



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER

Wellness Wednesday

What is empathy and does it impact our overall health and wellbeing? Empathy involves the ability to understand and share the emotions of another or to understand someone else's perspective on a situation. Empathy for others is a critical social-emotional skill related to building [social connections and regulating our emotions](#). In the medical field, empathetic interactions with a provider are even linked to fewer medical errors and [shorter, less severe illnesses](#).

Self-compassion, or empathy for yourself, is also increasingly recognized as an important skill linked to better [mental](#) and [physical health](#), as well as stronger social relationships. Practicing empathy can also help us handle stress. Studies show that when we can regulate our emotions, we are better able to relate to others in positive ways.

Accepting Mistakes & Building Empathy

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of empathy, research tells us that over the last 40 years, people have become [more demanding of both themselves and others](#) and less willing to accept mistakes. Whether we're trying to [excel at work](#) or manage the demands of [parenting in a pandemic](#), holding ourselves and others to standards that are too high might actually be getting in the way. Practicing empathy can help prompt us into actions that benefit us, our families, and our communities. So, [how can we build empathy](#) for ourselves and others?

- **Model making mistakes;** talk with your family about your own mistakes in a way that normalizes missteps and shows self-compassion.
- **Make it fun;** with children, try pausing when watching a show or reading a book to ask kids what the characters are thinking or feeling. Or, ask them to guess what pets are thinking or feeling.
- **Be intentional about who you're hearing from;** intentionally follow people on social media who have different backgrounds or experiences.
- **Ask Questions;** strike up a conversation with someone you normally wouldn't talk to or ask someone in your family to tell you more about an experience that was meaningful in their life.
- **Try out something totally different;** spend time in a new neighborhood or consider attending an event you normally wouldn't (like going to religious services for a faith that is not yours).
- **Take action;** volunteer with a community organization, work in a community garden (weather permitting!), or find other ways to engage with people outside your immediate circle.

Dimensions of Wellness Related to Gratitude Walks

- Emotional
- Social
- Spiritual
- Intellectual
- Environmental

