**Weekly Tip – Kindness and Respecting Differences**

As parents we make sure our children learn how to read and write – and yet we often assume children will naturally develop skills like kindness and tolerance.

You wouldn’t think that you need to be teaching your child to be kind – but, like reading and writing –emotional intelligence doesn’t come naturally to all children.

There are some easy steps to build tolerance and kindness in your children.

**1. Model kind behavior.** Do you make fun of people? Do you treat your spouse, pets or even kids in a degrading fashion sometimes? The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. If you tell your child to be kind, but you are modeling negative, unkind behavior – your words will have little impact on their behavior. Children do as they see – not as you tell them to do. Talking to your child about the importance of embracing differences and treating others with respect is essential, but it's not enough. Your actions, both subtle and overt, are what they will emulate.

**2. Acknowledge Difference.**  Rather than teaching children that we are all the same, acknowledge the many ways people are different, and emphasize some of the positive aspects of our differences – language diversity and various music and cooking styles, for example. Likewise, be honest about instances, historical and current, when people have been mistreated because of their differences. Encourage your child to talk about what makes him different, and discuss ways that may have helped or hurt him at times. After that, finding similarities becomes even more powerful, creating a sense of common ground.

**3. Seize teachable moments.** Look for everyday activities that can serve as springboards for discussion. School-age children respond better to lessons that involve real-life examples than to artificial or staged discussions about issues. For example, if you're watching TV together, talk about why certain groups often are portrayed in stereotypical roles. When your child’s behavior is affecting those around them – point it out. Let your child know how they are affecting others without shaming them. An example might be something like, “You hit her and now she is so sad. Look at that mark you left. You wouldn’t want her to put a mark on you. I would be very upset with her if she hurt you. I love you both and don’t want either of you hurt.”

**4. Teach your children the joys of helping others.** Be an example for your children and help strangers, friends and family. Let them know that it feels good to help others – even if you get nothing back. Set up opportunities for you to help others as a family. Teach your child that even small acts of kindness go a long way. Express to your child why you are holding the door for another person, letting someone get in front of you in traffic or helping someone when their hands are full. Explain that it is nice to be helpful, even if the person doesn’t say thank you or appreciate it. You should give to give – not give to get.

**5. Emphasize the positive.**  Just as you should challenge your child's actions if they indicate bias or prejudice, it's important to praise him for behavior that shows respect and empathy for others. Catch your child treating people kindly, let her know you noticed and discuss why it's a desirable behavior.