

EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to participate in the feelings or ideas of someone else. It can be difficult to develop, because it's so much easier to demand that we get our own way. If people will first empathize with us, then maybe we'll listen to someone else in the family! But empathy requires us to be willing to give the rest of the family as much room for mistakes as we give ourselves. Before reacting to another person's actions or words, we can project ourselves into that person's situation in order to understand and empathize.

Children can tell when Mom or Dad is empathetic. When Dad shows he cares about his son's feelings, his son will conclude that he, too, should be concerned about his dad's feelings. Even very young children can learn this lesson. There's nothing like the chubby smile of a three-year-old when you've got the flu. "It's okay, Daddy. I love you." Children often have more sensitive natures than their parents, and know their parent's feelings before their parents themselves do.

Empathy. The games in this section will help you increase the love and care you share as a family.

1) THIS IS US

Materials: Clay or paper and crayons.

Method: Empathy requires that family members participate in the feelings and ideas of others. This game offers the opportunity to listen to what others think is important about themselves.

Choose one question for the family to individually answer:

1. What's your greatest achievement?
2. What's your favorite time of year?
3. Choose a single word to describe you.
4. What's your favorite sport?
5. What's your greatest talent?

Ask each family member to think of an answer, without saying it out loud. Then ask everyone to illustrate his or her answer by modeling with the clay or drawing something on paper. Designs, real objects, abstract impressions—anything except words can be put on the paper. Give a time limit of three minutes. Then take turns guessing the answers each family member has illustrated.

2) THE FEELINGS BUCKET

Materials: A bowl or hat, paper, and a pen.

Method: Write (or type) the following list of words on small cards or pieces of paper.

Weariness	Fear	Excitement Love
Frustration	Sympathy	Elation
Surprise	Satisfaction	Disappointment
Anger	Appreciation	Gratitude
Contentment	Happiness	Caution
Sadness	Comfort	Concern
Boredom	Confidence	Pain
Impatience	Hope	Indifference
Embarrassment	Encouragement	

Put all the cards into the bowl or hat. Take turns drawing a card. After each card, the following questions are asked:

1. Has anyone in the family experienced this feeling in the last week? Can you tell us about it?
2. What would you do if you were in the situation again?

Don't force people to describe the situation which created a particular feeling. It may take some time for people to get used to talking about their feelings. Be patient. An atmosphere of sharing and support comes from parents who are willing to share their own feelings. If parents can talk about their feelings, most children will feel comfortable doing so, too.

3) YOUR TURN

Materials: None.

Method: Empathy is encouraged by listening to how others approach their problems. **YOUR TURN** gives you a chance to solve someone else's problems. But it also offers the chance to understand how others in the family approach their own problems.

Read one of the following dilemmas. Give each person five minutes to write out a possible solution to the problem. Then take turns reading the solutions.

Discuss them. Imagine how you'd solve the problem if it occurred in your family.

Can you reach a consensus?

1. Imagine you're the father of a family. You love the game of Squash, and play it as often as you can. You've been planning to play in a tournament this evening, but your neighbor comes over to the house in real despair. He's got a personal problem and says it's been bothering him for a month. Just then the phone rings. Your new boss says he'll stop by in ten minutes to pick you up for the tournament.

(What can you do? What might happen?)

2. Imagine you're a primary school student. Your friends have been giving you a bad time because you always get good marks. You're even accused of being the teacher's pet. Then the teacher asks you privately if you'd help some of your friends with their homework.

(What are some possible things you might do?)

3. The family has been trying to decide where to spend their two-week holiday. The kids want to fly to California, USA and go to Disneyland. But the parents want a quiet holiday at a nearby campsite. Money is no problem.

(Pretend you're the oldest child, fourteen years old. What might you do?)

4. You are a parent. Your fifteen-year-old daughter is out with a group of friends, all about the same age. She promised to be in at 22:30. You can't go to sleep. At 2:00 a.m. you hear her walk in.

(What do you do?)

4) ROLL IT

Materials: A die.

Method: This game gives each family member an equal opportunity to express attitudes and feelings. Empathy happens when others listen and participate in these feelings. Take turns rolling the die. The number determines which of the following six sentences must be used. Whoever rolls the die must complete the sentence, which can be directed to any other family member.

For example, if Mother rolls a "2," she may say, "I wish you'd notice me when ..." to any other family member she chooses.

1. I love you because ...
2. I wish you'd notice me when ...
3. I've been wanting to tell you...
4. I want you to help me...
5. I wish you wouldn't...
6. I want to ask you ...

Allow the person being addressed to respond. Let the two people discuss the question for a few moments, if they wish. End the game at a predetermined time. Fifteen to thirty minutes is usually enough time for a game of **ROLL IT**.

5) INTRODUCTIONS

Materials: None.

Method: Giving compliments to other family members is sometimes difficult. This game makes compliments fun. Choose one person to be "introduced." Everyone else thinks of three positive things about the person, and "introduces" him or her to an imaginary audience.

Go around the circle until everyone has made an introduction. Then choose a second person to be introduced. You might begin with the youngest and move to the oldest, or move around the circle clockwise. Continue the process until everyone has been introduced.

6) DREAM DAY

Materials: Modeling clay or playdough.

Method: How would your family *really* like to spend a day off? **DREAM DAY** gives you a chance to find out.

Ask each family member to imagine what they'd like to do for a "perfect day." Allow nothing to stifle the imagination. Pretend that money and distance are no problem.

Then ask family members to represent that day by creating something with the modeling clay. They can make an abstract representation of the feelings of the day, or an object needed for the day, or a letter of the alphabet that describes the main activity. Announce a three minute time limit. Then ask family members to show their creations. See if the family can guess anything about the day by looking at the clay. Then the person describes the day in some detail. Take turns until everyone has had a chance to describe the "perfect day." The experience may lead to a discussion of how to spend the next family vacation.

7) WORD STORIES

Materials: None.

Method: Children understand their parents better when they know something about their parents' own background. Storytelling is one way to share those experiences.

Children take turns giving a word to a parent. Let them dream up any word they can. Then the parent has to tell a story from their childhood that uses that word.

8) INSIGHT

Materials: Paper and pencils or pens.

Method: The preferences of others are sometimes a surprise to the rest of the family. **INSIGHT** lets you discover what others really like.

Write each person's name on a slip of paper. Put the papers face down in the middle of the table or floor. Ask someone to draw a name from the pile. The person who draws must then guess how the person whose name was drawn would answer the following questions.

1. If you were given R50,000 to spend in one of the following categories, which would you choose: art, books, a world cruise, furs and clothes, cars, charity?
2. If you were isolated in a snowstorm, what one book would you like to read?
3. If you could be an animal, which one would you choose? Why?
4. What are two of your favorite foods?
5. What man do you admire most in the world?
6. What woman do you admire most in the world?
7. If you had an unexpected day off from work or school, what would you like to do?

Add more questions if you'd like to. You can also keep score, if you wish, to see who has the most "in sight" into the rest of the family. Each correct guess counts as one point. If this approach is taken, ask family members to write out their own answers to the questions first, so that the person guessing will know the answers won't change during the game.