

PIP O. Gazette

A new magazine about social-emotional development

1 • 2022

Empathy

For

others



„The smallest act of
Kindness is worth more than
the greatest intention.“

— Kahlil Gibran

Editorial

Welcome to the PIP O. Gazette!

We hope that you will enjoy exploring the first issue of the *PIP O. Gazette*, a new magazine focused on children’s healthy development, kindness, and flourishing. Published bi-annually, this magazine showcases child development research, fresh parenting and teaching ideas, and tips from child development experts and caregivers with lived experience.

This issue is focused on empathy for others, and you will find information on the latest research about empathy from Dr. Melis Yavuz-Müren as well as ideas about how to promote empathy with your children from Dr. Ruthie Speidel. High school student Naomi Lawrence shares her thoughts on what empathy looks like to her, while parent Pochuen Kwok writes about how she talks about empathy and kindness with her children. Finally, we are excited to learn about how educator Kay Sharma-Lopes promotes social-emotional development in her kindergarten classroom.

Alongside this magazine, our team is developing community art workshops and has created a new website that will house additional resources for children, youth, parents and caregivers, and educators. The PIP O. team is also looking forward to engaging with the broader community.

We thank you for your interest and support. For more information about the *PIP O. Gazette* and our other initiatives, please visit our **website** or e-mail us at MaltiLab.PIPO@utoronto.ca.

The PIP O. Team

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 • 2022



- 3 Greetings from the Editorial Team
- 6 About PIP O.
Social-emotional development through art in the community
- 8 Fun Facts
Empathy and Kindness
- 10 Bonus Facts
Activity page for kids
- 12 Class Notes
The Platinum Rule!
- 16 Do the Research
Empathy for Others



- 24 Put into Practice
How to Promote Empathy for Others? Useful Tips for Parents and Caregivers
- 32 At Home
Empathy for Others: How I Nurture it in My Child
- 36 Me Today
The Psychological Performance of Empathy in Adolescents
- 40 SEDI Lab
Social-Emotional Development Through Art: Students Discuss Empathy for Others in Pilot Workshop



- 44 Book Club
Learning About Emotions through Books
- 46 Try it Out!
Loving Kindness
- 51 Contributors of PIP O.
Gazette Issue 1 • 2022
- 54 References
- 56 Community Support Resources
- 58 Imprint

WHAT IS PIP O.?

A **pip** is a seed found in the core of a fruit. It represents beginnings and growth.

O stands for *Omega*, the final letter in the Greek alphabet. It signifies infinity, endlessness, and enlightenment.

Every child has the seed of infinite potential! We hope to help encourage the development of kindness for themselves and others, well-being, and personal growth by preparing a supportive environment and nurturing care as a community.

PIP O. is an arts-based knowledge translation project by the SEDI Lab. Through this initiative, we bring like-minded people together to explore and nurture the infinite potentialities in every child. Our goals include sharing research-informed practices and strategies to promote growth, kindness, and well-being for children and adolescents and creating resources to support parents, caregivers, and educators in their commitment to healthy child development and caring.

PIP O. Project

Laboratory for Social-Emotional Development and Intervention
University of Toronto Mississauga
3359 Mississauga Road North, Mississauga, Ontario, L5L 1C6
<http://www.tinamalti.com/pipo/>

We'd love to connect with you! Contact us at MaltiLab.PIPO@utoronto.ca.

HOW IT STARTED...

The Laboratory for Social-Emotional Development and Intervention (SEDI Lab) is a community of researchers and partners at the University of Toronto who explore how we can provide nurturing care to children for healthy development through research, practice, and policy. Our founding director is Dr. Tina Malti, a clinical child psychologist and psychology professor at the University of Toronto.

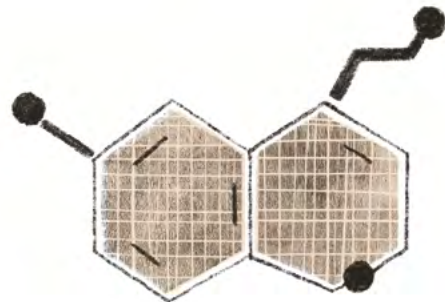
Particularly, we focus on understanding and promoting kindness with the self and others, because growing internal strengths such as kindness helps children realize their full potential and develop and maintain well-being, treat others equitably, and encourages them to feel empowered in society.

While we *study* emotions, art is a way to *express* them. This arts-based research to practice project was born out of our love for collaboration: working side-by-side with artists, educators, families, and local organizations to support our children.

Fun Facts About Kindness And Empathy

Listed below are some quick facts about kindness and empathy.
How many of these facts did you know?

BY BISMA ALI



Doing nice things for others boosts serotonin, the neurotransmitter responsible for feelings of satisfaction and well-being (Proctor, 2017).



Humans begin exhibiting signs of empathy in social interactions during the second and third years of life. However, there is compelling evidence that prosocial behaviours can be displayed at an earlier age. For instance, infants as young as 12 months of age can begin to comfort victims of distress (Lesley University).



Kindness strengthens your heart physically and emotionally! Kindness releases the hormone oxytocin, which lowers blood pressure. As such, oxytocin is known as a 'cardioprotective' hormone (Proctor, 2017).



Toddlers love to mimic emotions (especially of the adults around them). The development of empathy in toddlers largely stems from them observing and imitating the adults who care for them (Poole et al., 2019).



Kindness is biologically wired into humans! Our nervous system is wired in a way that affective touch, (such as the kind or loving touch of someone we feel close to) activates different parts of the brain (the posterior insular cortex and anterior cingulate cortex). This is particularly important for infant development, and suggests that this neurological pathway is necessary for survival (Karlin & Silva).

BONUS FACTS!

A. _____ help veterans, kids with autism, and adults experiencing mental health distress by displaying empathy and comforting them (UWA Psychology, 2019).

B. _____ have best friends! They have mates they share social connections with, and this was found to lower overall stress levels and increase their cognitive skills (Crow, 2020).

Here are some fun facts about kindness and empathy in animals! Feel free to share these with your child and ask them:

> Which one did you find the most interesting? <

The correct answers are on page 57.

C. _____ will try using their tusks to pick up a fellow member that is injured (Mooney, 2013).

D. _____ will selflessly help each other out. They have been observed to voluntarily help each other obtain food rewards and perform "selfless" acts (Crow, 2020).

E. _____ take care of their ill and elderly! For instance, they will run and fetch water for an elder female (Mooney, 2013).



2 Cows



1 Parrots



3 Chimpanzees



4 Service dogs

Write the answers in the chart below!

A	
B	
C	
D	
E	



5 Elephants



The Platinum Rule!

By Kay Sharma-Lopes

Educators are teaching and working in unprecedented circumstances, finding creative ways to support their students' learning, and just as importantly, their mental health and well-being.

Imagine this—you are an educator in a classroom full of 30 students, most starting school for their first time, in a global pandemic. You are also playing many other roles in your life, including parent, partner, child, and friend. You likely have additional stressors such as a second job, illness, etc. Your threat bucket starts to overflow as the requests and needs surmount. You are then encouraged to dive into self-care practice, but there is just no time or energy left. It is likely that many children around the world are feeling the same pressure from wearing masks, changing learning modes, and absorbing the stress caregivers are feeling. In addition, families must also be feeling the crunch as they send their children into the unfamiliar, all while trying to meet the rest of the expectations placed on them.

This act of perspective-taking is a major component of empathy. Empathy is a skill best learned by feeling it so we can reproduce it. It can be practiced, strengthened, and expanded. Empathy is also feeling someone else's pain and/or perspective-taking, a precursor to

compassion, which equates to empathy in action.

I find the platinum rule works best in any environment: "treat others the way they want and need to be treated." To implement this platinum rule, there must be awareness or cognitive empathy, acknowledgment or emotive empathy, and active listening or empathetic action. As an educator, it is important to promote empathy within the classroom by incorporating students' experiences and drawing on them as a strength and support, which translates into an inclusive and equitable learning environment. There are various ways to promote empathy in the classroom, and I will be providing you with what has been the most successful for us.

Firstly, in order to identify how students feel, they must be able to label emotions. We aim to identify feelings by giving them a colour from The Zones of Regulation curriculum. The Zones consist of four coloured zones that are associated with traffic signs, teaching about emotions, self-control, and self-regulation.

Here are some examples to support empathy, including **The Zones of Regulation**, in your learning environment.

- ▶ **Create a sensory-break centre** in your classroom and include strategy cards with fun characters such as Pokémon.
- ▶ **Emotion Show and Tell:** We play various movie clips then ask about the emotion displayed and what strategy could be implemented. For example, in *Finding Nemo*, Nemo is excited, but Dad is nervous. This shows students that emotions are universal. There are also many printable card games connected to the movie *Inside Out*, which also has a great association with emotion recognition.
- ▶ **Checking in** every morning, perhaps during attendance, and set the tone by simply posing the question, "How do you feel today?" or asking students to place a visual emotion card into their attendance pocket or the zone they identify with. This allows you to approach the child separately and does not put the child under pressure.
- ▶ **Role model, role play, and open discussion:** posing scenarios by beginning with, "This happened to me..." and offering solutions. Ask open ended questions to spark conversation. Ask questions such as, "How do you think I felt then?" "Why do you think they did that?" Create a Zones of Regulation problem solving wheel and implement it consistently with your students.
- ▶ Hold a class meeting to develop and reflect on **classroom rules that highlight respect, diversity, and equity**. This can be brainstormed as a classroom family and then posted, preferably with visuals. If possible, ask students to sign off together. Another favourite activity is developing a promise chart and posting art reflections around it.

- ▶ **Reading** is a powerful way for students to see situations from different perspectives. Some great reads include *The Invisible Boy*, *Those Shoes*, *We're All Wonders*, *I Am Love*, *We Are Grateful (Otsaliheliga)*, and *Malala's Magic Pencil*. Students in our classroom explore creativity with their own book-making skills, including emotion books.
- ▶ **The two M's: mindfulness and meditation.** We enjoy belly breathing as well as incorporating various yoga poses. The mindfulness acronym S.T.O.P. has been a big success in our classroom: S-Stop, T-Take three deep belly breaths, O-Observe by tuning into sensations, surroundings, and emotions. Label your emotions. P-Proceed, carry on with more awareness. We have placed several S.T.O.P. signs throughout the learning space and rotate them weekly.

My capacity for empathy has most definitely strengthened over the years. It has allowed me to build social awareness and build connections with others. It has helped amplify other viewpoints and is continuing to be a journey of learning each day. By honing a growth mindset, doors open to new perspectives, barriers, and struggles that many are facing. It is with gratitude that I say that during my struggles, I have had the honour of connecting with and being surrounded by many people who have taught me the true meaning of empathy.

My hope is that we embrace empathy in our lives by taking time, effort, intention, and choice as we navigate through this highly complex road we call life. I am a constant work-in-progress, but wouldn't have it any other way.

With gratitude to all the healers among us.

What is empathy?
How do I make sure
my child grows up
to be a kind person?
Read on to find out
why empathy for
others is an important
part of a child's
development.

BY DR. MELIS YAVUZ-MÜREN



Imagine you are in a playground with your 3-year-old child who is playing with other children. One of the children falls and starts to cry and your child stops playing and starts to cry too. Should you be worried?

In this scenario, the answer is no, because your child is showing early signs of empathy. In time, they will develop empathy for others, allowing the child to display kindness towards others as they grow.



What is Empathy for Others?

Empathy for others occurs when we feel with another. This includes feelings of concern for another, especially when the other is in distress. Empathy for others is different from empathy which occurs when we feel the same emotion as the other. It expands upon this to include the feelings of concern that we feel for others when we recognize and understand their feelings of distress.

These feelings of concern can inspire action on our end. For example, upon seeing another child fall down, your child might feel sad themselves and stop playing. That would be an indicator of **empathy**.

However, if your child sees them fall and tries to comfort them by offering a toy, that is a display of **empathy for others**. As such, empathy for others is vital for promoting compassion and positive social behaviors across development.

Empathy is...	Empathy for others is ...
Feeling the same emotion as another	Feeling concern and sadness upon another’s distress



Empathy for others requires:

- Understanding that the self is different from others and that others can have different mental states, including different emotions
- Understanding the emotions and, to some extent, inner states of others
- Having feelings of concern for others in distress
- The capacity to manage one’s own feelings of personal distress

Empathy for others has two components that develop at different rates: the emotional component and the cognitive component.

Component	Explanation	Example
Emotional Component	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involves feeling the same emotion as another person• Develops in infancy, around 8 to 14 months• Does not require the infant or child to understand the source or cause of another’s emotion(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A child becomes sad when they see another child cry.
Cognitive Component	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involves the ability to understand and evaluate another’s perspective and emotional states• Develops later, from early to middle childhood along with rapid brain development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A 4-year-old may feel sadness and concern when they hear another child in distress and may also recognize that that child is in distress because they just fell down.

Development of Empathy for Others: What to Expect When

While the emotional component of empathy emerges very early in life, it takes more time for the cognitive component to develop.

Empathy for others is aided by the following two abilities:

- 1. **Perspective-Taking (also referred to as Theory of Mind):** refers to stepping into someone else’s shoes by recognizing them as distinct individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and needs
- 2. **Emotion Regulation:** refers to our ability to manage our emotions in order to achieve goals and respond appropriately in different situations

Developmental Period	What to expect?	Example
Infancy (0–2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The first signs of the emotional component of empathy emerge.• Infants are sensitive to the emotions of those around them and will often mimic others’ emotions.• At around 8 to 14 months, infants react to the distress of others with negative emotions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An infant cries upon hearing the cry of another infant.
Preschool years (3–4 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cognitive component of empathy for others emerges during the preschool years as the ability to understand others’ perspectives (i.e., perspective-taking) develops.• Children start to develop the understanding that their mental states (e.g., feelings, desires, emotions) can be different from others. This ability helps them understand the distinct feelings of others, the reasons for these feelings, and the ideal way to facilitate more positive feelings within others.• The development of other socio-cognitive skills, including an increased capacity for understanding other’s emotions and improved emotion regulation skills, also facilitates the development of cognitive empathy during the preschool years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When trying to comfort another child in distress, a 2-year-old might give them their own favourite plush toy, whereas in later years, they will bring the other child’s favourite toy.• Seeing another child crying might make the child feel sad as well, potentially producing intense negative emotions and personal distress. Better emotion regulation skills help children manage this personal distress and, in turn, create more space for them to experience empathy for others.
Middle childhood (5–8 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As perspective-taking and emotion regulation continue to develop, and children grow an increasingly complex understanding of different emotions in themselves and others, empathy for others continues to increase through middle childhood.• As they age, children become better at reading others’ feelings through their actions, gestures, body language, and facial expressions — all of which will be helpful in establishing empathy for others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A 7-year-old sees someone being bullied by other children. Having a higher empathy for others would increase the chances that the child would defend the victim, and include the victim in future interactions.



Why is it Important to Promote Empathy for Others?

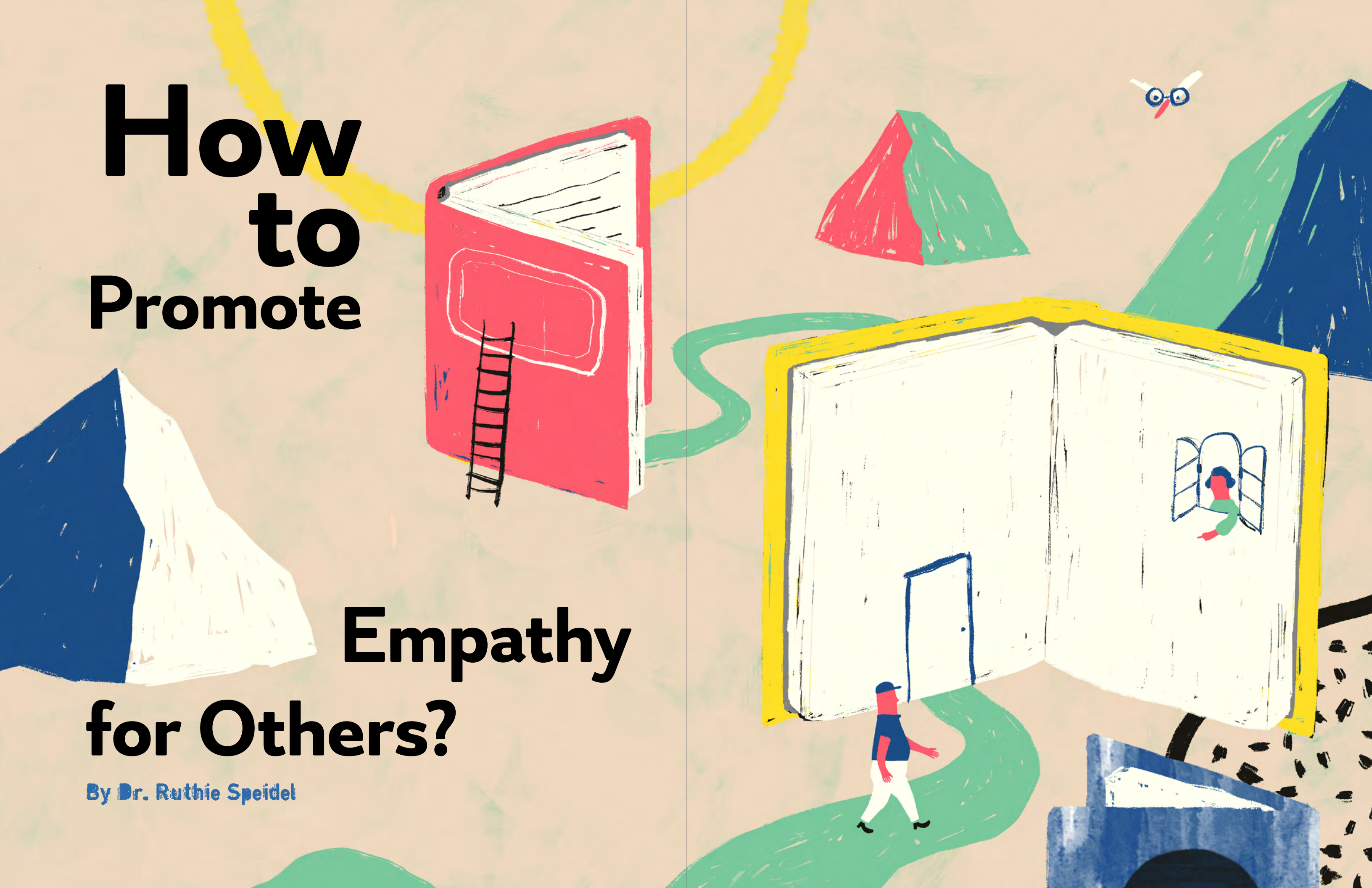
Empathy for others is a core component of positive social interactions with others. Research at our centre and in laboratories worldwide show that when children have higher empathy for others, they are more prosocial — meaning they are more inclined to help, comfort, cooperate, and share with others. Since empathy for others requires understanding the emotions of someone else who is distressed and feeling concern for them, children are motivated to react more benevolently and subsequently engage in prosocial behaviours.

Importantly, children who feel more empathy for others have been shown to display more positive social behaviours in childhood and in later years. For example, the research conducted in our lab has found that throughout early and middle childhood (4- 8-years old), children who display more empathy for others show more prosocial behaviours (e.g., Malti et al., 2016; Song et al., 2018). Since empathy for others develops over time, it is important to detect the early signs and promote empathy for others in early childhood and beyond to promote kindness within our communities and societies. But what can we do to promote empathy for others? To learn more about what you can do to promote empathy for others in children, you can read Dr. Ruthie Speidel's article next!

How to Promote

Empathy for Others?

By Dr. Ruthie Speidel



Empathy for others is an important part of children's development, but how do we teach it?

+ Be the Roadmap

One of the most important ways we can promote empathy is by modelling empathy in our daily interactions with children, others, and ourselves.

Be Empathetic with Children

Our actions speak louder than words. Children learn about the world and how to behave from watching and imitating others. This starts early in life—even as early as infancy! If children receive empathy and compassion, they are more likely to treat others with empathy and compassion.

- Using kind, loving language and actions that help children feel understood, accepted, and validated support our positive attachment relationships with children and provide them with a roadmap of instructions for how they can support and show kindness towards others.

Be Empathetic with Others

Beyond showing empathy to children, we can be an empathic role model in our interactions with different people, including our family members, friends, and even strangers at the store, school, or workplace. Children are constantly watching and learning from the everyday interactions they witness. Sometimes the most effective way to promote empathy is through our own actions.

- Modelling the behaviour you would like to see in your child is more likely to result in children imitating these behaviours. For example, saying thank you to someone when you receive help will increase your child's likelihood of doing so.

Be Empathetic with Yourself

If children learn from observing, this means they also notice how we treat ourselves when we make a mistake. If we can model self-kindness and growth in these moments, this is good for our own well-being and has added benefits of supporting children's

empathy. Let's face it: despite our best efforts, we're not perfect, and we're all going to make mistakes sometimes. It's a natural part of life and it's actually a huge part of learning.

- Being gentle with ourselves in these moments lets children know that it's okay to not be perfect all the time. It also lets them know that it's safe for them to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes in a constructive way, without feelings of shame. There are no bad children, only bad actions. Children can start to learn this by noticing how we behave towards ourselves when we make a mistake. (Malti, 2020a, 2020b)

+ Create Opportunities for Perspective Taking

Another way to promote children's empathy is by creating opportunities for children to take the perspectives of others. This might look a bit different at different ages.

- For example, with young children, you might read books with different characters and help children identify how those characters are feeling and why they are feeling that way.
- You might also role play with stuffed animals to help children understand others' perspectives. For example, if your child recently faced a difficult situation where they stole their friend's toy, you might use stuffed animals to recreate a similar event and talk through the feelings of the stuffed animals in this scenario.
- In different scenarios, you might even consider reversing the roles, with you playing the child and your child playing the adult! Children love to take charge and make decisions. Putting your child in the driver's seat creates a fun opportunity for learning.
- As children get older, you can engage in more complex conversations about the causes of emotions in yourself and in others. These conversations might occur after a real-life event or when discussing current events in the news, in a TV show, or in a story from a book. Before you discuss emoti-

ons and their reasons, remember to wait for your child to calm down if they are feeling heightened levels of emotions. Prioritize helping them manage their emotions. You will have plenty of time to bring up that topic and discuss emotions later. Also remember to be open and accepting of children in these conversations and make sure you allow them to safely express and explore their feelings without criticizing them. Children are still developing and learning new things every day, so it's important to be understanding if they are struggling to take the perspective of others.

✦ Emotions, Emotions, Emotions

The capacity to understand and manage our own emotions is integral to being in tune with others and their emotions. It's harder for us to display compassion for another person when we are dealing with our own strong emotions. Helping

children understand their own emotions, including the signs and causes of their emotions and how they can manage their emotions can equip children with the internal resources they need to empathize and display compassion for others.

There are several techniques we can use to help children understand their own and others' emotions. Try these four steps, which spell out L.O.V.E.

- » First, when a child is feeling an emotion, we can **L**abel that emotion for them or encourage them to label their emotion. For example, if a child is scared of a bee, we might say: "Are you scared of the bee?"
- » We can also view emotions (all emotions!) as an **O**ppportunity to grow closer. We might do this by getting down on the child's level or viewing the emotion as an opportunity to work together to come to a solution.

We might say, "What should we do?" Or "How can I help?"

- » We can also **V**alidate the emotion by letting the child know that their feeling is okay to feel. We might say "Yes, bees can be scary, especially when they fly too close to your face. It's okay to feel scared."
- » Finally, we can promote children's understanding of emotions by **E**laborating on the emotion. We might ask, "When I'm scared, my heart starts beating really fast and it feels harder to breathe. How does it feel in your body when you feel scared?" Asking open-ended questions and following children's lead helps children connect their emotions to their experiences and helps them learn complex problem-solving skills.

We can also practice the steps of L.O.V.E. when our child witnesses someone else feeling a big emotion.

Let us know what you think about these strategies to promote empathy for others. Is there something else that works well for your child? Email us at MaltiLab.PIPO@utoronto.ca, we'd love to hear from you!

✦ Notice and Note the Successes!

We can promote children's empathy for others by noticing and noting when they engage in small and large empathic activities.

- » Acts of empathy don't have to be large and extravagant to be effective. It can be as small as a child holding their toy out for another to play with, giving a hug, or holding the door for someone.
- » In addition to noticing these behaviours, we can actively praise children and their character in these moments. For example, we might say: "I noticed you playing so nicely with your friend today when he came to the park feeling a bit blue. You are so kind. I'm so proud of you!"
- » Children love to feel that they have an active role to play in helping others as well. Try cre-

ating opportunities for children to suggest acts of kindness. For example, if you notice that the child's classmate is having a bad day, you can work with the child to brainstorm ideas that might cheer the classmate up, such as drawing them a picture or playing a game with them.

+ Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a state of active, open attention to the present (including noticing our breath, our body, and the sounds around us) and observing our thoughts and feelings without judging them to be good or bad. Mindfulness is linked with lower anxiety, depression, and stress, and improved emotion understanding and kind behaviours in children and adults. Supporting children in some deep, mindful breathing can help

support their well-being and propensity for empathy.

» Children often learn best when they are playing, so turning mindfulness into something playful and creative is a great way to coach them in mindful breathing in a simple, fun, and memorable way.

» For example, you could teach your child deep breathing by having your child imagine that they have a hot cup of cocoa in front of them. Have them hold their hands around their imaginary hot chocolate and take in a deep breath. Then, have them let their breath out very slowly, like they are breathing their "out" breath through a straw or like they are slowly cooling down the hot chocolate in front of them.

When we change the rhythm of our breathing so that our "out" breath is longer than our "in" breath, this activates our parasympathetic system, which helps us calm down. If the child isn't a fan of hot chocolate, you can switch this exercise up to something like hot pizza or hot chocolate chip cookies fresh

out of the oven, or blowing bubbles.

+ Link Actions to Consequences

How we respond to children's behaviour can influence how they learn from that behaviour and why they might or might not engage in that behaviour again. For example, if we respond to behaviour we don't like with immediate harsh punishment or by criticizing who the child is as a person, although this may stop the behaviour in the moment, it is more likely to result in children displaying positive behaviours merely to avoid punishment. It is also more likely to instill shame into children (instead of thinking the behaviour was bad, they think they themselves are

bad). In this way, external factors (fear of punishment from an authority figure and fear of shame) become the main motivators for engaging in positive behaviours.

» We can maintain behavioural boundaries while still showing empathy and kindness when children make mistakes by focusing on the current actions instead of children's character. For example, instead of saying "You are a bad friend for knocking down your friend's tower" we might say, "Your friend is crying. It's because you knocked down their tower". This language helps children link their actions (knocking down the tower) to consequences (their friend crying) and gives them an opportunity to learn from this event.

In this way, kindness can become more internally motivated and is more likely to be displayed even in the absence of an authority figure.



Empathy for Others:

HOW I NURTURE IT IN MY CHILD

BY POCHUEN KWOK



Soccer, siblings, online school...with busy schedules and so many changes happening, how can parents and caregivers find the time to teach children kindness and empathy?

I'm a mom of two young boys, aged 6- and 8-years-old. They are your typical high energy boys who run around all day, and they are more concerned about playing than sitting down to talk about their feelings. When I do try to teach my kids about empathy by being sensitive to another person's feelings or by trying to make the other person feel better, I feel that the conversation is too abstract or not personal enough for them to understand or fully empathize. I found that when one of my kids is hurt, it's a much easier teachable moment because they feel it more emotionally.

For example, my 8-year-old son Braden* was accidentally hit hard in the face with a soccer ball by his friend Adam. Usually, Braden shakes it off and it doesn't bother him, but this was a very painful blow; he went down hard and cried a lot, the type that convulsed his shoulders. I happened to be making a call

and missed the entire incident and aftermath of the long-lasting cry (which is really rare). I knew it was an accident, but when I came back from my call, Adam was nowhere to be seen; he had moved on to the trampoline. Instead, another friend Ben was there right next to Braden, showing him his Pokémon cards in an attempt to make Braden feel better. I knew that Ben's empathy and actions were a great reflection of what I would want Braden to do, so I tucked that teachable moment for later in the day when Braden had recovered from the incident, was calm, and could really soak in the information.

Later that evening, after story time and while laying in bed (which I find to be a very good time to chat with my kids because there are no distractions), I decided to take the opportunity to converse, and also listen to them.

"What happened today? What made you cry?" I asked.

"Adam was really close and accidentally kicked the soccer ball really hard into my face," Braden said.

"What did Adam do and say when it happened?" I asked.

"Adam asked if I was okay, he stayed with me for a minute then left and played somewhere else," Braden said.

"What did Ben do?" I asked.

"He stayed with me and showed me his Pokémon card collection," Braden said.

With the two contrasting reactions, I then asked,

"What do you think you would've done?"

"I would've done the same as Adam, asked if he was okay, stayed for a little, and then leave," said Braden.

I liked the honesty but didn't like that he didn't realize the better alternative even after he just went through it himself today. I then had to probe further.

"Who made you feel better – Adam or Ben?" I asked.

"Ben did," Braden said.

Yes! We finally made progress, I said in my mind. That was my cue to then say, "That was nice what Ben did, I liked that he was so caring, didn't leave you alone, and he really tried hard to make you feel better." And to then take it to a potential future scenario, I asked,

"Do you think that if you accidentally hurt someone or see someone who is hurt, you should stay with the person and try to make them feel better?"

"Yes, I will," Braden said.

That's all I needed to hear and hoped that our conversation sunk in.

Weeks later, Braden's friend Adam was crying because he was sent to the principal's office. Braden didn't know what happened, but he knew his friend was in distress. He took the initiative to ask Adam if he was okay and what happened. Adam was so appreciative; he needed a friend to talk to and Braden was there to listen. I was so proud of Braden.

I'm hoping that eventually I don't need to have my kids understand empathy only from experiencing their own suffering and pain, and that they'll start to better understand how it would be like in the other person's shoes and think of ideas to help them feel better.

*Names have been changed.

The Psychological Performance of Empathy in Adolescents

By Naomi Lawrence



How has the pandemic impacted teenagers' emotional and mental health? What does empathy for others look like for them? Seventeen-year-old Naomi Lawrence shares her thoughts on how she sees empathy within her friends and family.

Recently, two of my friends lost close relationships. One of them had to leave her best friend, while the other had to leave her boyfriend. They both had committed relationships lasting many years. I know how hard it can be to lose someone you're close to, or someone you thought would be in your life forever, as I experienced it too. Ending strong emotional relationships can lead to teenagers feeling unmotivated, self-conscious, and apathetic. My way of showing empathy was continuously reaching out, giving advice, and reminding them that I'm here to support them regardless of the outcome. Being able to consider their perspectives and recognize their emotions was the key factor in showing empathy.

The Oxford Dictionary describes empathy as "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another" but it's so much

more than these words in a book or on a screen. Feeling empathy for someone can deepen connections, strengthen relationships, and can even become a pinnacle moment in someone's life.

Acts of kindness

A few years back, my friend called, telling me they were sick. Knowing the awful feeling, I decided to buy them hot chocolate, cough candy, and a bag of their favourite chips. They thanked me, saying, "You're the best friend in the whole world!" Being empathetic can be an emotional booster, as I was elated by their happiness and delighted to make my friend feel better. Although a bit cringy, I like to spend my time watching YouTube videos of people showing kindness. In some videos, people would go around paying random strangers' rent, or giving free laptops to students in university. Many people

receiving the gifts say, "this is the best thing that's ever happened to me" and tend to remember those life-changing memories for a lifetime. Kindness is based on the action while empathy is the emotional connection attached to it. The individuals giving gifts recognized the needs and struggles of others. They felt empathy as they understood the strenuous hustle that people endure every day.

The difference that empathy makes

One time, I got injured and was admitted into the hospital. Many people showed empathy by sending food, cards, prayers, and well wishes. This is an event I remember to this day that makes me content to reflect on. People being understanding towards me made me feel supported, cared for, and gave me hope that I would surely recover.

On the other hand, there have been countless situations where I have encountered friends who have invalidated my feelings or put the blame on me. It only pushed me further away, as it created a void that made me feel unsupported, alone, and unheard. Unfortunately, others feel the same way. When this happens, you feel excluded and isolated. That's why having someone show compassion and actively listen gives the sense of having a voice instead of being shut out. As a result, empathy can play a prime component in someone's life. One can voice their opinions and struggles while others either learn or relate to those experiences.

Empathy during the pandemic

I believe that this is the time when people have shown the most empathy. During the

pandemic, there are thousands of families and friends who lost loved ones and are still facing these battles today. In these situations, showing empathy can spark new connections and strengthen them, as you're able to discuss and understand one another due to going through similar experiences. In addition, the pandemic not only affected families emotionally, but has impacted youth and adolescents in unseen ways. More teenagers are now depressed, suffer from anxiety, or have increased mental health issues.

I know that during quarantine I became completely numb. Not only did I struggle with keeping up with my friends, I also struggled to stay positive. I became emotionally and physically drained. When I went back to school, I felt more rejuvenated as I was able to be empathetic and could connect with my friends. Most of us had gone through the same waves

of emotions while in quarantine. When talking to my friends, I felt understood and knew I wasn't alone.

To add, since parents started to understand the tensions placed on adolescents from online learning, social media, and a constantly changing environment, many showed empathy by communicating and encouraging their kids. Most teachers were empathetic, as they understood all the pressure and emotional strain that was placed on students, so they offered more guidance during classes and didn't overload us with assignments.

Empathy can be shown in the smallest actions but can result in hope and courage for numerous people. Kindness never hurts, and yet it can create such meaningful and connected experiences that may last forever.





SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ART: STUDENTS DISCUSS EMPATHY FOR OTHERS IN PILOT WORKSHOP

Text by Bisma Ali / Photos by S. Basrai & PIP O. Team

The PIP O. Project introduced a new art workshop program for children and adolescents: the PIP O. Wonder Lab. These interactive sessions are a new way to share evidence-based strategies to promote social-emotional development. Students are introduced to various artistic styles and skills while discussing topics such as empathy and emotion regulation in fun ways such as small group activities and games. We are happy to report that the pilot workshop sessions went very well.

“The idea of building empathy through art is amazing. Artist Pei-Yu and the team did an amazing job of facilitating this three day online art workshop. A lot of rich conversations happened as students discussed adjectives and character

traits about their animals and related them to their friends. They realized that everyone is unique and their differences make them special. Thank you for a great initiative.”

- S. Basrai

In December 2021, Mrs. Basrai's Grade 4 class at Castlebridge Public School in Mississauga, Ontario participated in our “Colourful Animal World!” workshop focused on empathy for others. The Wonder Lab team engaged children in discussions about empathy, and artist Pei-Yu Chang guided children through a creative activity which prompted critical thinking about how we perceive and appreciate ourselves, and the world around us.



In the first session, students were asked to think about themselves: Who are they? What kind of characteristics and emotions do they have? The accompanying artistic activity asked children to select a few adjectives from the Wonder Lab Emotion Map to describe themselves and then think of an animal they believe represents these characteristics. The children then created these animals into paper puppets.

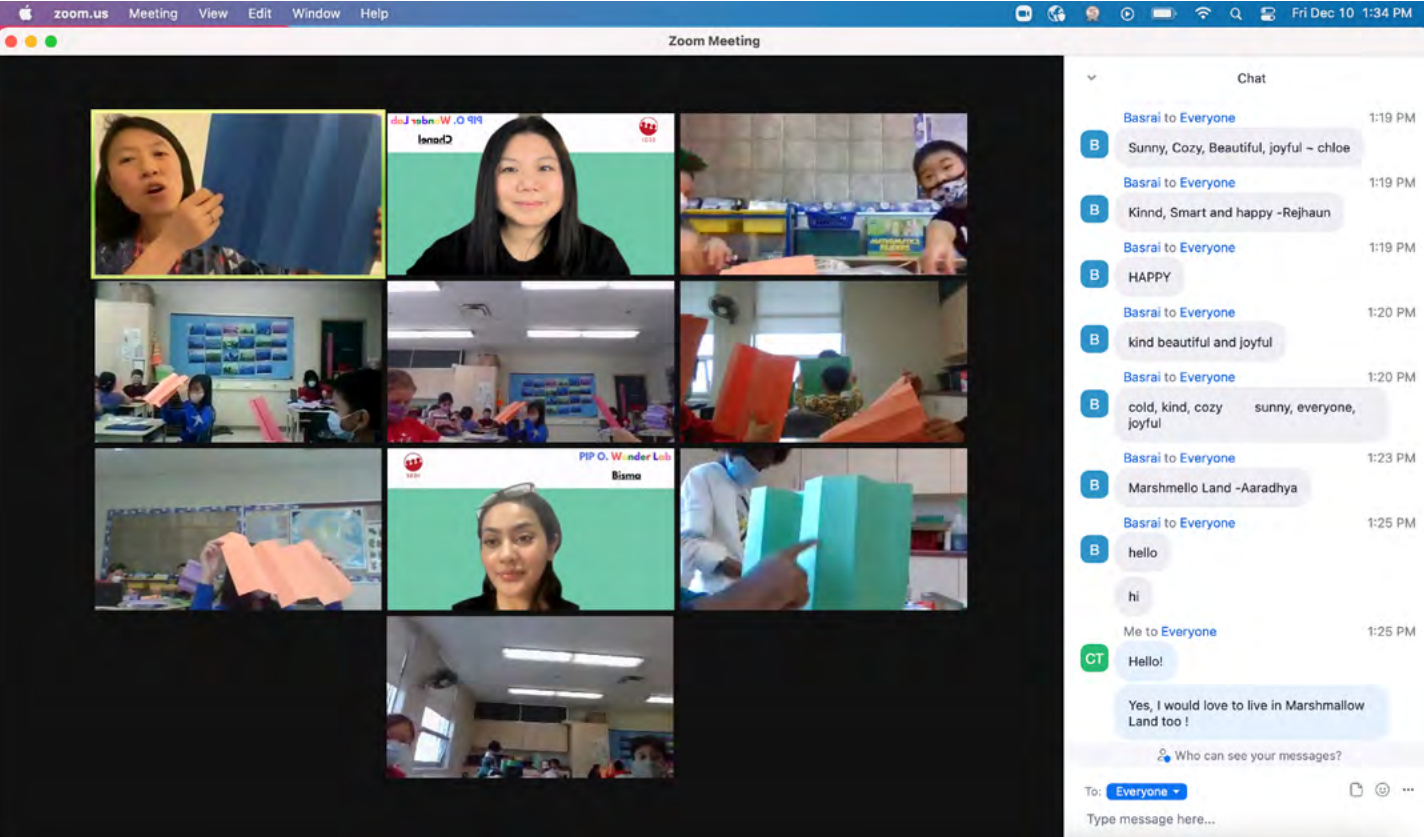
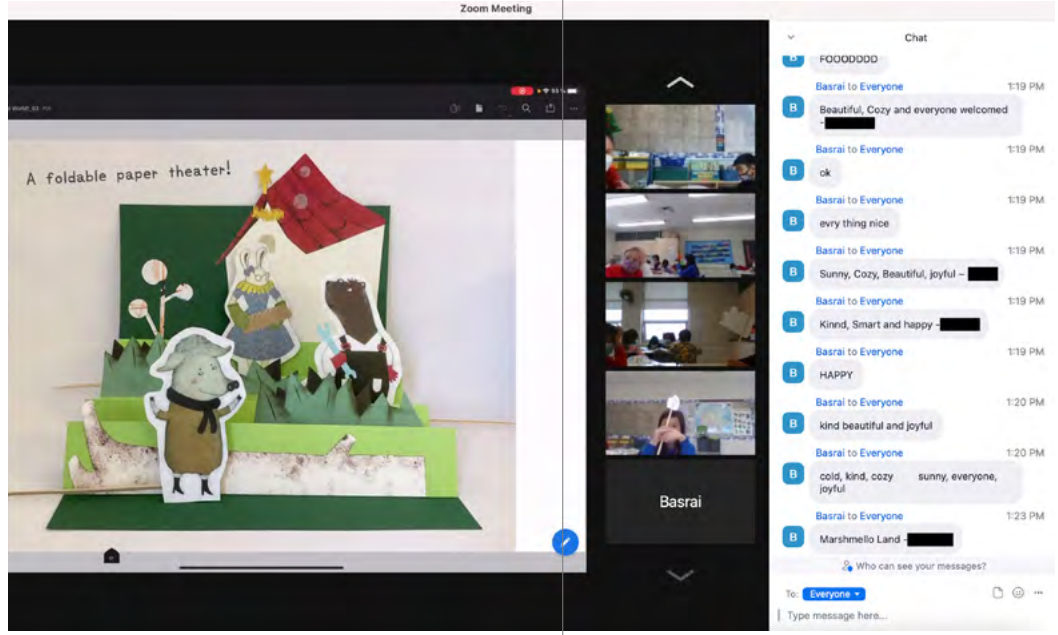


In the second session, students were asked to reflect on the fellow human beings around them who may be different from themselves, and what they appreciate about these relationships. The students chose one person and once again selected words to describe them. After creative and critical thinking, they created a second animal puppet based on their selection.

In the third session, students were asked to reflect on what kind of environment they would like to live in for themselves and for the people they are surrounded by. What type of world would their animals live in happily and comfortably? The children selected key words from the Wonder Lab World Word List which would described a world suitable for them and others. They then thought about what this world would look like, and created a puppet theatre for their animals.

It was a wonderful opportunity for the PIP O. Wonder Lab to engage with children, educators, and caregivers in the Peel Region and share the exciting research findings from the SEDI Lab. As well, it was an opportunity for us to navigate online learning and develop innovate ways of delivering virtual workshops effectively. We are looking forward to taking back the feedback and making intentional improvements to ensure our program is meaningful and meets the needs of students and educators.

For more information about the workshops, please visit our website or contact us at maltilab.pipo@utoronto.ca.



Learning About Emotions

By Dr. Ruthie Speidel

Reading together with your child is a wonderful way to connect. Stories let us see things from different points of view, read how characters are affected by others' words and actions, and the story and pictures can be a great starting point for talking about emotions.



1. Grow emotional vocabulary by talking about emotions.
 - "How is (character) feeling?"
 - "How do you know (character) is feeling ____? What signs (expression/dialogue) let you know they feel ____?"
 - "What do you think sparked (character's) feeling?"
2. Bridge connections by noting similarities and differences between characters and oneself.
 - "(Character) is feeling _____. When was a recent time you felt _____?"
 - "How are you different from (character)? How are you similar?"
 - Help children identify how different characters might perceive the same situation.
3. Support dialogue about how we might show empathy or kindness.
 - "(Character) is feeling _____. If they were with us, how could we help them feel better?"
 - Note and elaborate when kindness or empathy is modeled: "(Character) showed kindness by _____. How do you think that made (character) feel? Why?"
 - "When has someone shown kindness to you recently? How did it make you feel?"

* Suggested children's books

- Last Stop on Market Street by Matt De La Peña
- Little Blue Truck by Alice Schertle
- Come with Me by Holly M. McGhee
- Save me a Seat by Sarah Weeks
- You, Me, and Empathy by Jayneen Sanders
- I Walk with Vanessa by Kerascoët
- The Good Egg by Jory John
- The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson
- The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi

Books



Loving Kindness

By Chanel Tsang

Loving Kindness Meditation is a practice that comes from Buddhism. Its intention is to cultivate an attitude of benevolence and goodwill towards oneself and others by repeating short phrases like: "may you be happy" and "may you be healthy" (Young, 2016). Researchers have found that people who practiced Loving Kindness felt more positive emotions including joy, gratitude, hope, love, and pride (Fredrickson et al, 2008). The focus on others can help encourage the development of empathy for others too. (Malti, 2020b)

This is a practice that can be done at any time of the day with children and is easily built into their daily life, such as during their bedtime routine.

Ages 2-6

Music is a fun and natural way of learning for children: it builds their literacy and numeracy, develops their senses, and strengthens fine and gross motor skills through actions and dancing. It also stimulates the brain and helps with memory.

Here is a Loving Kindness song that I made up, set to the tune of "Frère Jacques." Ask them to think of someone while they sing this song (better yet, look through photos of family and friends and let them choose someone to sing it to!). Have your children help make up actions to go along with the words!





02

Ages 7-12

For older children, you can start by practicing saying Loving Kindness phrases together. You can say a line and have them repeat it.

Have them repeat the phrases, first thinking about themselves ("May I be happy...may I be healthy..."). Next, repeat the phrases again, this time thinking of someone they love. Then, repeat for someone they find hard to get along with. Finally, repeat the phrases while picturing someone neutral in their life, maybe another student they see in the school halls but they don't play with, a neighbour you see walking their dog every day, or the school crossing guard...this can be anyone they would like to send friendly wishes to (they can also draw pictures of them and even write out the phrases).

SAMPLE OF LOVING KINDNESS
MEDITATION PHRASES:
MAY YOU BE HAPPY
MAY YOU BE HEALTHY
MAY YOU BE SAFE
MAY YOU LIVE WITH EASE

You can even get into more discussions about the phrases. For example, you can ask what they think it means to "live with ease." They may recognize that the word ease sounds like easy, which is a good clue. However, living with ease doesn't mean to have an easy life, but to have the skills and practice to handle what life throws at us with grace and patience. What does that look like to them? Can they remember a time when something was challenging but they were able to handle it? How did they handle it? Your discussion may lead to many different places, including highlighting their own resiliency and therefore reminding them of all the resources and tools they already have and have used successfully! Loving Kindness can be another tool in their social-emotional toolkit.

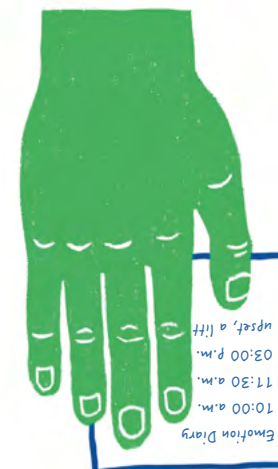
There are different Loving Kindness phrases used. You can explore them together or even have your child come up with their own.

03

Ages 12 and up

For older children and teens, why not build Loving Kindness into a routine action, like charging their phone or device? Every time they charge their device, challenge them to take a minute to sit and breathe, or practice Loving Kindness on their own. You can still practice this together or encourage them to keep a journal to record how they feel after each practice. We know that babies' brains go through great change and growth during the first three years of life, but teenagers' brains are growing and changing too. So, it's a great time to nurture their mindful awareness—it can help encourage a positive change that will stay with them into adulthood.

Try it out this week! Habits and routines take time, so it may take time to make this a regular practice. If your child is not enjoying or open to this yet, you can always come back to it later. And when you do start practicing, remember that the best time to stop any activity is when they're still having fun!





You could be in the next issue of our magazine!



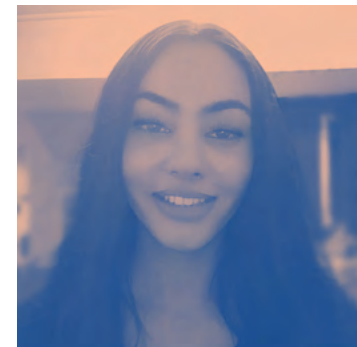
PIP O. Gazette

A new magazine about social-emotional development by
SEDI Lab at the University of Toronto Mississauga

Email: multilab.pipo@utoronto.ca
Website: tinamalti.com/pipo

CONTRIBUTORS OF PIP O. GAZETTE ISSUE 1 • 2022

The names are arranged in alphabetical order.



Bisma Ali is a 5th year student at the University of Toronto who is studying Health Studies and Biomedical Ethics. She is a work-study student at the SEDI Lab and the Editorial Assistant for the PIP O. Gazette. Bisma enjoys getting exercise at the gym, and likes to have movie marathons with her cousins in her free time (which is a type of marathon she doesn't have to train in the gym for!)



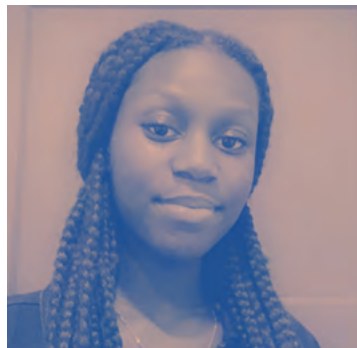
Pei-Yu Chang is an illustrator, author, college lecturer and translator based in Münster, Germany, originally from Taipei, Taiwan. She illustrates, writes and translates for small and big people. As a kid growing up in her family's printing factory, she loved to collect the leftover scraps of paper and other materials for her artworks. The smell of paper and ink mixed in the air reminds her of home.



Anastasiya Gordiychuk is a multimedia journalist who is passionate about business, politics and human-interest stories. She is a top graduate of the Department of Arts, Culture & Media (class of 2022) at the University of Toronto. Her works have appeared in numerous publications, including Maclean's, Global Summitry Project, The Varsity and the Toronto Observer. On a side note, she is scared of butterflies and other insects.



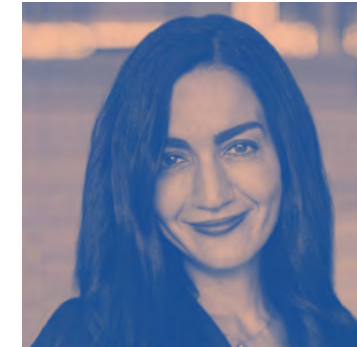
Pochuen Kwok lives in Mississauga with her two boys and husband. Her children have enjoyed participating in the SEDI Lab's research in social-emotional development. Pochuen's family enjoys bike rides on long trails; it's much preferred to the game of tag, where her kids now outrun her and her husband, so they are always "it" and out of breath.



Naomi Lawrence is a 17-year-old who enjoys journaling, poetry, and painting. She is part of the PIP O. Team's community in Peel Region. In her free time, you can find Naomi doing math, baking, or playing the piano. She's enthusiastic and loves a good challenge.



Kay Sharma-Lopes is an Educator in a kindergarten classroom in the Peel Region. She was an enthusiastic participant in a SEDI Lab training program for educators and was invited to write about her work with students and families for the PIP O. Gazette. Kay has worked with children and families for over 18 years and loves the areas of family support and special education. Kay, her three children, and husband love to explore bird watching, gardening, and walking their new puppy Mila.



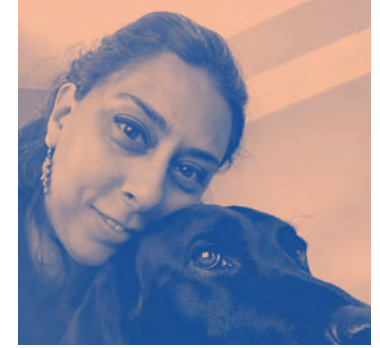
Dr. Tina Malti is a developmental psychologist and a registered clinical child psychologist. She is a professor of Psychology and directs the Laboratory for Social-Emotional Development and Intervention (SEDI Lab) at the University of Toronto. Tina feels passionate about research aimed at contributing to the potential for kindness and well-being in all children. In her free time, she likes meeting for coffee with friends, reading, and playing the piano.



Dr. Ruthie Speidel is a developmental psychologist. She is a postdoctoral fellow at the SEDI Lab, overseeing the development of social-emotional development training for caregivers and educators. Ruthie lives in Whitby with her dog, George. They love going on hikes and swimming in the lake together.



Chanel Tsang oversees knowledge translation and community engagement initiatives at the SEDI Lab and is the managing editor of the PIP O. Gazette. She has worked with children and families for over 15 years in schools and in EarlyON and Child and Family Centres. In her free time, she works on her podcast for children, Peace Out, all about social-emotional learning and mindfulness. She adapted one of her episodes for this issue.



Dr. Melis Yavuz-Müren is interested in the social-emotional development of children and understanding the role of parenting in children's social-emotional development. She is a postdoctoral researcher at the SEDI Lab, overseeing a study on the development of kindness in young children and supporting the expansion of SEDI's social-emotional intervention tools. She enjoys spending time outdoors, especially with her son and their dog, but she would never say no to a nice chat over coffee with friends indoors.

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Community Support Resources

 We all need help sometimes. If you are feeling overwhelmed or distressed, please consider reaching out to friends and family, and local community resources. We've included mental health supports, crisis response lines, and other resources here.

● = Open to all
A = Services for Adults
Y = Services for Youth

Peel Region

Associated Youth Services of Peel

160 Traders Blvd. E. Suite 100
Mississauga, Ontario
L4Z 3K7
1-800-762-8377 (Toll Free)
general@aysp.ca
✓ 24/7 Crisis Response Service

EveryMind Peel

85A Aventura Court
Mississauga, Ontario

L5T 2Y6
905-795-3500
info@everymind.ca

✓ Free, confidential and high quality mental health services to children, youth, young adults (up to age 25) and families in the Region of Peel.

Ernestine's Women's Shelter

Please note that we do not publicize the location of our shelter to protect the privacy and ensure the safety and security of our clients. Crisis Line: 416-746-3701 press 0 contact@ernestines.ca

✓ Emergency shelter for women and mothers with children, who are single or those with children who are currently experiencing abuse and need immediate shelter. Shelter program helps women, their children/youth heal from violence through counseling, child and youth programs, housing support and more
✓ 24/7 crisis response

DO YOU HAVE A TEENAGER BETWEEN THE AGES OF 12 AND 17? DO YOU LIVE IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA?

If you answered "Yes", you are invited to participate in our lab's new online study about youth's resilience and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic!

If you are interested or want to learn more, please email us at airy.maltlab@utoronto.ca

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Review Board, University of Toronto

Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre ●

3650 Dixie Road, Suite 103,
Mississauga, Ontario,
L4Y 3V9
905-629-1873
info@dixiebloor.ca
✓ Community oriented programs which are offered free of charge and responsive to the needs of community members.

Mississauga Halton Central Intake Program

2401 Bristol Circle, Suite 105
Oakville, ON

L6H 5S9
905-338-4123
one-Link@haltonhealthcare.com
✓ A single point of access for referrals to 10 Mississauga Halton Addiction and Mental Health service providers.

Our Place Peel

3579 Dixie Road, Mississauga,
ON L4Y 2B3
905-238-1383
info@ourplacepeel.org
✓ Our Place is a registered non-profit agency that provides shelter, support and hope for homeless and at-risk youth aged 16-24 in the Region of Peel.

Support House - Mississauga - Centre for Innovation in Peer Support ●

165 Cross Ave, Suite 201
Oakville Ontario,
L6J 0A9
1-833-845-9355
centreinfo@supporthouse.ca
✓ Provide wellness-based, peer-led self-help and social connections programming throughout Mississauga and Halton for individuals living with mental health and/or addiction challenges

Ontario

211 Ontario ●

Various locations for services and resources across Ontario. Please visit <https://211ontario.ca/>
Toll-free: 1-877-330-3213 OR dial 211 <https://211ontario.ca/contact-211-ontario/#email-enquiries-link>
✓ 211 is a helpline and online database of Ontario's community and social services

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) ●

Various locations and services. Please visit <https://www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/about-camh/contact-camh>
416 535-8501, press 2 OR toll free: 1 800 463-2338

info@camh.ca
✓ 24/7 crisis response
✓ Various services and resources for mental health and addiction

Children's Mental Health Ontario

Find a child and youth mental health centre near you.
Please visit <https://cmho.org/findhelp/>
(416) 921-2109
info@cmho.org
✓ Find child and youth mental health centres; Walk-in services and 24/7 crisis response resources near you through their online database.

Answers from page 10-11

- A: Service dogs
- B: Cows
- C: Elephants
- D: Parrots
- E: Chimpanzees

ConnexOntario

Various locations for services and resources across Ontario. Please visit <https://www.connexontario.ca/en-ca/>
1-866-531-2600
<https://www.connexontario.ca/en-ca/send-email>
✓ information and referral services focusing on mental health, addiction, and gambling, in the province.
✓ 24/7 phone, web-chat and email support.

Canada

Talk Suicide Canada ●

Please visit <https://talksuicide.ca>
1.833.456.4566
Text 45645 (4 p.m. - midnight ET)
✓ 24/7 crisis response

Kids Help Phone

Please visit kidshelpphone.ca
1-800-668-6868
Text 686868
info@kidshelpphone.ca
✓ 24/7 counselling via phone, online chat

Get Involved!

Do you have a little scientist at home?
Join our research studies and help us learn more about child development!

Eligibility:

Children from 6 months to 17 years

[Participate in Our Research](#)

Are you interested in child development research and intervention development?

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Editor-in-Chief
Tina Malti

Managing Editor
Chanel Tsang

Art Director
Pei-Yu Chang

Editorial Assistants
Maarya Abdulkarim, Bisma Ali

Writers
Bisma Ali, Anastasiya Gordiychuk, Pochuen Kwok, Naomi Lawrence, Kay Shar-
ma-Lopes, Ruthie Speidel, Chanel Tsang, Melis Yavuz-Müren

Illustrator & Layout Designer
Pei-Yu Chang

Publisher
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University of Toronto Mississauga

Marketing
Bisma Ali, Anastasiya Gordiychuk, Michelle Melvin, Chanel Tsang

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Alex Demanin. Pei-Yu’s headshot is by David Frank.)

PIP O. Gazette
3359 Mississauga Road North
Department of Psychology
Deerfield Hall, Fourth Floor, Room 4055
Mississauga, ON, L5L 1C6
T: (905) 569-4710
E: maltilab.pipo@utoronto.ca
W: www.tinamalti.com/pipo



