



## How can I help my child? ... Building Empathy Skills & Confidence

### PRACTICE EMPATHY

Empathy is “the ability to sense other’s emotions.” As parents, we are in a prime position to do this—we know our children best and we can almost feel the same feelings as our children. This demonstrates our powerful connection to our children. An example might be, when a child loses a sports game we might say, “that was a tough loss, it is disappointing.” Some ways to effectively communicate empathy are:

- Name the feeling. What do you see in your child?
- Consider a time that you might have felt that feeling before. Not necessarily to share with the child but rather to understand the child’s perspective. For example, if you didn’t get a job that you had hoped for you know what disappointment feels like.
- Offer a response to your child that shows you understand where they are coming from. For instance, “it doesn’t feel good to lose,” or “it really stinks to lose!”
- While we want to comfort our children, in exercising empathy the last thing we want to do is offer solutions! It is okay that kids “feel the feels.” Avoid saying something like, “you have another game coming up. You can try to win that one.” Allow them the time to sit with their feelings. Sometimes just listening is better than listing ways to solve a problem.

When we listen fully to children, we hear children’s words, notice their tone of voice, observe their actions and behavior, watch for facial expressions and body language. If we are that deliberate in paying close attention to these things, we will be able to empathize.

*“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They’re either speaking or preparing to speak.” Stephen Covey*

### LET ME TRY

When we allow for opportunities where children can “try” or do for themselves, whether they succeed or not, they learn from this experience, developing skills such as:

- What it feels like to experience frustration
- How to problem solve
- Develop different ways to cope
- Feel a sense of pride
- Strengthen self-esteem
- Understand when help may be needed
- Learn how to ask for help
- Know how to set goals

One of the beauties of Primary Project is that in the playroom, child associates allow for children to “try.” It is through this concept that children begin to integrate the skills listed above. As parents, we have seen this too. Think about how frustrating it can be at times to patiently stand by while your child independently ties their shoes. However, when you allow for the time to complete this task all on their own, they experience success and accomplishment. “I did it all by myself!”

*“I think I can. I think I can. I think I can. I know I can.”  
Little Engine That Could*