Set a good example for youth

Source: David Weisenhorn and Kerri Ashurst, senior extension specialists

As a parent or caregiver, you are the single most important influence on the lives of young people. It is so important that we teach our youth empathy and respect by modeling it in our daily lives.

Sometimes it is hard for us to empathize with others who have different backgrounds and viewpoints, but it is crucial for us to consciously practice empathy and respect. This way our young people will learn appropriate behaviors, particularly for public settings. Empathy and respect are behaviors that can be learned and nurtured, and they help promote kindness. Kindness is one thing our world is in desperate need of right now.

While it is important to feel firm in our beliefs, it is equally important to understand the feelings of others. Here are some tips to help you teach young people how to be more empathetic, respectful and kind.

Develop their emotional awareness by sharing your feelings throughout the day. We can all feel a wide range of emotions each day. We can help young people understand and identify their emotions, so they can recognize these same emotions in others. Use everyday situations to show your young person examples of what it means to be caring, cooperative and fair.

Be courteous and respectful in your daily interactions with others. When you show real interest in the feelings of other people, use manners, and spend your time and energy on them, it teaches youth about caring, compassion and unselfishness. Explain your motives for your behavior and respecting others to young people.

Acknowledge when they have been kind to others. Compliment youth and show that you are proud of them for their positive behaviors.

Expose them to diversity. Exposing young people to different perspectives is a great way to promote empathy and respect. You can expose your child to diversity in a number of ways such as reading books, eating at restaurants with ethnic cuisine, attending different religious or ethnic group activities, and being involved in community events.

It is ok to admit to your child when you have made a mistake. Everyone has bad days. That is just a part of being human. Specific, simple apologies go a long way to show your young person that is ok to admit when you are wrong and are sorry.

For more information, contact your (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

-30-