

Develop Self-Awareness



Self-awareness is a vital skill that helps students navigate the challenges of their academic and personal lives. Being aware of emotions, thoughts, behaviors and strengths leads to better decision-making, enhanced overall health and improved academic performance. Luckily, there are countless ways families can help children develop self-awareness right at home.

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Benefits of Self-Awareness

When children are self-aware, they are able to understand themselves in relation to the world around them. Self-awareness also helps children understand how their emotions affect their actions.

Self-awareness strengthens your child's:

- **Ability to empathize with others.**
- **Talking and listening skills.**
- **Critical thinking skills.**
- **Decision-making skills.**
- **Social skills.**
- **Leadership skills.**

Nurture a Growth Mindset

Life is filled with challenges—and students' success depends on how they respond to them. Help your child develop what educators call a growth mindset.

A growth mindset helps kids see themselves as learners—and problems as solvable. Suppose, for example, your child is having trouble finding the answer to a math problem. Some kids would throw up their hands and say, "I'm not good at math"—and quit trying. But other kids would take another view. "This is a challenge and I bet I can figure it out."

Children in the second group have a growth mindset. They believe that even if they can't do something now, they will be able to learn it and get smarter. They're more likely to stick with a problem—and solve it.

You can encourage this mindset by praising effort and inventiveness. "That project was challenging, but you kept trying different things until you finished it!"



Be a Positive Role Model

The most effective way families can teach self-awareness is to model the skill themselves.

Here's how:

- **Talk about your own feelings.** "I am so excited that you like this book as much as I do!" "I'm disappointed that I missed my work deadline."
- **Try to remain calm and optimistic** when you face unpleasant or frustrating situations.
- **Give yourself a timeout** when you are feeling overwhelmed. Say, "I'm feeling upset right now. I am going to leave the room and come back when I am feeling calm."
- **Take time for yourself.** Let your child see you practicing self-care. Spend time reading, exercising, practicing mindfulness or journaling.

Source: CASEL's *Widely Used Framework Identifies Five Core Competencies*, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

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Talk About Feelings

Children who understand their feelings—and know how to talk about them—are less likely to act out and more likely to express themselves in productive ways. To get a conversation going about feelings:

- **Make a list of different feelings:** *happy, sad, angry, disappointed, frustrated, scared, mad*, etc. Have your child draw a picture of each emotion.
- **Ask how your child is feeling** every day. Then, talk about the things that make your child feel that way. Listen carefully and be understanding.
- **Point out your child's feelings.** Say, "You look happy to be outside," or "You seem frustrated that you haven't figured out that math problem yet."
- **Talk about healthy ways to cope** with feelings. If your child is angry, suggest taking a deep breath and counting to ten. If your child is sad, suggest hugging a stuffed toy. If your child is discouraged, suggest trying a different strategy.

Encourage Self-Reflection

Children have many emotional ups and downs. Writing in a journal is a great way to help them express their feelings and process their emotions.

Encourage your child to write or draw in a journal for a few minutes every day. If your child can't think of anything to write about, offer these prompts:

- **What's the most fun thing you did today?**
- **What did you learn that was new?**
- **Did anything make you angry? Sad?**
- **What do you like to do when you feel this way?**

Promote Empathy

Being mindful of how actions affect other people's feelings is vital for building your child's self-awareness. To foster empathy:

- **Discuss how characters** in books or TV shows feel. Ask your child, "How do you think Auggie felt when Julian said that? What makes you think that?"
- **Gently correct your child** when behavior is insensitive or mean. Ask, "How would that make you feel?"
- **Point out consequences of behavior.** "You hurt your sister's feelings and now she doesn't want to finish the game."
- **Praise caring behavior.** "Your letter made Grandma feel so happy."



Manage Emotions

It's natural for kids to overreact when they are faced with challenging situations. However, it's important to help them learn how to control their emotions. Here are some ways to do it:

- **Encourage your child** to pause before reacting to a situation.
- **Remind your child** that people may not have a choice about what they feel, but they always have a choice about how to act on those feelings.
- **Name and acknowledge** your child's feelings. This will help your child think about how to process them.
- **Help your child** brainstorm solutions to problems.
- **Encourage your child** to see mistakes as ways to learn.

Identify Strengths

When kids are given the time and space to explore their strengths and passions, their self-esteem and talents blossom. To help your child uncover strengths:

- **Talk about the skills** or activities your child picks up easily and seems to enjoy. These can be indicators of strengths.
- **Ask what your child likes** about a certain activity or topic. Then, nurture that interest by suggesting related activities and subjects to explore.
- **Ask probing questions** to uncover hidden interests. "What is the last thing you think about at night?" or "What made you think about that idea?"
- **Encourage your child to express** ideas and interests—even if they differ from your own.

Boost Optimism

Optimism allows kids to approach life with hope and confidence. To promote an optimistic outlook:

- **Foster an attitude of gratitude.** Every evening, get your family in the habit of sharing something that they are glad happened that day.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** Teach your child to say things like, "I can do this." "This will get easier with practice."
- **Help your child put things into perspective.** One bad grade is not the end of the world. Mistakes are opportunities to learn and do better next time.
- **Have a positive outlook yourself.** Let your child see you persevering through tough times and trying to make things better.