

Guidance Home Page

Mr. Rauschenberger

“Building Empathy and Compassion for Others ”



5TH 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 "The New House and the Snake." The story talks about a young boy who moves into a new home and discovers a snake on his property. This young boy, being an avid lover of reptiles, feels empathy for the snake because it had been displaced by the numerous new homes that had been built in this boy's housing development. The boy can feel empathy for the snake because he knows what it feels like to have to leave a home that you loved. Luckily, this story has a 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."