



Transcript for the video:

Helping Children Develop Empathy and a Sense of Justice

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Vivian Paley (over music): We've got to spend time, day by day, hour by hour, in the first experiences of school, with helping children learn how to act nice to each other, valuing kind behavior above all other kinds of behavior.

Helping Children Develop Empathy and a Sense of Justice

With Vivian Gussin Paley, Early Childhood Expert

Vivian Paley: The teacher sets the example, who is able to say, "I'm sorry, boys and girls. What was the situation there that had us so angry, and let's see if we can figure out a better way of doing it."

Teacher: So why don't you say, "Can I please use them when you're finished?"

Child: Can I please use them when you're finished?

Teacher: Okay, good.

Vivian Paley: There's just been an altercation in which someone has been made to cry miserably. But you can't put the child in a timeout chair. All you're demonstrating then is meanness. All you're demonstrating then is isolation, that the only way to handle our relationships with each other is to isolate someone, to put him outside the social sphere. But that's not what you want to do.

Telling a Story to Help Children Empathize

Vivian Paley: You just say, "Oh, that reminds me. When my brother was little, the children used to tease him so much because he couldn't climb the slide, and he would cry and cry. I'll be happy to know that our children wouldn't have made my brother unhappy." Something like that, and everybody recognizes, even two- and three-year-olds, "Yes, I want to be the child who helps."

Child: Cece, how you got these off?

Child 2: I'll show you. You get it like this.

Vivian Paley: Collect the stories, and retell them every day. “That reminds me of when Johnny saw that no one was letting Julia play in the sand, and he went and took her hand and said, “Here, you can play over here.” Little things like that [are] worth—well, priceless. We must tell those stories from preschool on, so that when children get to third grade, to second grade, and there’s no teacher around, they may say, “That’s wrong. You can’t do that; you’re making him cry.” Or, “That’s wrong; you’re making me cry.”

[MUSIC]

Vivian Paley: Nothing is more important any more than using all of the natural narrative skills we have to begin our study of social justice, kindness, and respect for each other, as soon as children come together in social groups.