Caring Connections
Let's Talk About Empathy

Podcast Transcription

[Podcast Series Intro Video: Music plays in the background. Video lists each of the podcasts in the series with three pictures that correspond to each topic area. Topic areas include You, Nourishment, Routines, Environments, Following the Baby, Movement, Music and Empathy]

[Slide with photograph of Amanda Perez reading: "Welcome! Amanda Perez, Senior Writer/Training Specialist, Early Head Start National Resource Center."]

Amanda Perez: "Hi! And welcome to the eighth podcast in the Early Head Start Caring Connections series. My name is Amanda Perez, and I am a Senior Writer and Training Specialist with the Early Head Start National Resource Center. We hope that this podcast is useful to you – and that you share it with others who might find it helpful! Don't forget to take a look at the information sheet that accompanies each podcast. It will direct you to resources that we refer to and Head Start Program Performance Standards that are relevant to the information covered."

[A young infant responds to a massage from her caregiver.]

Amanda Perez: "In this series of podcasts, we have talked about important elements in caring for young children, including the importance of responsive relationships to children's healthy development. In this podcast, we will continue to think about those relationships, this time concentrating on how the relationships you build with young children help them build empathy with others."

[A toddler does a puzzle while sitting in his teacher's lap.]

Amanda Perez: "Particularly, we'll focus on toddlers, children from 16 months to 3 years old, as they learn about the impact of their actions on others and how to care for the people around them. But let's start at the beginning: what is empathy, and why is it so important?"

[Slide with the definition of empathy.]

Amanda Perez: [Audio Clip 3] Valerie Quann and Carol Anne Wien, teacher educators and researchers, define empathy as "the capacity to observe the feelings of another and to respond with care and concern for that other. We want that for young children, right?"

[A mobile infant plays blocks with her mother and home visitor on a home visit.]

Amanda Perez: "Being able to imagine another person's thoughts, feelings and needs – and being prepared to respond – is a core skill for living in families and communities, for negotiating friendships and succeeding in school. Did you know that even the smallest children show beginning signs of empathy?"

[Photos of diverse newborn babies crying.]

Amanda Perez: "In a quiet hospital nursery, the cries of one newborn often lead other newborns to cry. While we don't fully understand the reasons for their response – are babies startled? Are they sad? - one exciting idea is that the human brain is wired for empathy, through brain cells called mirror neurons. Dan Siegel, a psychiatrist and brain researcher, talked briefly about mirror neurons in the opening session for the 2007 Birth To Three Institute. Let's listen in!"

[Slide with photograph of Dan Siegel.]

Dan Siegel: "Because these mirror neurons, what they do, they take the feeling of someone else, inside of someone else, and they then mirror it in ourselves automatically. This is not like an intellectual

exercise. It makes your brain perceive the emotional experience of someone else and then, through this thing called the insula, it drives the information down to the limbic areas. So you feel the feelings and into your body."

Amanda Perez: "Wow! Did you hear that?"

[Computer generated image of neurons firing.]

Amanda Perez: "So when we are observing others, mirror neurons in our brains fire, connecting to the limbic part of the brain, our emotional core, so that we feel what the people we are observing feel. That might sound far-fetched, but watch this inchworm."

[An inchworms crawls across a woman's arm.]

Amanda Perez: "Do you feel the tingle of it on your own arm? Those are mirror neurons at work, the beginning of empathy."

[A home visitor plays "open and close them" with a young infant.]

Amanda Perez: **"**But, as Dr. Siegel tells us, having mirror neurons is not enough. Our experiences also shape our brains, our abilities to use those neurons to develop meaningful responses to the feelings of others. So, while those babies in the nursery may feel startled or sad, they are still developing the ability to, as Quann and Wien put it, respond with care and concern. Like all learning, learning empathy is developmental."

[A caregiver rocks and burps a young infant.]

Amanda Perez: "So where do we begin? Through modeling. The great news is that, just through responsive care, parents and teachers nurture empathy in young children."

[A father does finger play with his toddler on a home visit, while his mother looks on.]

Amanda Perez: "Each time a young child feels your empathy, he learns more about what's helpful and what is not. He's learning empathy from you."

[Slide with photograph of Magda Gerber, Founding Director, Resources for Infant Educarers (RIE).]

Amanda Perez: "Magda Gerber, a pioneer in our understanding of infant and toddler development, really emphasizes this point in *On Their Own With Our Help,* a DVD from Resources for Infant Educarers or RIE. In the following clip, Magda describes her approach to intervening when young children may get rough with one another."

[Slide: **"**On Their Own With Our Help © 1987 Resources for Infant Educarers (RIE)".]

[Mobile infant brushes another mobile infant's hair with a toy.]

Magda Gerber: "Oh, gently Jason. Very gently."

[Magda Gerber rubs the head and backs of the infants gently.]

[Magda Gerber demonstrates teaching empathy through gentleness.]

Magda Gerber: "Nice, easy. We teach gentleness by being gentle. And we stroke both children. If adults are rough with a child who hits and only comfort the victim in a sense they are rewarding the child for being a victim. And the aggressive child does not experience or learn gentleness."

[A caregiver supports a toddler and a mobile infant as they put away blocks.]

Amanda Perez: So, developmentally, Magda recognizes that the term “gentle” doesn’t mean much to these mobile infants. She uses her words, her soft voice, her gentle touch, and her responsive care to calm, comfort and teach both children. You teach gentleness, she says, by being gentle. And you teach empathy by being empathic.

[A toddler watches himself in the mirror as he brushes his teeth.]

Amanda Perez: **“**That kind of teaching is important all through childhood, but let’s think about the toddler for a second. How about this toddler? He’s building a sense of identity. He’s wondering about the little guy in the mirror. Who is he? What can he do? And here’s an important question as we are thinking about empathy: how does he feel? Another key piece of nurturing empathy is teaching children to identify their own feelings and name them. Strong emotions can be powerful for young children and sometimes confusing. Parents and caregivers can help.”

[A toddler cries and she transitions from dad to caregiver.]

[Slide with photograph of Sue Bland, Teacher, SETA Northview Head Start.]

Amanda Perez: “Let’s watch Sure Bland an Early Head Start teacher support two toddlers as they clean up after an activity.”

[A toddler walks around with string on a spoon.]

Narrator: “After a messy _____ activity, teacher Sue Bland uses a conflict between Emily and Enrique and an opportunity to teach language.

[Walks with three toddlers who are all holding onto a broom.]

Sue Bland: “We were sweeping the floor cleaning up the _____. The children, the two girls they are closer to three and the little boy, he’s a little over two, so there’s an age difference. They all wanted to share. They all wanted to do it.

[Three toddler attempt to use the same broom to sweep.]

Sue Bland: “There came a point where Emily did not want Enrique’s help anymore. She hit him.”

[Toddler girl hits a toddler boy.]

Sue Bland: “Emily, come here please. Are we supposed to hit, are we supposed to hit?”

[Toddler girl shakes her head up and down in an affirmative manor.]

Sue Bland: “What we want to see is the children using their words instead if hitting each other to stop the action.”

[Sue Bland intervenes when a toddler hits a classmate, supporting them in expressing their feelings through language.]

Sue Bland: “Can you find another part?”

Emily: “Another part.”

Sue Bland: “Another part?” [Shakes her head in the affirmative.] “Cause that hurt Enrique when you hit him.”

Emily: “Get another part.”

Sue Bland: “Enrique tell her.”

Enrique: “Stop!” [Holds his hand up in front of him.]

Sue Bland: “Stop! You’re Right!”

Enrique: “You’re right” [Swats at Emily.]

Sue Bland: “Say that hurt.”

Enrique: “That hurt.” [Swats at Emily’s chest.]

Emily: “That hurt!”

Sue Bland: “We don’t want to put your hands on him.” [Points from Emily to Enrique.] “That hurts when you put your hands on my friends.”

[Enrique attempts to hit Emily and Sue places her hand between them.]

Enrique: “I don’t like it!”

Sue Bland: “You’re right! You don’t like it. You tell her.” {Sue looks from Enrique to Emily.] “Emily, did you hear his words?”

Emily: “I didn’t like that!”

Sue Bland: “She didn’t like it that you put your hands on her.”

Amanda Perez: **“**Did you notice that Sue worked with the children to talk about what they felt? How interesting that they both said, “I don’t like that!”

[Slide of two message bubbles: “I don’t like that!”]

Amanda Perez: **“**Over time, as they develop language, these children will learn to name the strong emotions they feel.”

[Slide of two message bubbles: “Mad!” and “Hurt!”]

Amanda Perez: “And will be better able to understand and respond to them and others.”

[A toddler in his caregiver’s lap.]

Amanda Perez: “We opened this podcast by talking about brain development. Each time you respond to a child’s need, each time you offer a child understanding and words for feelings, you strengthen the neuronal pathways in the brain that allow children to understand another’s feelings and respond. The truth is empathy is key to how you provide responsive care.”

[A toddler plays with a doll.]

Amanda Perez: “This toddler, playing with dolls, knows a lot about care! She’s got a ways to go – it’s a really hard job – but she’s learning so much - about care and empathy too - from the people who care for her. Thanks for all you do.

Slide/Banner for EHS NRC and ECLKC]

Amanda Perez: **“** And Thanks so much for joining us! You can look us up at www.ehsnrc.org or on Head Start’s Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center at eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov for more resources designed to support you in your work. Stay tuned for more podcasts from the Early Head Start National Resource Center in the coming year. In the meantime, this is Amanda Perez at the Early Head Start National Resource Center wishing you all the best – as you respond with empathy – in your work.”

References:

Quann, Valerie, and Wien, Carol Anne. (July, 2006). The Visible Empathy of Infants and Toddlers. Young Children on the Web • http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200607/Quann709BTJ.pdf