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Mr. Rauschenberger

“Building Empathy and Compassion for Others ”



4TH GRADE

This week during your child’s guidance classroom lesson, children learned about the importance of empathy and compassion for others.

This lesson was a follow-up to last month’s lesson on bully prevention. Research has proven that one of the best deterrents to bullying behaviors is to teach children about the importance of empathy and compassion for others.

Children learned the difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy was defined as, “feeling sorry for someone else.” Empathy was defined as, “putting yourself in someone else’s shoes.” The ability for children to learn empathy at a young age is so important. This definition comes from the NJ State Bar Association which is based at Rutgers University. Today’s guidance lesson focused on building empathy for others as well as building a stronger more cohesive classroom community.

Children began the lesson by reading a short story from *Chicken Soup for the Children's Soul*. Students read "Goodwill." The story talks about a young girl Annie who befriends a new student Kristen. The two girls come from very different socioeconomic backgrounds. Annie's family is very well off, while Kristen's family is struggling financially. While going through Annie's closet to get rid of her old clothes that no longer fit, Annie's mom accidentally donates her favorite skirt to Goodwill. The next day at school, Annie discovers that her new friend Kristen is wearing her skirt! At first Annie is furious at her mother and at Kristen, but as she gets to know Kristen better, she learns that Kristen was often giving her parents her babysitting money to help pay for the family's food and bills. Annie learns a very good lesson about compassion through Kristen and the story has a very happy ending!

Following this short story, children participated in an activity called "Crossing the Line" (a.k.a "The Power Shuffle"). The children were read several statements about different events and incidents that may have occurred in their lives. If those incidents pertained to them, they were asked to "cross the line." Students moved from one side of the hallway to the other side of the hallway. Some of the prompts that were read included the following:

- 1) "Cross the line in silence if you've ever been teased, called a bad name or made fun of."**
- 2) Cross the line if you've ever been picked last in games or sports or felt left out of a game"**
- 3) "Cross the line if you've ever felt alone, unwelcome or afraid"**
- 4) "Cross the line if you've ever felt pressure from your friends or an adult to do something you didn't want to do."**

Once this activity was completed, children were asked to return to their seats and quietly reflect on the activity through writing prompts.

Some discussion questions that followed the activity included:

- "What are some feelings that came up for you during this activity?"**
- "What was the hardest part about crossing the line?"**

- ***“What did you learn about yourself?”***
- ***“What did you learn about your classmates?”***
- ***“What do you want to remember about this experience?”***
- ***“What do you want to tell others about this experience?”***

At the conclusion of the lesson, children were given the opportunity to share some of their thoughts and feelings. This activity can be very powerful because, if anything else, children can see that they are not the only ones who've experienced difficult times in their lives and that there's “strength in numbers.”