



# Toward a Better World

## Helping Children Make a Difference

*Toward a Better World: Helping Children Make a Difference* is a curriculum component of *The World at Their Fingertips*™ that supports and guides children's development of empathy, compassion, and social awareness.

Focused around fostering lifelong qualities of caring and understanding in children, *Toward a Better World* builds the accompanying desire to take action to make the world a better place.

*Toward a Better World* aims to widen children's visions of the world and encourage appreciation for the wider world where people may look, act, and talk differently, have more or less, live in different kinds of dwellings, or eat different foods. It offers children an opportunity to broaden their awareness and encourage caring, connection, and compassion for others. Children can engage in service opportunities at their center or school and through home activities and projects.

### Developing Social Awareness

Most of us know people in our lives, both adults and children, who have a deep sense of social consciousness and want to make the world a better place. Whether they have committed themselves to helping others, environmental change, political activism, or other community projects, many of these inspiring individuals work tirelessly for the greater good. How did these people come to take this course in their lives? Were they nurtured in this direction? What are the factors that help children develop empathy and caring? While we may not always know the definitive answers to these questions, parents and educators do share a common goal: *We want to raise empathetic and compassionate children.*

Empathy is the ability to move beyond ourselves and to recognize and care about the experiences of others. Developing awareness of the needs of others begins at home with the way we relate to our closest family members and friends. Our behavior, body language, words, and actions toward others are closely observed by children in their effort to learn how to be in the world. The capacity for empathy differs by age groups. For more information on age differences, visit [www.brighthorizons.com/betterworld](http://www.brighthorizons.com/betterworld).

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From Bright Horizons  
*Toward a Better World*  
curriculum component of  
*The World at Their Fingertips*



## Fostering Compassion

Research and practice offer us some guidance about ways to encourage empathy, caring, compassion, and social action in children:

- To learn to be caring, a child has to be nurtured and cared for first.
- Empathy requires seeing things from another's perspective. We know that children are initially egocentric and see the world from their perspective only. But, children as young as 18 months can demonstrate empathy.
- Children who are helped to understand feelings and the consequences of actions are more likely to develop empathy for others (i.e., "You hurt Michael. Look, he is crying. How might we help him feel better?")
- The adults in children's lives (family members, teachers, caregivers) are critical in the development of children's empathy. Modeling is powerful.
- Contrary to popular belief, children who are warmly welcomed by adults to show negative emotions like sadness and distress and helped to cope with these emotions tend to become more sympathetic and competent in social situations.
- Altruistic children are likely to be self-confident children who feel good about themselves. They have been nurtured by adults who model positive, caring behavior, give children appropriate responsibility, reward children's positive behaviors, use reasoning in discipline and encourage children early on to take responsibility for others.

- Validating caring behaviors by labeling these behaviors when they are exhibited by children is valuable (i.e., "I noticed that you gave your brother a hug when he fell off his bike.")
- Having opportunities to care for others helps build empathy and caring. This could be caring for other human beings, or caring for a pet gerbil or plants at home.

## Projects and Activities

Through *Toward a Better World*, Bright Horizons offers families ideas and opportunities to get involved and extend teachings beyond the classroom walls. These practices and projects are also part of daily life at Bright Horizons centers and schools. The four broad cornerstones are:

- Connecting and Caring Around the World
- Making the World a More Beautiful and Sustainable Place
- Volunteering and Supporting our Communities
  - ◆ Helping the Homeless and Hungry
  - ◆ Finding and Supporting Community Helpers
- Promoting Peace and Tolerance

For sample activities and related children's books in each area, visit [www.brighthorizons.com/betterworld](http://www.brighthorizons.com/betterworld).

