

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *A Compassionate Response*

**W**HEN WE CALL PARENTS to say that another student has hurt their child, their response is often to ask if the other person was punished. This very human reaction stems from our protective instinct. We don't want an incident like it to happen again. Teachers feel the same way. They are extremely vigilant supervisors. They believe in consequences and put their whole hearts and minds into keeping their students safe and teaching them social skills that supplant the need for physical aggression.

Recently, when getting a call that his kindergarten daughter had been knocked down by another child in anger, the girl's father immediately offered a different kind of comment, saying, "I hope the other child is alright. He must be going through a hard time and need a lot of love right now." His statement provides important learning for us all about compassion.

We want children to stand up for themselves and to tell a teacher if anyone hurts them. However, we also want them to understand that other people often get angry because they're having a hard day or have some big challenge happening in their lives. The purpose of this learning isn't to excuse unacceptable behavior in others or to suppress their feelings of anger or hurt. We want their thinking to go a step further. As part of their life learning, we want them to begin to see the way moods and stress affect people. Those insights help them to predict others' reactions and understand their own upsets.

When children have a confrontation with someone else, they are likely to describe the person as being mean or unfair. It is important to validate children's feelings, but if we as adults agree with their assessment and demonize the other child, we hinder their learning.

We ask parents to extend compassion and care toward all the children in a class or in the school community, and this father's simple questions and concern exemplify that value.

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