

EMPATHY IN GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY

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A simple glance at the news headlines shows a world that is scary, angry and negative. Scrolling through social media, there are similar messages. Reading all of this leaves me feeling bitter and pessimistic. I wonder how my kids feel, with fewer life experiences, they have a more innocent perspectives and are naive global topics. In times like this, I want to build a wall around my home to keep the pain away, keep my children safely tucked under my wing like a mother hen protecting her chicks. While we can't stop the presence of anger, hatred and judgment on the news, in music, on television, social media, even in our communities, we can make a conscious decision to limit the time and energy we give to it. In turn, we can decide to spread kindness and lift each other up instead.

Pink Shirt Day is a movement celebrated across the globe to spread kindness and symbolize intolerance to bullying. At Northern Gateway Public Schools, we work to create an environment of tolerance, kindness and acceptance all year, and we set aside February 27, 2020 to wear **PINK**.

Kind (adjective) 1. *A good or benevolent nature or disposition;* 2. *Indulgent, considerate or helpful; humane.*

Empathy (noun) 1. *The psychological identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.*

Like many attributes, *kindness* and *empathy* are traits first learned at home. How to ensure you are teaching kindness? If a child is treated as though they are kind and empathetic, they will live up to those expectations...and the opposite is also true.

- Let your children catch you being considerate to those around you, such as the elderly neighbor, the server at the restaurant, the secretary at school, the custodian at the mall.
- Be respectful to your child, look at them when they are speaking to you. Listen to what they are saying and answer graciously.
- Point out attributes in others that represent kindness and empathy such as a welcoming smile, a contagious laugh and a thoughtful act.
- Demonstrate to your child how to give back to others through actions like donating outgrown toys or clothes, visiting someone in the hospital or nursing home, or bringing a meal to a family going through a difficult time.

"It is not our job to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. It is our job to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless."

~ L.R. Knost

We are not helpless amidst the negative news around us. We **can** make a difference in our homes, schools and communities. How? By **being** the change: focus on the good, look for the helpers, be the heroes, recognize the beauty and gentleness, model humanity.

Each time you open your arms, pick your battles, breathe through the meltdowns, spot the silver lining, carry the weight though it feels too heavy to be carried: You are being the change - You are making a difference.

Leave your child with a kind word before they go to school and ask them to look for the beauty today. After school, ask them what they saw that was beautiful, what made them laugh, and how they made someone smile. Start and end each day with words of gratitude.

Not every day is a good day, but there is always something good in every day. Seek it out like a treasure in the sand.

I recently read this phrase that resonated with me (author unknown):

As the world fights to figure everything out, I'll be holding doors for strangers, letting people cut in front of me in traffic, saying good morning, keeping babies entertained in grocery store lines, stopping to talk to someone who is lonely, being patient with sales clerks, smiling at a passerby.

WHY?

*Because I will not stand idly by and live in a world where love is invisible.
Join me in showing kindness, understanding, and judging less.*

And Remember to Wear Pink on February 27!

This article was submitted by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She advocates for students and parents, providing a link to other supports within the community. Tammy has been a social worker for over 20 years and is a mother of 4 teenagers.