

I SEE YOU



CARE

One for baby. One for bear.

I see you share.





Grab a broom. Clean it up.
I see you care.

FOUR TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

Sawubona is the Zulu word for “hello.” It literally means *I see you*. When I first learned this, I instantly thought about the relationship between parents and children—or between any caregiver and the little ones they love.

Everyone needs to be *seen*—especially toddlers, who crave the loving attention of the adults in their lives. When we say “I see you” to toddlers, whether by our words or by our actions, what we are really saying is: “I’m paying attention to you. You are important to me. I like you just the way you are.”

Here are four ways you can communicate “I see you care” to the young children in your life.

1. Name What You See

When you notice toddlers caring for their family, friends, pets, home, or community, name what you see. This helps them learn that caring behavior is important. You might say: “You shared your toy with your baby brother! That was really kind.” “You are petting the kitten so gently.” “Your hugs make me so happy inside.”

2. Acknowledge Them as “Helpers”

It’s really appealing to toddlers to be viewed as capable and responsible by the adults in their lives. In fact, in a 2014 study published in *Journal of Child Development*, researchers Christopher Bryan, Allison Master, and Gregory Walton asked children between the ages of three and six to perform a variety of tasks. Children who were asked to be “helpers” were more responsive to the requests than those who were asked simply to “help.” Why? Toddlers are building their self-image—answering the question “Who am I?” Being acknowledged as helpers is motivating for them. So share your gratitude for the little helpers in your life.

3. Give Them Age-Appropriate Responsibilities

Since toddlers can find real satisfaction in being helpers, let them help care for their home, learning area, and community! You can teach them how to pick up toys, put their dirty clothes in the hamper, sort clean laundry (find all the socks!), set napkins on the table for dinner, and water plants. When having toddlers help, it’s important to keep your expectations realistic—they won’t always do tasks just right, they may get bored partway through, and their help can make some tasks take longer. They may even undo your work in their efforts (dropping the stack of neatly folded dishtowels). Stay patient and keep giving them opportunities to lend a hand; their helping skills will grow with time and practice.

4. Encourage Empathy

Empathy is a skill. It requires a toddler to imagine how someone else is feeling and then respond. It’s also something that takes time to develop. You can help foster this skill by talking with toddlers about other people’s feelings and encouraging them to respond with kindness and care. This can be as simple as:

- “Yes, the baby is crying. Do you think she might be hungry or tired?”
- “Oh, your friend looked so happy when you gave them a flower!”
- “That little boy dropped all his crayons and looks sad. Let’s go help him pick them up.”

When we take time to notice all the ways toddlers show they care, we let them know that kindness is important—and that’s a message we all need to hear!

