



Compassionate Parenting

By Robin Gregg, School Counselor, AES/Pierce School

Parenting isn't easy for anyone, including adults who are survivors of trauma. To be truly available to our children and to give them what they need we need to remember that their issues are about them, not us. We need to make sure we can separate our own needs and our own emotional responses (that come from our own experiences and history) from our children's experiences. Our children are not us, they have different parents, lives, experiences. One way to think about this is to think about "the double struggle"--- a phrase that's included in some positive behavior training. The first struggle is the child's struggle or challenges. The other struggle is the struggle to control our own emotions and reactions, and to aware of our own "triggers." As parents, we often experience that "double struggle," striving to manage our own emotions while responding to our children's emotions.

To be a compassionate parent means cultivating and using empathy—noticing and observing what our children are feeling, putting ourselves in their shoes, so to speak, while also making sure that we are not inadvertently "projecting" our feelings or needs on them.

One writer, Svava Brooks, addresses this issue, noting that there are many benefits to learning how to feel your emotions. For one thing, Brooks writes in a blog post, being aware of our own emotions helps us to become a more compassionate, empathetic parent. The following suggestions are based on and adapted from Svava Brooks' suggestions:

- Sit with your children and allow them to feel their emotions and express them. Don't react defensively, don't flinch or express horror or dismay or disbelief.
- Allow yourself to feel your children's painful emotions, keeping in mind that their emotions are not your emotions. The focus is on the child(ren), not on yourself/ves.
- Tell your children you feel their pain, you hear them, and you see them. Use paraphrasing or reflecting back: "You are feeling really sad right now."
- Tell your children you know the situation (past or recent) hurt or frustrated them, and you're sorry.
- Tell your children you'll never shame them and you will always support them for expressing their feelings.
- Tell your children it's okay to express painful feelings about their past or to express anger, frustration, disappointment and other strong feelings about recent experiences.

Feeling self-compassion is important, too! It's important to make sure that we have supports in place for our own feelings and struggles so that we don't mistakenly assume that our children's feelings and struggles are the same as ours and so we have the emotional resources to engage in truly compassionate parenting.

For the original article:

<http://www.acesconnection.com/blog/how-to-become-a-compassionate-parent>