things that just initially comes to mind is when whether it's teachers or parents when you're reading stories are watching television shows pausing that show or stopping the the reading of this story that you're in the midst of an saying how high do you think that person feels the way that they do I think the other powerful thing is really that to understand. Others emotions, we have to understand our own emotions see and and that can be a challenge so modeling that you can express how you're feeling there are no wrong feelings. There are no wrong emotions and then processing those feelings in and showing your children how you've process, those emotions and and kind of kept that some of the challenging portions.

>> It's really interesting point because I think we're all finding ourselves feeling a little bit differently these days and we asked hopefully we're asking in looking inside and saying why did I just say that to that person that probably didn't sound so nice or that's uncharacteristic of me. I was just mentioning to you today that I said gosh and I'm sure it sounded a little bit mean to somebody but it was really just about being direct and getting things done but so what do you do when you know, I say oh I sounded a little mean do you go back or.

>> What would he do about that you can have it it's a it's a redo it reduce are okay and mistakes are okay and and teaching our youth no matter what age that we make mistakes or maybe we say something that wasn't as thoughtful as we wanted it to be we're setting the tone that we wanted it to be and so taking a step back thinking about it and then really saying I'm sorry I this is uncharacteristic of my behavior or are helping people see where you're coming from so so if you're interacting with somebody that you usually don't they they their job is to do this but her job is to protect the kids or protect the students are protected the staff and if CPS right you have to help them understand where you're coming from and not okay to I think it's really important for us to share where we're coming from with other so that they can can empathize with what we're feeling or what we're doing it absolutely it's basically about sharing the dilemma isn't it sharing the dilemma and this is a big one right now we are facing a lot of challenges, yeah, how can we practice empathy a lot of people

listening made have children or they may be staff members and have a classroom. What are some of the things they can do to practice.

So the if it's

I think we've talked about it a little bit but but really starting with OK recognizing our own emotions but then in practice it's surrounding ourselves with people that come from different backgrounds or have different experiences because there is no better way to understand what somebody is going through that to really hear a different story from yours, I grew up in a very very small town and then I moved here and it was you know, shell shock and but it was so powerful for me because I learned about so many different walks of life that I wouldn't have if I had stayed in the area I was but we have to consciously do that and continue to do that and and learn about other people's lives in and hear their story I think it's just so powerful to hear someone story.

>> I think it's a really good suggestion because it does seem sometimes that we're all sort of going down this road and we're not you know because of everything that's going on right now we're not straying remind not making a right.

Instead of the left and going through different neighborhood that you use to are just taking a different way home from the store anything and even something like that can open your eyes

eyes to something that you might not be used to can it.

Yeah

and you know, let's say it really just makes me think about school right where we we are all engaged in this huge dilemma of how to support our students and and people are on all different sides of the coin with us, but this is.

>> This is where I always think that people are trying to do what's best for kids whether it's teachers whether it's parents we all have the seam intention of doing what's best for children and so understanding why maybe somebody is upset with the decision that was made.

But then how we can support them in and letting them know what we're doing to support others to I think that's really important.

>> You've been a school based counselor.

So you're just yes, yes, yes, we know, it's OK it's been a school based psychologist for years.

What happens when you encounter a child who doesn't have feelings of empathy maybe they were not exposed to that over what do you do when you see that and you know you're coming in obviously because of something that happened. But what do you do about that yeah I think a lot of that is about the conversations that we have with them.

>> In Fairfax County we have we have trainings in and something called the start of justice that is

a way we engage with students a way we can engage with staff but also and intervention right and and the whole point of that is to really hear that side from maybe it's the victim in a situation and understanding why they feel hurt or upset or harmed by something so that that student that may be made a mistake.

Can can learn to understand.

This is how my actions impacted somebody else and so the restorative justice process is very powerful in that way.

But one on one we're having those same conversations with students were we'll be trying to process and usually not when they're at peak, we're trying to do that when they have been able to de-escalate a little bit and can process their actions of questions might you ask.

Well asking what how do you think what you did impacted your teacher how do you think your teacher felt after you know you disrupted this entire list said how do you think the student that you punched in the face was feeling afterwards or that when you made fun of them because of their close.

Why do you think that might have been hurtful and and really trying to process just how those acknowledge our own actions.

Impact others, I think we sometimes forget that we're very empathetic individuals or not sometimes you we all just get wrapped up in ourselves and so that does happen that's human nature but taking a step back processing acknowledging that maybe we said something that might have hurt somebody or harm. Someone.

>> Interesting you mention that restorative justice and a lot of listeners probably don't understand what that means I'm having worked in law enforcement field for many years.

I do recall some law enforcement from Fairfax County Police Department working with the schools on restorative justice.

Give us a little bit of an idea of what that is and if you think we should be doing a podcast on that topic I think that could be >> a great idea we know we have some specialists in of CPS that would be wonderful presenters and I'll let them speak to all of the details on making a new and there you go.

But I restorative justice is really rather than just looking. Disciplinary consequences.

Yeah, learning from our mistakes as I said before mistakes are okay, but trying to make amends with those that may have been harmed and and and hearing how we may have wronged someone and then being able to come to an agreement that everybody is comfortable with so it's not just and authoritative figure saying this is the consequence for what you did do we always learn from that not necessarily we're really we're trying to help students learn from the mistakes that they may have made the parents get involved in that in how are they informed when this process is under way you know I I would assume that they're typically notified, I don't know all of the details on that so I will let your next guest speak to that home was a bit more I have all those and say oh no that's OK I do recall that it could still be on the Police Department's website.

>> Because I remember whenever there we did some partnerships on that and also likely some of them involve the courts, the tooth of quite yet.

>> Yes, it's all dependent on the situation that happens with the kids so I know that it could be the juvenile courts. But we do it's not just for students who have engage in illegal activities sometimes we engage in those practices in the school system just to be more supportive than and more encompassing of how to overcome the the behavior that may have occurred and one from those mistakes, but yeah, there's there's I the whole episode worth of restart of justice that I'm sure he can discuss next all remember that.

Good what when we talk about empathy what are you.

>> You know sort of the ages where you start to worry, you know I I can imagine that when you have a very young child they may just you know be thinking about themselves. I want that lollipop or I want those animal crackers or something like that or I want to play this game. So they're not potentially thinking about the person in the room with them or there preschool playmate or something like that.

But when do we start as parents are caring adults in a child's life kind of you know getting concerned about empathy and thinking gosh, you know why don't they care about that other person how could they just hit them or you know, and in our other signs that we should be looking for on when we need to do more is that caring adult know well and and I think that question is a little bit tricky only because there are a lot of factors that play into that.

>> A student with disabilities may have more difficulty understanding that emotions of others and said that could vary based on that developmental growth and progress could vary and and the big thing I think about is we can't worry if it's not a skill that we've tried to teach our star child or our students and so I I know we've talked about this in the past but the social emotional learning component of the curriculum that teachers are betting in in their lessons can really build on empathy and relationship skills scene now we know that we are putting a greater emphasis on that and Fairfax County public schools, it's always been there but but we're working on it more so that we can say where we're providing this relationship school instruction to all students and then from the school's perspective.

When we still start to see concerns and challenges in that area.

We then refer for greater level of intervention right and we have different social skills, curriculums and and different curriculums that psychologists counselors and social workers school

have groups of students participate in and then you know, we'll we'll consult with parents and say is this a concern at home.

We're looking is is this a consistent deficit

across settings or is it just in certain circumstances when when they're they have very high and emotions so so some of it is circumstantial too.

But if if you have questions or concerns about that with your specific child I really would encourage to call the school based counselors, social workers and psychologists can still help you navigate that

it is really child by child so every school has those the access to those counselors and clinicians so please please please use them if you have questions send salute Lee.

Empathy is all about emotion.

And we've talked a little bit about discussing a motion with your child

and how does that look people right now or so

tied up in trying to figure things out in their own lives, but

what could

possibly cause a parent to just stop in their tracks and say I need to have this

conversation, maybe it's listening to this podcast right now I don't know what

could you say to make that suggestion

that parents and friends in caring adults have those conversations with their kids

about emotions and about

how to talk about.

Yeah, I I just think that is an ongoing conversation and especially with our teams tonight.

And we always say have those conversations when

you're not at peak, it, you know you have to do that when everybody's in a calm state

and try to be in a a very I'm non-threatening environment meaning

it's harder to have those conversations face to face sitting there but maybe when

you're riding in the car, you're driving somewhere or having that

the conversations or

after a situation where you've been really happy or really excited or really proud.

Having those conversations afterwards and and and praising kids for

the things that they've done well or if they handle frustration really well or

anxiety really well being able to have those conversations.

I also think it's important when

I always need time afterwards so sometimes I have to take a timeout after I've had

an emotional situation and then talk about it afterwards and really again it comes

back to modeling expressing how you're feeling

and and talking about it so that you have made it OK for your child to talk about it too.

When you see expressing how you're feeling as an adult do mean a sort of expressing it to yourself.

>> Or you know in writing it down or should you call a friend.

>> How do you do that yeah.

Well you did

so your kids don't need to know everything that's going on in your life right eye

and court has said because take that into consideration,

but letting them know how we're feeling when it's appropriate to manage your own

emotional response, maybe it is phoning a friend maybe it's journaling like you said

it could be it could be going for a walk and really being about the process on your own.

It doesn't necessarily have to be

out loud.

I I'm a big fan of Mark

Brackett who talks about permission to feel and we had some schools that implement

the ruler program and part of that is is it recognizing how we're feeling in our own

emotions and I I use that the ruler app it's called the mood meter

to be able to meet the mood meter yes, how's that for and it helps me sometimes labeled the emotion, I'm feeling.

But I also get to you know when you put it into the app it gives what strategy am I going to use to stay here if it's one of those more positive there's energized emotions

or if it's

an emotion where I'm feeling really tired and I'm not being productive then then what strategies my going to use to be a little bit more productive to need a cup of coffee, do I need to go for a five-minute walk so it's just it's helpful for me, but everybody has to find what works for them.

>> Because it varies I think it's really interesting and really instructional free to offer

these you know practical suggestions for people because I have often said that you know when you don't feel well,

your stomach hurts or your your ankle hurts than you could doctor you get it checked out.

But what do we do when you're in a bad mood and that bad beat continues were comes up in unusual times you know things like that you're talking about those resources at its super helpful not only for parents in listeners, but you know anything about yourself as well as your kids, yeah, and there are a lot I was actually

>> in a student group not too long ago and they were talking about self-care and and I just like I said the students were saying

my self care tool will not work for you see it might not work for you, but when you have a whole tool box

of things to consider you can try one and say hey that was really helpful and they also talked about the different apps on your phone that you can list the tools and apps they talk to amber yeah, I do remember headspace was one and some of them cost money but some of them are free and I can can tell you which was which but headspace a calm

yeah, I can't think of all the names serve as a whole less, but I can look for those and post them somewhere because

sometimes they just have different activities that can it can be very very helpful on and being able to

center myself or can't get back to calm or even go to sleep some of them mindfulness activities to to be able to fall asleep all different things

left his suggestions.

For me personally I just download the all trails that when I hit the trail lately I have that one as well that's it that's a good option.

Yeah.

>> Because you never know when you're going to need to take that walk and yes, take that walk around the block to some fresh air.

Another thing that you know I read the healthy minds, blog view and that's a wonderful

partnership between 4 affects County and Fairfax County public schools, it is and so I do encourage everyone to read that blog one of the issues on their in this month is about

empathy and cultivating empathy in the children.

But one of the issues they talk about is helping others develop kindness and caring

by being involved in the community or globally
do you have any thoughts about those kinds of activities.
>> Yeah, I mean it all looks a little bit different right now doesn't it he has and
can't go necessarily to a public place to be able to live or work at
like a food pantry or something like that however
I know that a lot of kids, a writing cards for people that may be in nursing homes
or even thank You's to are
frontline workers right people in the hospital postal workers are delivery people.
There there are ways of showing that appreciation I think that
positive contributions can also happen in the home, you know it doesn't it doesn't
necessarily have to be a service learning activity it could be that
your your child help to unload the dishwasher without asking right and really
recognizing when they've done that I think
pets are also such a positive way of showing up
the in caring and love and
and you know you're taking care of an animal or even a plant to to help them thrive
so there are ways of taking care of each other without having to leave the home as
well.

>> That's a really good suggestion.

And I hope everybody listing
is thinking about how they can take empathy and why in identifying why it's so
important it helps you in your career helps you with your relationships, your
friendships doesn't
it does and.

>> And I'm sorry I just thought of one other thing that you know this is kind of
timely to it being thankful and grateful is really really helpful and fosters
empathy in children as well and
thinking of
those things that we're thankful for on a daily basis or something that went well
and and and who you're thankful for what they've done to make you feel good or feel
feel happier positive really recognizing others for those actions.
If it's your teacher being able to some that teacher an email or if it's your mom
writing a card for your mom
and saying thank you I really appreciate what you've been doing for me so
there are those ways of showing.
These are great ideas on this team, even when you're sitting down to breakfast table
their dinner table or some time when you're together
saying to your
folks who live in your household.
There are 3 things you're thankful for today, what are 3 things make you feel good
today.

Just a simple thing simple conversations, but sometimes it just takes a reminder to
make it happen.

Yeah.

I had teachers at one of the schools, I worked at that they were like accountability
partners in doing that so make sure that they reported to each other at the end of
each day in
and they both report it was so powerful for them.

>> Really I love that
break that down right well before I let you go I have 3 things to ask you.

We do this with all our wonderful guests yes, when was the last time we learn something new.

I have to tell you I am learning new technology strategies on it.

>> Pretty at every week so I would say there's something some form of technology. I can't tell you which one it was this week, but it's constant it's a it's a big learning curve.

It is yet in an exciting it is and I feel silver linings of all this is yeah on learning you're having to do it we're having to do it, but I feel like those are skills that will stay with me in and

keep me engaged with other so it's great absolutely when was the last time you did something fun.

Well yesterday, I got to we've got walking at Burke Lake with one of my dear friend, so that leaves are so pretty so pretty yeah, wonderful and when was the last time you made a new friend.

So I last school year I had started at pole middle school and that was really hard for me because it was a new check it was a change from a place I had been for a long time.

And what I really really bonded with the social worker there she has become one of my dear friends and I'm just really lucky to have that relationship now I love it.

Yeah well thank you Bethany for being here today for talking about tips and ways and the importance of cultivating empathy in children.

>> If you have a topic that you'd like healthy months podcast explore don't be shy. But us now send your suggestions to help the minds of some.