



Family Matters

Making Family Life Easier

The Power of Empathy

We cannot control children. The best we can do is positively influence them, and to be able to do that, we must be trusted, respected, and connected. So, the question then is, how do I gain trust, respect, and a connected relationship? The answer is Empathy.

Empathy is the foundation of all positive and respectful relationships and can be defined as **the ability to put** yourself in your child's shoes and respond accordingly.

It involves being in the moment with your child and asking yourself "What might my child or teenager be thinking or feeling right now?" or "What would this look like from their point of view?" It is about tuning into your child and sensing what it is they might need in that moment.

Empathising involves:

- Paying attention and listening
- Acknowledging, accepting and respecting their feelings & points of view (this does not mean agreeing with them, just accepting them)
- Drawing on our own emotional experiences to help us understand (how might I feel if this was happening to me and I was the same age as they are)
- Capturing the essence of what is happening for them and reflecting it back to them (using words or phrases that show we understand what they are experiencing) e.g.

A young person hasn't done as well as she had hoped in a test, using empathy the conversation would go something like this:

'I got a D on my test'

'You're disappointed you got a D'

'Well I know you want me to do better'

'You think I would like you to get better marks? And maybe you'd like to decide for yourself what marks you get'

'Well I'd like better than a D'

And on the conversations goes....

Using empathy as a guiding attitude in all our interactions with our children is beneficial; however, it is particularly useful during times of conflict and when children are dealing with strong emotions. This is especially important during the teenage years, a time when teenagers frequently complain that we don't listen to them or understand. When we empathise with a young person they feel heard, understood and validated and as a result more connected to us. This in turn leads to increased cooperation and openness to taking our advice and support, something which they need during these years.