

LISTENING WITH MY HEART

A DISCUSSION & ACTIVITY GUIDE



A NOTE TO PARENTS AND EDUCATORS:

In today's hypercompetitive world, kids often internalize the message that their worth is attached to their accomplishments and that messing up is something to be ashamed of, rather than a normal part of life, which can lead to critical self-talk. *Listening with My Heart* reminds us of the other golden rule—to treat ourselves like we'd treat a friend. When we do this, we are practicing self-compassion.

You can help your child cultivate self-compassion by:

Helping them become aware of their emotional experiences. You can encourage them to name what they are feeling and to pay attention to the physical sensations that accompany their feelings. Validate their experiences and let them know whatever they are feeling is okay.

Teaching them that disappointment, frustration, etc. are a part of growing up. It's important for children to understand that messing up and making mistakes is normal. This doesn't mean that they aren't responsible for their actions, but they can take responsibility in a kind, understanding way.

Helping them become aware of their self-talk when things don't go the way they wanted. Often, it's not so much the experience that is upsetting, but what we tell ourselves about it. Critical self-talk can leave us filled with shame, embarrassed or believing that we are not good enough. If you notice that this is happening with your child, you can ask them to think about what they would say to a friend who had the same experience. You can also help them find encouraging words or phrases that would feel comforting to them when they make mistakes.

Modeling self-compassion. Kids pay attention to how we deal with our own frustrations and shortcomings. Every mistake we make is an opportunity to model self-compassion.

The discussion questions in this guide are intended to facilitate reflection on the universal themes of friendship, empathy and kindness found in the book. The activities included provide an introduction to self-compassion practices that you can do as well. If they feel awkward or strange at first (to you or your child), it may be because they're new. That said, let your child be the guide who decides what feels most comfortable to them.

My own introduction, understanding and practice of self-compassion began by reading the work of Dr. Kristen Neff, a pioneer in self-compassion research and I offer my work with deep gratitude to her. You can visit her site self-compassion.org for more information and resources on self-compassion.

Warmly,

Gabi

LISTENING WITH MY HEART

Discussion Questions



How do Esperanza's feelings change over the course of the story?



How do you think Bao's feelings change?



What do you think being new to that school is like for Bao?



What would you do if you saw Bao sitting alone?



If you could talk to Esperanza after she runs off stage, what would you say to her?



How do you think you'd feel if that happened to you? What words do you think you'd like to hear after that experience?



Why do you think Esperanza is able to be kind and understanding towards others, but has difficulty doing the same for herself?



Is it easier to offer kindness to yourself or to others? Why do you think that is?



How do you think the comment from the other team's player impacted Esperanza?



What example of kindness, empathy and friendship are found in the story?



What do you think self-compassion means?



In what ways can you spread kindness and love into the world?



What does it mean to be a friend to yourself?



What does listening with your heart mean to you?

LISTENING WITH MY HEART

Think of a time when you demonstrated the traits below. What was it like for you?
Was there anything hard about it?

KINDNESS: The quality of being helpful, considerate, and understanding.

EMPATHY: Understanding how someone else is feeling so that you share the emotion and can put yourself in “their shoes”.

FRIENDSHIP: The state of being friends; showing kindness, interest and understanding.

SELF-COMPASSION: Showing kindness, empathy and understanding for yourself when you make mistakes, fail at something, or feel disappointed, embarrassed or any other difficult emotion.

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SELF-COMPASSION: Being A Friend to Myself

There can be a lot of pressure on kids to get the best grades, to do well in sports or to act or look a certain way. Do you ever feel this? Because of this pressure, some kids criticize themselves when they make mistakes or when things don't go the way they expect. Doing that doesn't feel good. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Instead, we can treat ourselves with the same **kindness, understanding** and **love** that we would show to someone we care for. When we do this, we are being a friend to ourselves, we are practicing **self-compassion**. Below are activities you can try that may help you be a friend to yourself when you need it.

Wrap your arms around yourself and give yourself a gentle hug. Take a few deep breaths and close your eyes if you'd like. Say these words to yourself:

When I feel sadness, may I treat myself like the friend I need.
May I show love and kindness to myself.

When I feel anger, may I treat myself like the friend I need.
May I show love and kindness to myself.

(Think of feelings you experience that are difficult for you and fill in the blank.)
When I feel _____, may I treat myself like the friend I need.
May I show love and kindness to myself.

Notice how this feels for you.

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What does it mean to be a friend to yourself? What can you do to practice being a friend to yourself? Draw a picture of yourself doing something that shows care and understanding for yourself.

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KIND WORDS FOR MYSELF

Self-talk refers to the conversations we all have with ourselves. When we make mistakes, fail at something, or feel disappointed, embarrassed or any other difficult emotion, our self-talk can be mean or hurtful. We can say things to ourselves that we would never say to others. But we change that. We can learn to be our own encouraging friend.

Place both hands over your heart. Notice your hands touching each other and touching your heart. Take a few deep breaths and close your eyes if you'd like.

What loving and understanding words or phrases would you like to hear when you're having a tough time or feeling upset? What would feel good or comforting to hear? Take some time and see what words or phrases come up for you. If this is hard, imagine what you'd say to a friend in this situation. Write your phrases below or in a notebook and read them to yourself whenever you need to hear them.

If it's hard to come up with your own phrases, below are some examples.

That didn't work out the way I wanted. I'm feeling disappointed.

This is hard for me. I'm having a tough time. It's okay to cry.

I'm feeling upset/ sad/ lonely/ (something else). It's okay to feel this way.

Everyone feels this way sometimes. I can be a friend to myself.

Everybody makes mistakes. I did the best I could. Everybody struggles at times.

I matter. My feelings matter.

LISTENING WITH MY HEART

GENTLE & SOOTHING TOUCH

Touch can feel good and help us feel calm. This is because our skin is very sensitive so gentle and soothing touch helps release chemicals in our body that make us feel good. Some examples of gentle or soothing touch include giving yourself a hug, placing both hands on your heart, placing one hand on your belly and the other on your heart or gently rubbing your cheek. You can try each one out and decide what feel good to you. Since most people don't do this very often, it may seem strange or different at first and may take time to get used to.

WE ARE ALL CONNECTED

Everyone messes up, makes mistakes and experiences difficult emotions-- it's normal. Everyone also wants to feel kindness and love. This is what connects us to each other.

Choose a soothing touch from above or place your hands on your lap. Take a few deep breaths and close your eyes if you'd like. Say these words to yourself:

I connect to myself through love and kindness.

I connect to others through love and kindness.

I connect to the world through love and kindness.

Notice how you feel after doing these activities. You can do them whenever you want. Listening with your heart feels good. It connects you to others and reminds you to be a friend to yourself. **It helps grow a more peaceful world.**

