Compassion

February's Key to Character

Definitions
Elementary: Compassion is the concern you show for the feelings or welfare of others.
Secondary: Compassion is the understanding and empathy that you have for the distress of others and the desire to relieve it.

Road Blocks to Being Compassionate
Some things that stop us from being the compassionate people we should be are:
◊ Fear of those who are different
◊ Lack of forgiveness
◊ Prejudices and stereotypes
◊ Boring activities
◊ Being too busy to take the time
◊ Lack of knowledge about a difficult situation
◊ Perception that showing concern indicates weakness

Think about those that stop you from being compassionate and tear down those roadblocks one at a time!

"Today give a stranger one of your smiles. It may be the only sunshine he sees all day."
H. Jackson Brown Jr.

Related Words
Kindness  Courtesy  Consideration  Love
Esteem  Acceptance  Cultural Diversity  Honor

Through the Looking Glass

We see compassion when we see someone who:

- considers cultural differences.
- gives to someone less fortunate.
- is kind even when others are not.
- forgives someone who hurt them.
- is helpful at home without being asked.
- looks for ways to help in the community.
- is friendly to someone who needs a friend.
- is generous in sharing time and belongings.
- is willing to share the pain or joy of others.
- includes those less skillful in group activities.
- treats others as they would like to be treated.
- is careful to prevent unintentional injury to others.
- understands that it is our actions not our feelings that hurt others.

Forgive
That slight misdeed of yesterday, why should it mar today?
The thing he said, the thing you did, have long since passed away.
For yesterday was but a trial, today you will succeed.
And from the mistakes of yesterday, will come some noble deed.
Do not condemn the past, for it’s gone with it’s mistakes; their memory cannot last.
Forget the failures and misdeeds, from such experience rise.
Why should you let your head be bowed?
Lift up your heart and eyes!
Author Unknown
Ben Franklin Challenge

Ben Franklin would wake up each morning asking, “What good can I do today?” and would go to bed each evening asking himself, “What good did I do today?” Let’s challenge ourselves to do that for one month and see how close we can come to making compassion and kindness a way of life. To do this we could:

◊ talk to the unpopular.
◊ be kind to strangers.
◊ resist stereotyping.
◊ encourage others with a good word.
◊ invite someone who eats alone to eat with us at lunch.
◊ intervene if we see someone being bullied.
◊ donate to a worthy cause.

School Spotlight

Churchwell Elementary students are being caught on camera showing what they are learning about compassion. Each day a grade level uses their newly purchased flip cameras to video their students modeling the character focus of the month then it is shown on the ITV News each afternoon. This month they are acting out quotes on compassion. The kids love being on TV and are having lots of fun. Thanks Churchwell for sharing this great idea!

To spotlight your school, e-mail information about the special character education projects your students are doing to Cynthia Gass.

School

Expository:

◊ Think about a time when you had a problem and someone showed compassion to you. Write to explain how this person was compassionate and how their kindness helped you to handle the situation.
◊ Think about the old saying, “sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me.” Write to explain why you agree or disagree.

Narrative:

◊ Think about the power of a politician and how they could help others. Write a story about what you would do to show compassion to others if you were a politician.
◊ Think about a new student sitting alone at lunch looking lonely and sad. You decide that something needs to be done. Write a story about what you and the three friends you were sitting with decided to do and how it turned out.

Persuasive:

◊ Think about a family with four children who lost everything they had in a fire. How could you convince your classmates to donate to a collection drive to gather food, clothes and household supplies for them? Write an article for your school newspaper persuading them to donate to this worthy cause.
◊ Think about the saying “To have a friend you must be a friend.” Write a letter to convince your cousin who just moved to a new school that this is true.

Websites

www.learningforlife.org—free sample lesson plans with integrated character traits. - ESE materials

http://urbanillinois.edu/programs/character.html—“strategies for empowering students” - collection of classroom activities that encourage values.

http://printables.scholastic.com Printables—Award certificates.

http://www.epa.gov/kids—grants, awards, EPA Kid’s Club, online book to read—Kids Book Project
Language Arts:
◊ Practice finding the good in other people by finding the good in even the worst characters in literature. Teach students active listening skills (body language, rephrasing, tuning in to feelings, etc.). In pairs ask students to interview each other one at a time then introduce their partner to the class.
◊ Direct students to rewrite a story or fable from another point of view (Red Riding Hood from the wolf’s point of view, for example).

Math:
◊ Compile data from students surveys to create a compassion thermometer for your school to display in the hallway. Include the number of students who performed a compassionate action for someone last year and the number of students who received a special act that showed compassion.
◊ Calculate the number of opportunities that we have to show compassion by the day, week, month or year as it is grade level appropriate and create a goal to look for opportunities to show compassion (example: goal of twice a week = 2 X 4 = 8 actions of compassion each month, etc.)

Science:
◊ Imagine a helpful invention which could probably never become a reality. For example, a gadget which would analyze the world’s problems and tell how to solve them.
◊ Discuss the role of the scientist as research is done to solve problems. Is compassion a motivating factor?

Social Science:
◊ Find a story about a politician in a recent newspaper and determine if he/she is behaving in a compassionate manner. Have a class debate or discussion. Identify the number of students who would vote for that candidate based on the story.
◊ Discuss the Habitat for Humanity program as it shows a community effort to show compassion and meet needs. Is it our responsibility as citizens to do so? Emphasize how students can get involved.

Drama:
◊ Role Play: Choose a real person with a handicap or someone from literature and provide an opportunity for students to “walk a mile in their shoes” and learn compassion for those who are different.
◊ Prepare a skit for the morning announcements about being compassionate.

Art:
◊ Ask students to draw a picture of themselves showing compassion to someone in need.
◊ In small groups direct students to create a comic strip character and brainstorm a list of compassionate acts the character could do. Allow the students to choose from the list then draw a comic strip showing the new character being compassionate. Select the best ones to publish in the school newspaper.
Suggested Reading List

K-2
Koki’s Kitten by Patterson. A real life story of a gorilla who cares for a kitten and speaks sign language.
Frog and Toad are Friends by Lobel. Two special friends go to great lengths to show they care.
It’s Mine by Lionni. Three selfish frogs learn the value of kindness from a toad who helps them.

3-5
The Aunt and the Elephant by Peet. A small character helps a bigger one solve a problem.
The Giving Tree by Silverstein. A story about the selfless act of giving and giving.
Sachiko Means Happiness by Sakai. A girl deals with loving her grandmother with Alzheimer’s disease.
Badger’s Parting Gifts by Varley. The woodland animals share memories when one of their friends dies.

6-8
After the Rain by Mazer. A fifteen year old learns to love and appreciate her dying grandfather.
Almost a Hero by Neufeld. A boy balances responsibility with good deeds in a service-learning project.
The Watson's Go To Birmingham by Curtis. An African –American family takes a poignant trip together.
What About Me? by Rodowsky. A teenager has mixed feelings towards her brother with Downs Syndrome.

9-12
During Revolutionary War, Sarah by Scott O’Dell. An Indian couple and a young Quaker befriend Sarah Bishop.
The Gift of the Magi by O’Henry. A husband and wife give up their most valued possessions to purchase Christmas gifts.

Sunshine State Standards

Pre K-2 grade
HE.A.1.1 Students comprehend concepts related to health promotion & prevention.
HE.B.1.1 Students know health-enhancing behaviors & how to reduce health risks.
HE.B.3.1 Students know communication skills that enhance health.

Grades 3-5
HE.A.1.2 Students comprehend concepts related to health promotion & prevention.
HE.B.1.2 Students know health-enhancing behaviors and how to reduce health risks.
HE.B.3.2 Students know how to use effective interpersonal communication skills that enhance health.

Grades 6-8
HE.A.1.3 Students comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention.
HE.B.1.3 Students know health-enhancing behaviors and how to reduce health risks.
HE.B.3.3 Students know how to use effective interpersonal communication skills that enhance health.

Grades 9-12
HE.A.1.4 Students comprehend concepts related to health promotion & disease prevention.
HE.B.1.4 Students know health-enhancing behaviors and how to reduce health risks.
HE.B.3.4 Students know how to use effective interpersonal communication skills that enhance health.
Why develop compassion?

There are three kinds of people in the world; those that make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened!

◊ Compassion prevents school violence
◊ Compassion makes us successful at relationships
◊ Compassionate people experience more happiness
◊ Compassion gives people a sense of fulfillment and changes people’s lives

How to develop compassion:

◊ Get motivated; make the effort to change your habits
◊ Overcome your hindrances
◊ Demolish stereotypes
◊ Change your thinking
◊ Believe the best—look for the good in people and reasons for their behavior
◊ Think about the feelings of others

Can we be kind and compassionate to our children and still be strong disciplinarians?

Yes, we can if we:

◊ provide our children with unconditional love. Help them understand that we will always love and support their efforts although we may not agree with them, approve of what they are doing, or what they have done.
◊ bring out the best in our child by focusing on what they could have done differently rather than what they did wrong. Provide firm consequences for bad choices but with a loving attitude.
◊ always discuss the “why” something should be done differently rather than just “what” they should have done.
◊ make sure that they feel appreciated and supported at home so that they do not need to look for support from undesirable sources.
◊ provide firm and certain consequences without anger.
◊ make sure the responsibility for correcting the problem or improving the behavior falls only on the child.
◊ emphasize positive things they did right rather than emphasizing only what they did wrong.
◊ encourage and expect the best from them. Studies show that this is the best predictor of success.
◊ teach by example. Make a special effort to make sure they hear us use the polite terms of “please,” “thank you,” “excuse me,” and see you put others first or help in the community.
◊ let them see us smile so they know they are loved and appreciated.
◊ watch TV with them and discuss the ethics of what we see together. It is a great opportunity to point out alternative ways the characters could act or solve a problem.
◊ clearly establish the core values and beliefs of our family for the treatment of others.
◊ work together as a family in service projects (volunteer to serve meals at a homeless shelter, etc.).
◊ encourage forgiveness when other family members make bad choices.

When showing compassion to others starts with our immediate family it can become a way of life.
The Secret of Happiness

There is a wonderful fable about a young orphan girl who had no family and no one to love her. One day, feeling exceptionally sad and lonely, she was walking through a meadow when she noticed a small butterfly caught unmercifully in a thornbush. The more the butterfly struggled to free itself, the deeper the thorns cut into its fragile body. The young orphan girl carefully released the butterfly from its captivity. Instead of flying away, the little butterfly changed into a beautiful fairy. The young orphan rubbed her eyes in disbelief.

“For your wonderful kindness,” the good fairy said to the girl, “I will grant you any wish you would like.”

The little girl thought for a moment and then replied, “I want to be happy!”

The fairy said, “Very well,” and leaned toward her and whispered in her ear. Then the good fairy vanished.

As the little girl grew up there was no one in the land as happy as she. Everyone asked her the secret of her happiness. She would only smile and answer,

“The secret of my happiness is that I listened to a good fairy when I was a little girl.”

When she was very old and on her deathbed, the neighbors all rallied around her, afraid that her fabulous secret of happiness would die with her.

“Tell us, please,” they begged. “Tell us what the good fairy said.”

The lovely old woman simply smiled and said, “She told me that everyone, no matter how secure they seemed, no matter how old or young, how rich or poor, had need of me.”

Source: The Speaker’s Sourcebook

What is Success?

To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children.

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends.

To appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better.

Whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, this is to have succeeded.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson
Week 1

“It is smart to pick your friends but not to pieces.”
~ Anonymous

“A friend in need is a friend indeed.”
~ Anonymous

“People are lonely because they build walls instead of bridges.”
~ Anonymous

“Kindness is a language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”
~ Mark Twain

“If you do not have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all.”
~ Anonymous

Week 2

“I can live two months on one good compliment.”
~ Mark Twain

“A drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall (vinegar).”
~ Abraham Lincoln

“There are no unimportant jobs, no unimportant people, no unimportant acts of kindness.”
~ Anonymous

“Kindness gives birth to kindness.”
~ Sophocles

“Be nice to people on your way up because you’ll meet them on your way down.”
~ Wilson Mizner

Week 3

“The more you give love and friendship away the more you get in return.”
~ Anonymous

“A definition of a successful life must include serving others.”
~ George Bush

“There is no better exercise for strengthening than reaching down and lifting people up.”
~ Anonymous

“The course of human history is determined, not by what happens in the skies, but by what takes place in our hearts.”
~ Sir Arthur Keith

“Speak kind words and you will hear kind echoes.”
~ Bahn

Week 4

“Never, if possible, lie down at night without being able to say: ‘I have made one human being, at least, a little wiser, a little happier, or a little better this day.’”
~ Charles Kingsley

“There is no greater loan than a sympathetic ear.”
~ Frank Tyger

“Make no judgments where you have no compassion.”
~ Anne McCaffrey

“Wisdom, compassion and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men.”
~ Confucius

“Compassion is a two way street.”
~ Frank Capri

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**Teacher’s Corner**

Creating a Loving and Caring Classroom

“If you would be loved, love and be lovable.” Benjamin Franklin

Students are not always lovable. Through years of teasing and discouragement many have learned to put up a guard of protection around themselves that make it difficult to penetrate. This makes it even more important for teachers to communicate their compassion clearly, especially to adolescents. When students feel teachers do not care, it is really difficult for them to care. Their academic scores suffer and they are more likely to have problem behaviors. When they feel cared about at school, however, they feel supported and usually make a bigger effort to learn and grow. Below are some ways that you can show compassion to your students.

◊ Give formal written feedback to students and parents to recognize and show appreciation for social and emotional development

◊ Be sensitive to signs of difficulty in student’s lives and refer them to appropriate support staff before a crisis arises

◊ Motivate parents to be involved in the daily student/teacher dialogue and provide materials to help them support their student’s academic goals

◊ Recognize acts of compassion by individual students and school groups

◊ Advocate for professional development focused on improving students’ social/ emotional development
The Circus
(FCAT Reading—Read the story and answer the questions below.)

Once when I was a teenager, my father and I were standing in line to buy tickets for the circus. Finally, there was only one family between us and the ticket counter. This family made a big impression on me. There were eight children, all probably under the age of twelve. You could tell that they didn't have a lot of money. Their clothes were not expensive, but they were clean. The children were well behaved, all of them standing in line, two-by-two behind their parents, holding hands. They were excitedly jabbering about the clowns, elephants and other acts they would see that night. One could sense they had never been to the circus before. It promised to be a highlight of their young lives.

The father and mother were at the head of the pack standing proud as could be. The mother was holding her husband's hand, looking up at him as if to say, "You're my knight in shining armor." He was smiling and basking in pride, looking at her as if to reply, "You got that right."

The ticket lady quoted the price.

The man's wife let go of his hand, and her head dropped. The father leaned a little closer and asked, "How much did you say?"

The ticket lady again quoted the price.

The man didn't have enough money.

How was he supposed to turn and tell his eight kids that he didn't have enough money to take them to the circus?

Seeing what was going on, my dad put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a $20 bill and dropped it on the ground. (We were not wealthy in any sense of the word.) My father reached down, picked up the bill, tapped the man on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me, sir, this fell out of your pocket."

The man certainly knew what was going on. He wasn't begging for a handout but certainly appreciated the help in a desperate, heartbreaking, embarrassing situation. He looked straight into my dad's eyes, took my dad's hand in both of his, squeezed tightly onto the $20 bill, and with his lip quivering and a tear streaming down his cheek, he replied, "Thank you, thank you sir. This really means a lot to me and my family."

My father and I went back to our car and drove home. We didn't go to the circus that night, but we didn't go without.

Source: Dan Clark from A Second Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen.

Answer the following questions:

1. In the story above, in what ways did the father of the writer show compassion? Use specific details from the story to support your answer.

2. In the last sentence of the story, the author wrote, "We didn't go to the circus that night, but we didn't go without." What point do you think he was making to the reader with that statement? Use details and information from the story to support your answer.

3. What can you infer about the values of the author from reading this personal narrative? Use details and information from the passage to support your conclusions.