COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND EMPATHY

WHAT DO COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND EMPATHY MEAN?

Community Awareness refers to the degree to which we are in-tune with the social, cultural and political norms or realities of our community, and the ways in which we follow or stray from these norms.

Empathy refers to our ability to place ourselves in another person’s metaphorical shoes or reality, even when we have not personally or directly experienced that reality.

WHAT DO COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND EMPATHY LOOK LIKE?

Children with a strong sense of community awareness and empathy will:

- Feel an authentic connection to their community.
- Take multiple perspectives into account without compromising their own values or beliefs.
- Have the compassion necessary to put oneself in another person’s shoes.
- Understand the interconnectedness of individuals, communities, organizations and systems (e.g., children might be able to think through the various ways in which littering impacts humans, other animals, and the environment, while simultaneously thinking through the jobs that are created by the need to clean up litter and waste in the community).

HOW CAN PARENTS FOSTER COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND EMPATHY?

Parents can:

- Create opportunities for children to be involved in their communities through service or work and by attending community-wide events.
- Create opportunities for children to have exposure to differing viewpoints and express those differences through a critical lens (e.g., sharing news articles about the same topic from sources with differing viewpoints and discussing the differences in each viewpoint in relation to what the child believes).
- Model empathy by taking their child’s perspective and helping them name their emotions.
- Create opportunities for children to experience the realities of others and the interconnectedness of individuals, communities and systems by picking a social issue (e.g., hunger, homelessness, climate change, etc.) and ask …
  - How do you think the reality of this issue affects others?
  - How do you think current societal circumstances influence those realities?

Afterward, ask children to share how they are feeling and how they think the people they meet feel everyday living in the circumstances they observed.

Take the conversation further by asking them to explore what they think some of the barriers people may have in being able to change their circumstances).