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Parents urged to shape children's inner voice through compassion

South African families are being encouraged to prioritise compassion and emotional awareness in raising children, as these qualities shape how they see themselves and interact with the world.

Momentum Group's staff volunteering programme specialist, Patronella Sono, emphasises the powerful role of parenting in building empathy.

"Parenting is perhaps the most profound responsibility we carry," she said.

"Investing in emotional intelligence and kindness is not just about raising polite children; it is about building a generation equipped to solve problems and create meaningful change."

The language parents and caregivers use becomes internalised by children as their own internal voice.

When a child is told they are valued and that message is reinforced through genuine listening and attunement, they begin to believe they matter.

This belief becomes foundational to how they relate to themselves and others throughout their lives.

Sono explains: "The words we choose with our children are not merely fleeting moments of conversation; they become part of a child's psychological architecture, and balancing expectations with understanding helps children respond with compassion rather than criticism."

The early years, particularly primary school age, are identified as critical because the brain is highly neuroplastic, making this the most effective period to instil kindness, forgiveness and empathy.

She adds that children learn more from what they see than what they are told.

"The most effective way to instil compassion in children is not through lectures or rules; instead, it is shown through being the kind of person you wish your child to grow into."

Families are also encouraged to volunteer together, with Sono describing it as "a powerful learning laboratory" where children can see the real impact of helping others and develop a sense of purpose.

Moreover, compassion is contagious.

When children learn to be kind and empathetic, they carry these values into their peer groups, schools and eventually their workplaces and families.

Over time, this gradual accumulation of compassionate individuals builds more tolerant, cohesive communities.

Professor Tharina Guse, Head of the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria, supports this view, saying: "Kindness can enhance positive emotions, and it strengthens our social relationships."

Experts agree that teaching compassion early not only benefits individual well-being but also helps build more cohesive, caring communities in South Africa.



Momentum Group's staff volunteering programme specialist, Patronella Sono, gives parents insight on how to mentor their children to have compassion.

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