



Prevention Research Center

FOR THE PROMOTION OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

PEACE

(PROGRAM ON EMPATHY AWARENESS AND COMPASSION IN EDUCATION)

The Program on Empathy, Awareness and Compassion in Education (PEACE) was established in 2009 with the mission to promote health and well-being in children, youth, and families through the scientific understanding and promotion of awareness, compassion, and empathy. Program faculty, research associates and students engage in work that focuses on developing a strong multidisciplinary science in this emerging area. PEACE supports interdisciplinary scholarly activities ranging from theoretical essays to basic research on the development of awareness, compassion, and empathy, to the design and evaluation of interventions intended to foster these attributes in individuals and relationships.

The work of PEACE is guided by the central conviction that awareness, compassion, and empathy are core dimensions of human nature that contribute to personal development and wellness. Although the primary focus of PEACE is on the wellness of children and youth, we recognize that children are nurtured through relationships with parents, teachers, and other adults within the ecological contexts of families, schools, and communities. Awareness, compassion, and empathy are intrapersonal experiences that contribute to personal well-being and interpersonal experiences that nurture strong and life-enhancing relationships. Thus, promoting these qualities in caregivers within key developmental contexts (e.g., families, schools, etc.) is essential to promoting child well-being.

Background

Over the past decade, research on understanding and nurturing positive aspects of human experience has included an integration of Western and Eastern philosophical concepts such as mindfulness, awareness, compassion, and equanimity. These concepts describe psychological processes that can lead individuals to experience everyday life in a calmer, more balanced and peaceful way, thereby reducing emotional suffering, stress, and related poor health outcomes. Advances have included basic science studies of the associations between these attributes and individual well-being, neuroscience studies connecting these attributes to brain function, and intervention studies to help individuals cultivate their capacities for compassion, awareness, mindfulness, etc.

Interventions that nurture these abilities have shown promise for reducing psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. Such interventions also have reduced negative physical and psychological responses to stress and increased individuals' capacity for focus and attention. Further, nurturing awareness, compassion, and empathy has the potential to improve the quality of our relationships. While numerous centers on mind-

body health have developed at major universities, there has been little focus on children and youth or the cultivation of these attributes in the early and most malleable stages of development.

Center Goals

1. To conduct and support high-quality scholarship on compassion, awareness, and empathy and their associations with well-being in children, youth, and those who care for and educate them.
2. To develop and evaluate interventions to promote the development of compassion, awareness, and empathy within individuals and contexts.
3. To create a community of scientists and practitioners that value and support the development of these attributes in families, schools, and communities.
4. To disseminate scientific findings to support innovation in families, schools, and communities

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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