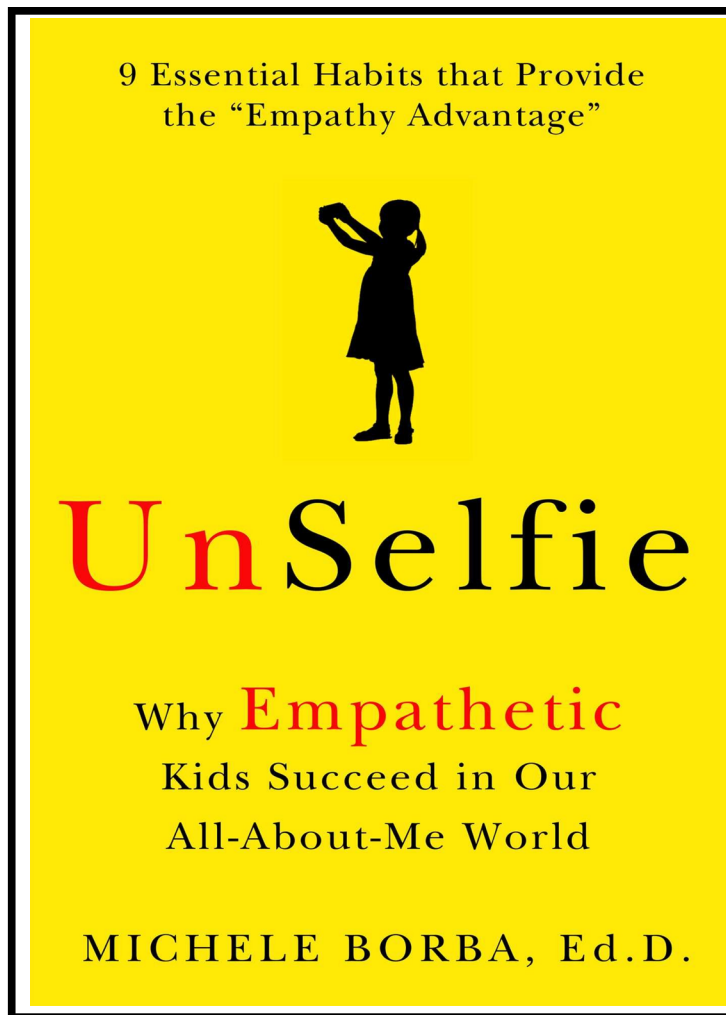


A Parent Discussion Guide For **UnSelfie**



**Created for Parents by Michele Borba
To Help Raise an UnSelfie Generation**

A book guide is also available for educators on how to implement empathy-building strategies in schools. See www.micheleborba.com for a free PDF and to contact Dr. Borba for speaking or media.

Facilitating an UnSelfie Parent Group



Teens today are 40 percent less empathetic than they were 30 years ago with dangerous implications for children. First, it hurts children's academic performance and leads to bullying behaviors. Also, it correlates with more cheating and less resilience as well as hampering their ability to collaborate, innovate, and problem-solve—all vital skills for the global economy. *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me-World*, pinpoints the forces causing the Empathy Crisis and shares a revolutionary, researched-based, nine-step parenting plan for reversing what Dr. Borba calls "the Selfie Syndrome." This guide is designed to help parents discuss how to apply the strategies in *UnSelfie* to raise empathetic, courageous, caring children with skills to thrive in a 21st century, digital-driven world.

How to Start a Book Group for UnSelfie

- Identify parents interested in forming a book club to discuss *UnSelfie*.
- Each member should order a copy of *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About Me World* by Michele Borba (Touchstone, 2016, ISBN: 978-1501110030 from your preferred retailer. It is available in hardbound, e-book or audio format.
- Determine the specific days, times, places and frequency for your group meeting.
- Assign a discussion leader or rotate the role at each discussion.
- Ask participants to read the chapter-to-be-discussed prior to each meeting.
- Use the questions provided to facilitate discussions. Some groups ask each participant to develop one question for each meeting. The key is to make your meetings meaningful for parents

4 Ways to Divide UnSelfie Discussion Content and Meeting Frequency

There are several ways to divide your discussion content. Here are four possibilities, but choose the number of total book sessions based on group consensus and needs.

1. **9 meetings discussing one chapter per month.** Most book clubs meet once a month and discuss a different chapter in *UnSelfie*. Since there are nine chapters, the meetings would take nine months total.
2. **Traditional book club-one meeting total.** Meet just once and discuss issues participants find most relevant.
3. **Two chapters per meeting; four meetings total.** You might divide *UnSelfie* into four sections and discuss two chapters at each meeting
4. **Three total sessions divided into how to Develop Empathy, Practice Empathy and Live Empathy:** The first meeting would discuss How to Develop Empathy (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4); Session two: How to Practice Empathy (Chapters 5, 6, 7); Session three: How to Live Empathy (Chapters 8, 9).

NOTE: Page numbers in the e-book format may differ from this guide designed for the hardcopy of UnSelfie.

How to Teach Kids the Empathy Skills and Habits in UnSelfie

Dozens of empathy-building skills are provided in *UnSelfie* and boxed areas of each chapter discussion. Parents should choose those deemed important for their children. Use this model to teach each skill.

1. **SHOW.** A skill is learned best if you *show* (not tell or lecture) what it looks like. So model it for the child! Point it out in context. Provide examples so the child can see it and copy it.
2. **ROLE PLAY.** Role play the skill with the child so he understands what it looks like in action.
3. **PRACTICE.** Skills are learned best through repetition and generally take around 21 days of practice to be mastered. Find various ways for the child practice the skill.
4. **REINFORCE OR CORRECT.** Correct any errors in context and praise your child's skill-building efforts.
5. **STEP BACK.** Once your child has mastered the skill and can use it without your guidance, teach the next empathy-builder and then the next and the next!

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS



INTRODUCTION: The Hidden Advantage of Empathy

Corresponds to pages xi to xxi in *Unselfie*

1. What about *UnSelfie* peaked your interest? What do you hope to gain from these discussions?
2. How would you answer: “What do children really need to be happy and successful in today’s world?” (pg xiii). Do you believe empathy is integral to children’s future success happiness and well-being? Despite science, why do many think empathy to be a soft skill?
3. Teens today are 40 percent less empathetic than thirty years ago. Have you seen a change in your child or his friends’ character and behavior that might indicate the Selfie Syndrome? (pg xiv).
4. *UnSelfie* describes several factors that contribute to the Empathy Deficit. Which cultural factors/parenting styles do you think affect kids’ empathy capacities? Which factors can parents really control?
5. Step into the shoes of today’s kids: What *invisible* and *visible* messages would you see about our our culture? Are they ones that would nurture an empathy and help to produce a generation of “Unselfies” or are more likely to exacerbate the Selfie Syndrome?
6. Which of the nine essential habits do you feel are most crucial for today’s 21st century kids? Which habits are you instilling in your child? Which might you be overlooking? (pg xix)
7. How could parents teach empathy habits in such a way that their children master them and no longer need our reminders? How might you network with other parents to cultivate children’s empathy?
8. What skills will our children need to succeed in the global economy when jobs of tomorrow don’t exist today? What should parents be doing to prepare kids for a world of rapid change?
9. How would you define an “Unselfie world?” What would an empathetic family, school, community, nation look and sound like? How do we create empathy in those teachable parent-child moments?
10. What behaviors would adults display in an empathetic culture? What often is your child seeing adults model courage, empathy and compassion? How often does your child see *you* model empathy?
11. What is your hope in cultivating empathy in your children?

9 EMPATHY HABITS

1. Emotional Literacy
2. Moral Identity
3. Perspective Taking
4. Moral Imagination
5. Self-Regulation
6. Practicing Kindness
7. Collaboration
8. Moral Courage
9. Altruistic Leadership

PART I: DEVELOPING EMPATHY



Chapter 1. Empathetic Children Can Recognize Feelings

1st EMPATHY HABIT: Teaching emotional literacy to help children recognize and understand the feelings and needs of others

Corresponds to pages 3 to 24 in *Unselfie*

Emotional literacy is what motivates a child to care, and it all starts by tuning in to feelings. Identifying, understanding, and expressing emotions are the skills kids need to activate empathy. It turns out that kids schooled in feelings are smarter, nicer, happier and are resilient than children who are less literate in their Emotional ABCs (page 7), and it is a teachable habit.

- Common Sense Media finds that the average child is plugged into digital devices about nine hours a day. What impact does a digital devices have on kids’ empathy? How do you know if your family is “too plugged in?”
- What ways can parents reclaim conversation with children in a digital-driven world? Pages 18-20 lists ways to set digital limits. How are you setting limits? How do we help children develop healthy

relationships with peers, especially when face-to-face contact is breaking down and the internet is meaner?

- One study found that 62 percent of kids said their *parents* were too plugged in (page 10). How would your kids describe your digital habits? How can parents set a better example for their kids?
- Why was Mary Gordon’s Roots of Empathy approach (page 3) successful in increasing children’s empathy? What are real, meaningful ways to help your child experience empathy?
- Mothers are more likely to discuss emotions with daughters than sons. What impact does it have on boys? Do you notice the tendency in your friends or yourself? What will you do to reduce the pink-blue emotion divide?
- Tuning in to feelings is an essential part of good parenting and lays the groundwork for developing close relationships with our kids. How could developing empathy enhance your relationship with your child? How can parents cultivate their empathy so they model empathy to their children?
- Emotional literacy is cited as a key to motivating kids to care. What ways can you help your digital native understand feelings and tune into others (pg 20-24)?

EMPATHY SKILLS TO BOOST EMOTIONAL LITERACY

1. **4T Rule: No Texting, Tapping, Talking on a cell or TV viewing when others are present** (pg 17): To tune in to emotions and not let digital devices hinder face-to face connections.
2. **Always Look at the Color of the Talker’s Eyes** (pg 17): To pick up on facial expressions, voice tone, and emotional cues.
3. **Name the Feeling, Pose Questions that Tune In To Feelings or Match the Word with the Gesture** (pg 17): To build a feeling vocabulary and help children recognize feelings and needs of others.

Chapter 2: Empathetic Kids Have Moral Identities

2nd EMPATHY HABIT: Developing an ethical code so children will adopt caring values that guide their integrity and activity empathy to help others

Corresponds to pages 25 to 46 in *UnSelfie*

- How have cultural values changed that might affect today’s children’s character? What factors are increasing narcissism? (pg 28). Do you see a rise in youth entitlement? If so, why?
- Our messages help “deposit prosocial images in our children’s identity banks so they can define themselves as caring, responsible people who value others’ thoughts and feelings” (pg 27). What kinds of daily actions can parents do to nurture positive Moral Identities in their children?
- Why do “two-thirds of adolescents rank their own personal happiness as more important than their goodness?” (pg 27). What are you doing to help your child recognize the value of caring?
- How can parents help their children find their “respectful voice” (pg 42) in a disrespectful world?
- How we praise helps kids define the type of people they believe themselves to be. Wrong praise can increase narcissism. How might you use the science-backed strategies (pg 33)?
- How do you think your child would describe your family’s values? What do you hope your child would say? How could you apply the steps to “Creating a Caring Family Mantra” (pg 38)?
- Page 42 asks: “If I were the only example my child had to learn Moral Identity, what did she learn today?” How can parents tune up their behavior to exemplify social responsibility and caring?

EMPATHY SKILLS TO BOOST MORAL IDENTITY

1. **How to REFUSE Temptations** (pg 36-37): To buck peer pressure and stick up for beliefs.
2. **“Is that me?” tests** (pg 43): To stick to moral identity and conscience in trying times.
3. **Self-Talk** (pg 43): To counter taunts and adhere to personal code of ethics.
4. **The KIND Rule** (pg 44): To guide inner moral compass both online and off.

Chapter 3. Empathetic Kids Understand the Needs of Others

3rd EMPATHY HABIT: Instilling perspective taking so children can step into others' shoes to understand another's feelings, thoughts and views

Corresponds to pages 47 to 72 in *UnSelfie*

- Do you agree (pg 49): 'Children's empathy is sparked by active face-to-face experiences-not lectures'? Can you recall a teacher's lesson that helped you understand another's perspective? If so, why was it memorable? How can you provide such authentic experiences for your child?
- Page 70 states: "It's easier for children to empathize with people they know, or are similar to, so widen your child's perspective by exposing him to people of different backgrounds." How could you widen your children's Social Hubs so they are more likely to empathize with people who are "different" or "not like them?" What are you doing to broaden your child's empathy horizons?
- Science finds that discipline can stretch or shrink children's perspective taking abilities (pg 50-60). Where on the 'stretch or shrink' spectrum would you say your discipline practices fall? Which practices do you believe parents should use to nurture empathy? Are they different from how you were raised?
- Which age-by-age strategy would you consider using or adapting (pg 65-70) to expand your children's perspective taking abilities? What other strategies might you consider?

EMPATHY SKILLS TO BOOST PERSPECTIVE TAKING.

1. **SOLER** (pg 61): Five key listening skills to boost empathy and paying attention to the other.
2. **Look and Listen for the Emotion** (pg 61): Playing detective to look and listen for the feeling.
3. **Put Yourself in Their Shoes** (pg 62): To imagine the other person's perspective
4. **Describe Their Side** (pg 62): To paraphrase a speaker's perspective and increase empathy.
5. **"I Wonder"** (pg 66): To stretch perspective taking when encountering someone new.

Chapter 4. Empathetic Kids Have a Moral Imagination

4th EMPATHY HABIT: Instilling a moral imagination so kids can use literature, films and emotionally-charged images as a source of inspiration to feel with others

Corresponds to pages 95 to 118 in *UnSelfie*

- "Books can be portals to understanding other worlds and other views to helping our children be more open to differences and cultivate new perspectives." Which books were your childhood favorites? Which resonate with your child? Were you surprised (pg 78-80) on the power of literary fiction to activate empathy? How can you find books that pull your child's heart strings?
- Posing the right questions can help kids vicariously step into someone else's place. What strategies (pg 80) might help your child see the world from other perspectives?
- Around eight is when kids generally stop reading for enjoyment, and also when we typically stop reading aloud to them. How can you use the ideas (page 86-87) to instill in your child a greater love of reading?
- Have you considered starting a "Parent-Child Book Club?" If so, how would you start?
- Which age-by-age strategy (or others) intrigued your interest (pg 88-91)?

EMPATHY SKILLS TO BOOST MORAL IMAGINATION.

1. **Ask "What If?"** (pg 84): To think about a character from the child's perspective.
2. **"How Would You Feel?"** (pg 84): To help reflect as to whether the child shared similar experience.
3. **Switch 'Me' to 'You':** (pg 85): To switch from "me" thinking to "we" thinking.

PART TWO: PRACTICING EMPATHY



Chapter 5. Empathetic Children Can Keep Their Cool

5th EMPATHY HABIT: Mastering self-regulation to help children learn to manage strong emotions and reduce personal distress so they can help others

Corresponds to pages 95 to 118 in *UnSelfie*

- Research says that self-control is a better predictor of adult wealth, health and happiness than grades or IQ? Do you agree? If so, why? Are today's children being raised to have self-control?
- Are you noticing a change in children's (and adults) ability to regulate their self-control? If so, what do you attribute the increase? How well do your children manage their emotions?
- What are you doing to help your children learn habits of self-regulation?
- *UnSelfie* describes approaches that nurture children's self-regulation (like stress-management, yoga, meditation, mindfulness). Did any interest you? Have you considered a Parent-Child Yoga group?
- Schools are embracing mindfulness practices (pg 106-108). Would you consider adopting the approach in your home? How might you start? Are there ways you might join other parents (such as in playgroups, scouting, play dates) to teach self-regulation practices to your children together?
- Which age-by-age strategy (pg 106-116) would you consider using with your children? What other self-regulation strategies have you tried? How would you know if they worked?

EMPATHY SKILLS TO BOOST SELF-REGULATION

1. **Just Breathe** (pg 110, 113): To learn mindful breathing and increase self-regulation abilities.
2. **Belly Breathing** (pg 111): To learn breath control to create an instant relaxation response.
3. **Learn a Cool Down Strategy (Imagine a Calm Place, Self-Talk, or 1 + 3 + 10)** (pg 113-114): To adopt a self-regulation habit when stress kicks in.
4. **Gratitude Breathing** (pg 114-115): To use mindful breathing to increase compassion and gratitude.

Chapter 6. Empathetic Children Practice Kindness

6th EMPATHY HABIT: Developing and exercising compassion to increase children's concern about the welfare and feelings of others

Corresponds to pages 119 to 140 in *UnSelfie*

- Did Harvard's survey (pg 124) as to the values teens deem "most important" surprise you? What values would your child say matter? Do you agree that "achievement and success" are trumping "kindness and character"? (pg 124) How can parents help kids realize that kindness matters?
- Do you agree that kindness can be stretched like a muscle? Why do many parents think that kindness is a fixed trait? How can you help your child practice kindness (such as on pg 129-135)?
- Jessica and Mark initiated Secret Kindness Buddies (pg 136) to focus on kindness and giving. Are there other family rituals (such as those on pg 135-139) you would like to try with your kids?
- "Kids learn kindness best through example" (pg 134). If your child had only your example to watch, would he catch kindness? How can parents be more intentional about modeling kindness?
- Were you surprised by the findings on random acts of kindness studies with children (pg 127)? How could you apply Sonja Lyubomirsky's findings with your family? (A few ideas: pg 129-132).
- What books and films help kids understand kindness? How could parents share selections amongst so more children can be exposed to their messages about kindness?
- Is starting a Kid Kind Club (pg 139) something you might consider? If so, how might you begin?

EMPATHY SKILLS TO CULTIVATE KINDNESS

1. **The Two Kind Rule** (pg 132): To help children practice kindness and expand their kindness muscles. *This skill has five steps; teach each step separately).*
2. **Kindness Rituals** (pg 136-139). To practice kindness and help children adopt a caring mindset.

Chapter 7. Empathetic Kids Think “Us” Not “Them”

7th EMPATHY HABIT: Cultivating collaboration to active empathy and help children work with others to achieve shared goals for the benefit of all

Corresponds to pages 141 to 168 in *Unselfie*

- How has the decline of unstructured play affected childhood? How much free time does your child have to learn collaborative skills?
- How might parents join forces to use the cooperative game ideas (pg 163), mix up the social scene (pg 162) or movie nights (pg 162) to boost their children’s cooperative skills?
- How are you strengthening your child’s collaborative skills (like playgroups, team membership, family meetings)? What family projects (pg 164) might help your family work together?
- How could you use the Family Meetings (pg 154) to polish your child’s social-emotional skills?
- How has stiff competition affected empathy (pg 148)? Are you more likely to praise “the win” or your child’s “camaraderie” (pg 162)? How can parents help kids grasp that teamwork counts?
- We empathize with those “like us.” How can you expand your child’s Circle of Concern (pg 150)?
- What community resources might you use to expose your child to more diversity? How do we help children understand racism and injustice happening in the world?

EMPATHY SKILLS TO BOOST COLLABORATION.

1. **Take a “STAND” to Solve Problems** (pg 155): To learn to solve problems peacefully and consider other people’s feelings and needs. *Each of the five steps should be taught as a separate habit.*
2. **Take a Reality Check** (pg 158): To learn to listen for categorical statements and halt stereotypes.
3. **Encouragers** (pg 163): To support others, inspire collaboration and be a team player.
4. **FACT Conversation Starters** (pg 161): To start dialogues, build relationships and focus on others.
5. **Disagreeing Respectfully** (pg 163): To learn to disagree respectfully and keep communication open.
6. **Decision Makers and Deal Breakers** (pg 163): To resolve conflicts and boost cooperation.

PART THREE - LIVING EMPATHY



Chapter 8. Empathetic Kids Stick Their Necks Out

8th EMPATHY HABIT: Promoting moral courage to embolden kids to speak out, step in and help others

Corresponds to pages 169 to 190 in *Unselfie*

- Which parenting styles curtail or strengthen children’s moral courage? How does over-rescuing or a helicopter style impede? What is your style? If you are in a rescue mode, how might you step back?
- The story of Rocky Lyon (pg 178) describes how a parent helped her child find his inner hero. How are you helping your child develop moral courage? What else might you do (pg 180)?
- Which of the five reasons curtails your child and peers from helping bullied peers (pg 172)? What

can parents do so kids feel more comfortable coming to you or other adults for help?

- What family courage ritual could you use to empower your child to face setbacks (pg 189)?
- How can parents help children be more likely to step in to help or comfort others?
- Kids need heroes to inspire their Moral Courage. Who are your child's heroes?
- Which books or films could help kids learn to stick their necks out for others (pg 188)? Are you interested in starting a book club (pg 188) with your child's friends and parents?
- Which moral courage builders might you use (pg 183-189) with your child? How could parents join forces to help children learn Upstander strategies?

EMPATHY SKILLS TO BOOST MORAL COURAGE

1. **STANDUP for Others** (pg 181-182): To mobilize moral courage and step in to reduce bullying. *Each strategies should be taught as a separate habit.*
2. **Positive Self Talk** (pg 183): To override the fear response and build moral courage.
3. **Mental Rehearsal** (pg 183): To use visualization in reviewing an activity so reduce stress.
4. **Chunk It** (pg 183): To set goals in extremely short chunks to reduce stress.
5. **2-3-4 Breathing or Dragon Breaths** (pg 184): To get oxygen to the brain for instant relaxation.
6. **Use Your HEART:** To help those who are distressed. *Each strategy should be taught as habit.*
7. **S.O.S. Safety Smarts** (pg 187): To avert danger and decide if it's safer to step in or wiser to get help.

Chapter 9. Empathetic Kids Want to Make a Difference

9th EMPATHY HABIT: Cultivating altruistic leadership abilities to motivate children to make a difference for others and become Changemakers

Corresponds to pages 191 to 214 in Unselfie

- Do you believe that empathy is something kids are born with or a trait that can be developed? How could that answer have a surprising impact on whether children become Changemakers? (pg 201).
- Does your child (or you) believe that empathy is something you're born with or something that can be developed? How can you use the steps (pg 201-202) to teach your child that empathy stretches?
- Do you agree that fame-driven "heroes," a materialistic world, and an over-helping parenting style can limit a child's altruistic potential (pg 195-198)? What else can shortchange altruistic urges?
- How might you use the Perlyn's six steps (p 205) to help your child become a Changemaker?
- What community resources might offer meaningful service opportunities for your child?
- How might you use the eight strategies (pg 208-211) to help your child develop altruistic leadership?
- How could you stretch your child's comfort zone to include "different" experiences (pg 212)?
- How can parents work together to raise kids who want to better the world?

EMPATHY SKILLS TO BOOST ALTRUSITIC LEADERSHIP.

1. **FACE** (pg 203): To show concern and close the empathy gap. *Each skill should be taught separately.*
2. **ABCs of Stress Management** (pg 211): To cope with emotional distress and fight the empathy gap.
3. **Start With One** (pg 208): To build self-efficacy and realize "I can make a difference."

MICHELE BORBA, Ed.D., is an internationally renowned educational psychologist and an expert in parenting, bullying, and character development. She is an award-winning author of 22 books including *Unselfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World* translated into 14 languages. She is a regular NBC contributor who has appeared over 140 times on *Today* and has been featured on *Dateline*, *The View*, *Dr. Phil*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Fox & Friends*, *Dr. Oz*, and *The Early Show*, among others. Follow her on Twitter @micheleborba

To contact Dr. Borba for a speech or media: www.micheleborba.com