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Moral Development:
Raising Caring Kids

When he was six years old, Devon loved his teddy bear. His friend Amy didn't have a teddy bear and really liked Devon's, so Devon gave it to her. What made Devon willing to give away his much-loved toy? How did Devon learn to be generous and to care about Amy's feelings?

We all want our children to care about others, like Devon did. We want them to be kind and generous and know the difference between right and wrong. However, understanding how others feel and distinguishing between right and wrong require abstract thinking skills that very young children haven't yet developed. How soon can we reasonably expect them to care about others, and how can we help them while they're very young to begin to learn about right and wrong?

How to help children learn to care about others

- Model caring behavior; make sure your child consistently feels loved and cared for; help the child think about how his or her behavior affects others (how would you feel if someone did that to you?).

- Set limits so the child knows what is right; begin to talk about why certain things are right or wrong.

- Make sure the child's daily experiences include examples of the caring behavior you expect (family members, teachers, friends, media).

THE PENNSYLVANIA KEY

EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS!

Milestones in learning to care about others

- **0-12 months:** child begins to respond to parents' emotions (babies respond more to adults who are enthusiastic and happy); begins to understand give-and-take (when he smiles, mom smiles; when she cries, dad tries to make her feel better).

- **12-24 months:** child wants independence, but also shows concern when caregiver is unhappy; begins to learn about sharing.

- **24-36 months:** child becomes aware that hurting someone is wrong, and may feel some remorse.

- **3-4 years:** child is able to share more consistently; can think about a moral dilemma (what if…).

- **4-6 years:** child may want to share with people who don't have (like Devon did when he gave his teddy bear to Amy); understands fairness.

RESOURCES

Early Childhood Moral Development, by Angela Oswalt

For Families: 7 Tips for Raising Caring Kids. Making Caring Common Project. **http://bit.ly/2kuT4PS**

How to Raise a Caring Child. PBS. **https://to.pbs.org/2kSjkUp**

Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at **PAIECMH@pakeys.org** with questions or concerns.

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