



TEACHING COMPASSION TO KIDS

Some ideas for Christian parents and grandparents

COMPASSION lies at the heart of the Christian faith. God's compassion for us brought about the Incarnation and so many of Jesus' teachings address the need for us to exercise this virtue – e.g. parable of the Good Samaritan. At a time when there seems to be a growing increase of knife and gun crime affecting young people – and children – Christian parents and grandparents can make a difference by teaching children the importance of showing compassion and rejecting violence.

There are a number of online resources to help young people develop this virtue. The *Spiritual Association of the Compassionate Hearts of Jesus and Mary* has collected some of these together and offers four Prayer Practices for parents or grandparents to use with their children followed by ten Practical Suggestions.



i) A DEVOTION for LOVING COMPASSION

Settle down quietly. Close your eyes. Notice your breathing. Take a deep breath – and exhale. Then pray:

✠ Come, Holy Spirit and fill my heart with your Divine Wisdom. Amen.

Next place a hand on your heart, slowly formulate your desires into phrases such as:

May I be filled with your compassion, Lord; may your Mother's love enfold me.

Hold this intention for a minute. Then:

May (*name of partner or close friend*) be filled with your compassion, Lord;
may your Mother's love enfold him/her.

and repeat the process as you move on:

May *my friends* be filled with your compassion, Lord;
may your Mother's love enfold them...

May (*those you find it hard to like*) be filled with your compassion, Lord;
may your Mother's love enfold them...

May (*name of someone you dislike*) be filled with your compassion, Lord;
may your Mother's love enfold him/her...

Or you/your child could use this prayer:

May I be freed from anxiety, anger and hatred
and be filled with your compassion.

and repeat it replacing 'I' with the name of someone you love, a friend, someone you dislike and, finally, someone you hate. Conclude with:

These things I ask for the sake of Jesus' Compassionate Heart. Amen.

ii) PRAYER for when you notice you are not exercising compassion

Direct your attention to the person(s) concerned:

May (s)he be filled with your compassion, O Lord;
may your Mother's love enfold them.

Hold them in your heart for a minute.



iii) BREATH PRAYER

Settle down quietly. Close your eyes. Notice your breathing. Take a deep breath – and exhale. Slowly breathe in again, then:

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| <i>On the out-breath, pray:</i> | Jesus, |
| <i>As you inhale:</i> | fill me with your compassion. |

Keep slowly repeating this for ten minutes. If your mind wanders, bring it back to the prayer!



iv) DAILY COMPASSION

There'll be times throughout the day when you become aware of feelings of anger, hatred, dislike, irritation etc... Take a moment to recollect yourself and offer this prayer for the person who has attracted such feelings. Use this whenever you find yourself in a similar situation:

May you be well,
may you be happy,
may you know the compassion of Christ.



1. BABIES can be prayed with (they get to like the rhythm)! Try to include your child from the earliest age in 10 minutes of meditation each day – it's good for them, and it's good for *you*! Maybe begin with some gentle, reflective music. Then use one of the Prayer Practices
2. COMPASSION TO ALL THINGS: Jesus taught us to show compassion to people, ourselves and the whole of Creation ("Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind – and your neighbour – as yourself." *Luke 10.37*) At some point it would be helpful to explain to a child that all the world's great religions teach something which Jesus lived out.
3. YOUR EXAMPLE: What example are you setting? Are you working on developing ways of being a compassionate person? What would a child observe from watching you? If you get irritated or annoyed do you express your displeasure in a respectful way? If someone wants help do you stop what you're doing to do so?
4. TLLC: Let a child know you care for them – show them loads of TLC C (Tender, Loving

Compassionate Care). How do you show that you are compassionate towards yourself?

5. TV: Talk about showing compassion when you see something on TV which might suggest a response (e.g. to a violent act can suggest anger, revenge – or compassion for all involved). Explain why it's important to be empathic and compassionate towards others (it shows our respect for them, it makes us more human; its opposites are destructive – something you can discuss with them: “do to others as you would have them do to you.” - *Sermon on the Mount: Luke 6. 31*) Jesus taught the importance of compassion (e.g. Good Samaritan, healing a leper – the excluded one .

6. VOLUNTEER your time. Show how you care in practical ways. (My mother used to take a meal to a lonely neighbour from time to time); go with your child to a charity shop when you're taking something there. Take part in a fun activity that might help others.

7. PETS can help – getting a child to care for them and showing care yourself. Children who care for pets learn important values such as responsibility, unconditional love, empathy, and compassion for all living things. Talk to them about why it's important to care for your pet. If they get bored gently explore what might happen and what might be the most compassionate action.

8. COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS: talk about the way those who express compassion are valued and respected and can become extraordinary friends, co-workers, spouses, and parents.

9. READ: encourage them to read about compassion – there's various suggestions online – and find books about caring, compassionate people (e.g. St Francis, Mother Theresa, Abp. Desmond Tutu...). Again there are plenty of suggestions around and St. Paul's Bookshops can be a good place to enquire.

10. INCLUDE THOSE EXCLUDED: show compassion towards those who are excluded because of their race, religion etc. Show concern for refugees both here and abroad. Explain that some newspapers and other outlets will try to stir up hatred and mistrust for these and other minorities and seek to exclude them.



There are further resources available at the website of the *Spiritual Association of the Compassionate Hearts of Jesus and Mary*: www.cchjm.org

