

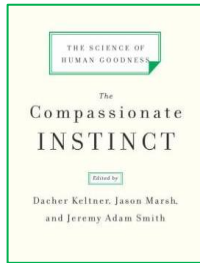
MES Weekly Update

from the Superintendent of Schools

Week of August 31, 2026



Marlborough Elementary School Vision: *To inspire wonder, awe, and curiosity and to motivate young minds to embrace learning.*

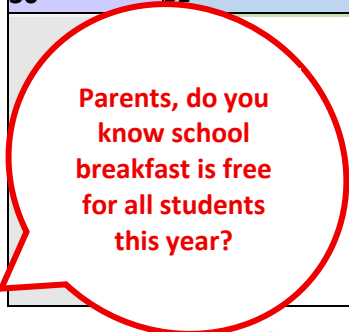


Research suggests that compassionate behavior not only exemplifies a good, moral way to live, but carries **great emotional and physical benefit** for compassionate people, their families, and their communities. More and more, it seems that rather than being irrational and superfluous, behaviors like compassion and kindness are actually conducive to human survival – and essential to human flourishing.

From the introduction to *The Compassionate Instinct* by Keltner, Marsh, and Smith

Read Chapter 1 from the book later in this week's Update.

This Week

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30	31	September 1	2	3	4	5
		Board of Selectmen Town Hall 7:00 PM		Coffee with the Superintendent 8:30 – 10:00 AM  MES Instrumental Music Night 5:30 PM 	 National Food Bank Day	



Attention all parents: Don't be shy about dropping in any time from **8:30-10:00 AM on Thursday, September 3 for Coffee and Chat with Superintendent**. Come in for coffee and stay for the chat. Or, take the coffee, say hello, and run off.

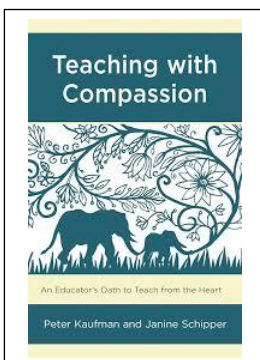
Ask a question, make a comment, leave a suggestion!

If you cannot make it this Thursday, the next scheduled coffee is Thursday, September 17. However, you are welcome to sit down with the Superintendent at your convenience, too. Reach out – psmith@marlborough.k12.ct.us.

Note: No taxpayer dollars used for coffee, cups, cream, sugar, or stirrers.

Compassion Matters!

Compassion matters in education. Compassion serves as the foundation of our educational goals and programming. Optimal learning takes place in a compassionate setting. Disciplinary issues are reduced in compassionate schools. A more positive and robust school climate prevails in a culture of compassion. Compassion helps produce resilient students who are better equipped to handle challenges, both academic and personal. And, compassionate students foster a supportive environment where everyone feels valued and included.



Book recommendation:

Teaching with Compassion: An Educator's Oath to Teach from the Heart.

By Kaufman and Schipper



Great article at NIEER website, too.
Teaching (with) empathy and compassion in schools



September/October 2026

Send information on school sponsored events to psmith@marlborough.k12.ct.us for inclusion.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	NO SCHOOL Labor Day 	 MES Building Committee MES Library 6:30 PM			 Rosh Hashanah begins in the Evening	
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Uncle Sam Day  	MES PTO MES Library 6:30 PM RHAM Board of Education @ RHAM Middle 6:30 PM	Board of Selectmen Town Hall 7:00 PM	National Guacamole Day 	Coffee with the Superintendent 8:30 – 10:00 AM  	EARLY DISMISSAL Professional Development	
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
 Yom Kippur begins in the Evening	 Board of Finance Town Hall 6:30 PM			BOE Policy Subcommittee MES Library 5:45 PM Marlborough Board of Education MES Library 6:30 PM		 Stay Unplugged for 24 Hours!
27	28	29	30	October 1	2	3
				 MES Open House Evening 6:00 PM	World Smile Day 	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	MES PTO MES Library 6:30 PM	Board of Selectmen Town Hall 7:00 PM		National Fluffernutter Day 	NO SCHOOL Professional Development Start of Columbus Day Long Weekend	



Education trends – and it's all about A.I. (See my warning in the last paragraph...)

Recently, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED) released their report on trends in education worldwide. From their report:

Trends Shaping Education is a triennial report examining major economic, political, social, technological and trends affecting education. This report is designed to give policy makers, researchers, educational leaders, administrators, and teachers a robust, non-specialist source of international comparative trends shaping education, whether in early childhood education and care, schools, vocational education and training, higher education or lifelong learning programs. While the trends are robust, the questions raised in this report are more suggestive – they aim to stimulate creativity in reflecting on the challenges facing education and encourage strategic foresight and action today.

As anticipated one of the major trends has to do with AI. From their report:

Learning in an AI-driven world

Technological advancements are rapidly transforming most aspects of our lives, including education and the workforce. Frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT) and virtual reality (VR) are developing rapidly, offering solutions to global challenges like climate change, food security and public health. **These innovations are already changing how we work, learn and communicate...**

- **AI in the workforce:** The integration of AI and other advanced technologies is reshaping the labor market, automating many tasks, and creating new ones that require different skill sets. AI is also expanding the capacity of robots to work with humans in different fields, meaning that more of us will work collaboratively with intelligent machines in the years to come. **How can education systems ensure individuals are prepared for the jobs of the future and foster lifelong learning to keep pace with technological advancements?**
- **AI in education:** AI has the potential to revolutionize education itself by providing personalized learning experiences, automating administrative tasks, and **supporting teachers in identifying students' needs**. Immersive technologies like VR are already commonly used to teach technical skills in areas like medicine and are also being explored for developing softer skills like empathy. However, the implementation of these technologies in education also raises concerns about data privacy, equity, and the potential for bias. How can education systems leverage AI and other frontier technologies to **enhance learning while addressing these ethical and practical challenges?**
- **Digital literacy and responsible use:** As digital technologies become more pervasive, there is a growing need for digital literacy to navigate the complexities of the digital world. This includes **understanding how to use AI responsibly and ethically**. How can education best equip students with the skills to critically evaluate digital content, protect their privacy, and use technology in ways that enhance their learning and well-being? How can curricula be designed to integrate digital literacy and promote responsible use?
- **Health and well-being:** Advances in AI and technology offer new opportunities to support health and well-being. AI can enhance the precision of mental health diagnoses and treatment options, while VR aids in managing phobias, anxiety, and social isolation. Assistive technologies also provide valuable support to individuals with disabilities and chronic health conditions. Education systems can leverage these technologies to provide comprehensive support for students and staff. **How can schools ensure that AI and other technologies are used to promote health and well-being, while addressing emerging mental health challenges related to excessive use of digital devices?**
- **Equity and access:** The digital divide remains a significant barrier to the equitable use of AI and technology. Ensuring that all students have access to the necessary tools and resources is crucial for fostering an inclusive educational environment. How can education systems address the digital divide and **ensure that the benefits of AI and technology extend to all learners?**

A concerning divide is emerging. Though it is my opinion only, students in certain communities will be well prepared to use AI effectively, recognize and avoid its pitfalls, and apply those skills in future careers. Students in communities that overlook AI-related learning may struggle, especially as success increasingly depends on the ability to adapt to rapid advances in technology.

The most pressing issue for schools is to decide where they now stand on training students and teachers to use AI to capitalize on this new learning as AI brings changes the workforce – and ultimately to what and how we teach.

Read information on Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Teaching and Learning.

For more, visit **Artificial Intelligence in Education** published by UNESCO, the United Nations Organization that promotes cooperation in education, science, culture, and communication to foster peace worldwide.

Your pictures are needed for the yearbook

The MES yearbook will be as good as the pictures that are provided. Please volunteer and share your photos!

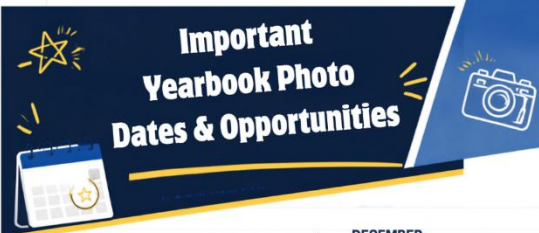
Help Capture the Year!

We are looking for parent volunteers to help take photos throughout the year for the yearbook.

Your photos help tell our school story!



Important Yearbook Photo Dates & Opportunities



SEPT 3RD— INSTRUMENTAL NIGHT 5:30PM-6:30PM	DECEMBER— CCMC PJ DAY SING ALONG
SEPT 21ST— 25TH: BOOK FAIR	JANUARY— WOLFPACK GAME
OCT 29 TH — MULTICULTURAL ASSEMBLY	FEBRUARY— READ ALOUD DAY 100TH DAY AFTERSCHOOL CLUBS
OCT 23RD— TRUNK OR TREAT	MARCH— READ ACROSS AMERICA DAY INVENTION CONVENTION
DEC 8 TH — CHORUS/BAND CONCERT 6PM-7PM	APRIL— FUN RUN
FEB 25 TH — AUTHOR VISIT	
MARCH 12 TH — MEA PASTA DINNER	
APRIL 6 TH — BAND CONCERT	
APRIL 8 TH — MULTICULTURAL ASSEMBLY	

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR:
RECESS/LUNCH
CLASSROOM TIME -
20 PHOTOS/CANDID GRADE LEVEL

OTHERS:
FUTURE PROBLEM SOLVERS
STUDENT COUNCIL
MYAL TEAM PHOTOS
NETTO SOCCER PHOTOS
FIELD TRIPS

Keep this flyer handy all year long!

We'd love for you to be part of our yearbook team!

If you're interested in helping out, please contact **Jamie Smigel**
text (860) 759-9310 or email us at marlboroughctyearbook@gmail.com

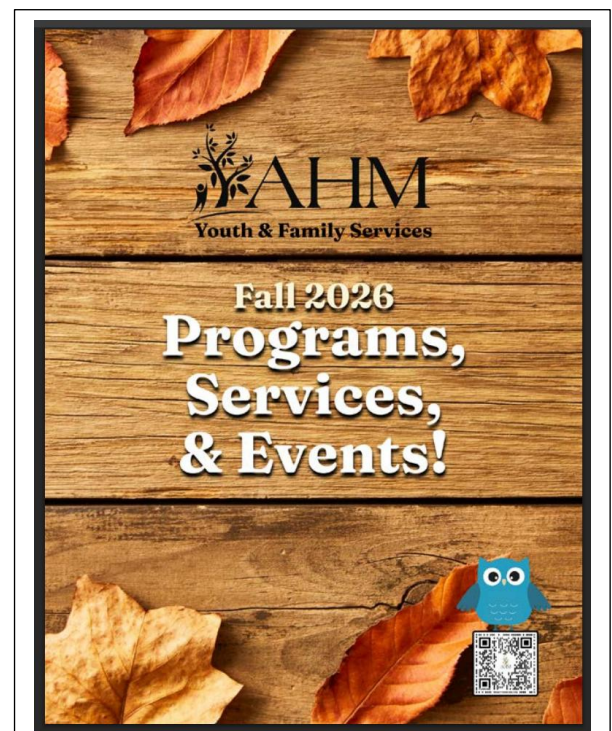
An impressive resource for MES families

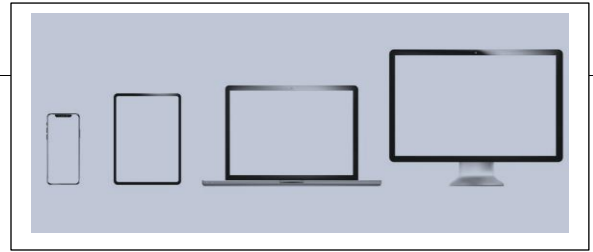


AHM is a Youth Service Bureau and Family Resource Center offering intervention, prevention, positive youth development, and student support services. In addition to its main office at 25 Pendleton Drive in Hebron, AHM provides satellite offices and programs in our local schools in Andover, Columbia, Hebron, Marlborough, and RHAM.

[Visit their website by clicking here.](#)

[Click for an extensive list of their Fall programs.](#)





Your day, measured in inches:

Wake up staring at a 6.7" screen.

Work on a 16" screen.

Relax with a 55" screen.

Fall asleep staring at a 6.7" screen.

The average person now checks their phone 96 times a day. Once every 10 minutes.

Here's how to take your day back, according to the research.

First, drop the self-blame.

A 2020 USC study found the biggest predictor of lasting behavior change wasn't motivation or willpower. It was repetition and environment. Thousands of engineers spent years making that screen hard to put down.

So redesign your environment instead.

1. Name the feeling.

Reaching for your phone is rarely about the phone. It's emotional first aid for boredom, stress, or loneliness.

Before you unlock it, ask: "What am I avoiding right now?" Research on affect labeling shows that naming an emotion weakens its grip.

2. Make your usage impossible to miss.

Harvard's Teresa Amabile found that what fuels daily motivation is visible progress. The reverse is also true: invisible costs undermine your drive.

Put a Screen Time widget on your home screen. See the number every time you unlock.

3. Convert your phone from a casino to a toolbox.

Delete the apps built for endless scrolling. Keep the ones built for finishing a task: maps, messages, banking, calendar, notes.

A tool helps you complete something. A casino keeps you playing.

4. Add 20 seconds of friction.

Charge it in another room. Use a timed lockbox during deep work.

Twenty seconds of inconvenience beats two hours of resolve. Every time.

5. Replace the break.

In my book "When," I found the most restorative breaks share four common elements: moving beats sitting, outside beats inside, with someone beats alone, and fully detached beats half-checking.

A walk with a friend is the anti-scroll.

6. Recruit a witness.

Pick one person. Share your weekly screen time every Sunday. Discuss what triggered you and what you'll adjust. Behavior watched is behavior changed.

One last thing.

For my book "The Power of Regret," I collected more than 26,000 regrets from people in 134 countries. Not one person said, "I regret not spending enough time on my phone." Your attention is the raw material of your life. Spend it like it's scarce. Because it is.

From <https://www.danpink.com/>: Daniel Pink is the author of seven bestselling nonfiction books on a range of topics, from human motivation to the science of timing to a graphic novel career guide.

His books include the *New York Times* bestsellers *The Power of Regret*, *A Whole New Mind*, and *When*—as well as the #1 *New York Times* bestsellers *Drive* and *To Sell is Human*. His deeply researched works have been translated into 46 languages and have sold more than five million copies around the world.



The month of September is the time to fall back into good routines. Summer is over along with late nights and casual schedules. Establishing a routine of going to bed on time is a key element to transitioning back to school. The school district is your partner in helping to maintain good attendance. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you are having school avoidance issues at home.

What is Chronic Absenteeism? *(From Attendance Works)*

Chronic absenteeism refers to students missing an excessive amount of school days, typically defined as missing 10% or more of the academic year. This equates to missing around 15 days or more of school per year. It has emerged as a significant barrier to student success and educational equity, as students who frequently miss school tend to fall behind academically and are at higher risk of dropping out.

Half of the students who miss two to four days of school in September end up missing nearly a month (25 days) of school in total throughout the year. Those missed days quickly translate into missed academic opportunities.

How to Address School Avoidance By Laura Wheeler in *Edutopia*

To help reduce chronic absenteeism, schools can help students learn how to self-regulate and manage feelings of discomfort.

“I don’t want to go to school!” are words that induce worry, stress, and even frustration at times for the adults who care for children. Naturally, we look for an underlying cause of school avoidance, which at times is easily identified and at other times seems to entail concerning and sudden shifts in behavior and emotions without a reason.

Absenteeism and school avoidance are issues that have increased remarkably in recent years, which in turn profoundly impact academics. School avoidance is frustrating for parents, caregivers, and educators and is often a cycle that seems to quickly become habitual for some students. Avoiding school leads to missing work and detachment from peers, which leads to anxiety about returning to school, potentially leading to more absenteeism and school avoidance. An increase in parents’ working remotely from home, rising anxiety and mental health concerns, and changing attendance policies post-Covid all contribute to this concern.

DETERMINE A PLAN FOR ADDRESSING SCHOOL AVOIDANCE

Parents are faced with balancing expectations and supporting their child’s mental health, and it is hard to know when and how to best support them when faced with an upset child who doesn’t want to go to school. Educators simply cannot teach students who are not physically or emotionally present in the classroom. Addressing school avoidance requires a comprehensive intervention effort, with collaboration between parents, school administration, counselors, and educators.

Supporting students who struggle with anxiety starts with regulating ourselves as adults and approaching the student with a calm demeanor. Collaborating with parents and caregivers prior to the student’s arrival at school to discuss the plan, letting the student know when support will be available and how to access that support, and communicating this plan with classroom teachers and administrators are all important steps that can be taken to provide a consistent and supportive approach.

ACKNOWLEDGE AND MANAGE FEELINGS OF DISCOMFORT

Lynn Lyons, an international speaker and psychotherapist based in Concord, New Hampshire, who [helps children and families manage anxiety disorders](#), states that she “utilize[s] a **strategy that focuses not on ‘getting rid’ of thoughts,**

feelings, or sensations, but understanding them, at times expecting them, and learning how to manage them." Inspired by this method, I began piloting a strategy that I call "Practice the And," to support students with anxiety or school avoidance behaviors.

It seemed logical that **instead of encouraging students to avoid feelings of discomfort by removing all barriers, we would instead teach them how to identify, anticipate, and manage uncomfortable feelings.** The results were surprising, given a strategy that was really just a shift in the language that we use with students. Utilizing this strategy, we saw that students who struggled with school avoidance began to come to school more willingly, improving attendance and their overall academic performance due to an increase in instructional time. They also began transferring this strategy to other anxiety-provoking settings.

Simply put, this strategy encourages students to label emotions *and* what they are trying to achieve, modeling that it's OK to feel uncomfortable when others do not share those emotions. This **resilience-building strategy essentially encourages students to state what they're feeling, followed up with the word "and" to state what they're trying to achieve, to shift our thinking into accepting anxiety and moving forward.**

For example, if a younger student doesn't want to come to school and is feeling worried or sad about being away from their parents, we shift away from "It'll be fine, you'll see your parents later. Let's get you to class so we don't miss story time!" to **"You are feeling anxious and sad about missing your parents, and you are at school. It's OK to have those feelings and be at school. Let's go to the classroom together and see what the class is reading for story time."**

For older students, **encouraging them to "practice the and" more independently can be a helpful tool in developing self-awareness and resiliency.** For example, asking a student what they are feeling and then making an observation about feeling that way *and* moving forward with a first step can be a means of modeling this strategy.

School counselors and staff can model and encourage students to follow these steps to "Practice the And" when students are present at school or even when they aren't (through phone conversations or Zoom calls):

1. Identify the emotion ("I'm feeling worried").
2. Identify the goal to achieve ("I have to present my project in class").
3. Add the word *and* ("You are feeling worried *and* you are presenting your project").
4. Support the student in taking one small step in the environment that they are avoiding, and consider pairing that environment with a positive experience—for example, inviting a trusted adult or friend to be in the room for their presentation.
5. Acknowledge and celebrate that they faced the situation that made them uncomfortable, and remind them that feelings are temporary and that feelings are not always facts. Keep this step simple! Acknowledgment can be a note, a thumbs-up, or a positive comment about their courage and hard work.

Managing uncomfortable emotions begins with self-awareness. We must acknowledge and become aware of emotions before we can manage them effectively. Well-intentioned adults sometimes try to offer quick emotional management fixes to help distract students from uncomfortable emotions, when our efforts may be better focused on encouraging self-awareness.

When we model that it is OK to feel uncomfortable and move forward, we support resiliency skills that can help students manage these feelings in the future. Furthermore, by using distraction as a singular strategy, we are actually modeling avoidance, which can unintentionally perpetuate avoidance behaviors.

SUPPORT A GROWTH MINDSET

This strategy complements our work with students around using a growth mindset. We teach students that our "growth zone" is achieved when we take healthy risks, challenge ourselves, and become comfortable with feeling uncomfortable. The "Practice the And" strategy helps students to shift their thinking from avoidance to self-regulation, and ultimately that leads to an increase in their confidence and resilience.

The "Practice the And" strategy also **helps students learn and embrace the fact that emotions are temporary.** Anxiety often feels as though it is permanent, and it's difficult for students to see that they will ever *not* feel anxious. Providing regular emotional check-ins and asking how students are feeling, or asking them to name a few emotions they are feeling at the same time, is a helpful way to reinforce the idea that emotions are ever-changing states and not permanent.

There's a sticker on the door to my office that says, "Feelings are only visitors, let them come and let them go." Embracing this mindset, as well as practicing the "and," can help students move through uncomfortable emotions rather than allowing those moments to take away valuable experiences.

Thoughts from the Superintendent



Compassion and kindness matter – and they can be taught

Two researchers have caught my attention recently as their studies give a compelling argument for schools and communities to **teach** kindness and compassion.

- ❖ R. J. Davidson in his research, “The neurobiology of compassion,” published in *Wisdom and compassion in psychotherapy: Deepening mindfulness in clinical practice* promotes the idea that **compassion can be taught to our children**. His research shows that compassion training affects brain functioning and should be considered a skill that can be cultivated “**even with relatively short periods of practice.**”
- ❖ Erin Clabough writes in her book, *Second Nature*, “Neuroscience tells us that there are elements of self-control, empathy, and creativity that even very young children can learn. The brain is always developing; connections between neurons are always being refined. So, **when we practice these skills, we build the connections for them in our kids, regardless of their ages...** This is true for our kids: they will pay our attention to the things that we as parents require them to experience and, eventually, to the things that they habitually notice.”

Consider compassion and kindness to be requisite skills of our students and our community will grow and benefit from within.

The Compassionate Instinct by Dacher Keltner

(Chapter 1 in *The Compassionate Instinct*, by Keltner, Marsh, and Smith)

Compassion is deeply rooted in our brains, our bodies, and in the most basic ways we communicate.

Humans are selfish. It’s so easy to say. The same goes for so many assertions that follow. Greed is good. Altruism is an illusion. Cooperation is for suckers. Competition is natural, war inevitable. The bad in human nature is stronger than the good.

These kinds of claims reflect age-old assumptions about emotion. For millennia, we have regarded the emotions as the fount of irrationality, baseness, and sin. The idea of the seven deadly sins takes our destructive passions for granted. Plato compared the human soul to a chariot: the intellect is the driver and the emotions are the horses. Life is a continual struggle to keep the emotions under control.

Even compassion, the concern we feel for another being’s welfare, has been treated with downright derision. Kant saw it as a weak and misguided sentiment: “Such benevolence is called soft-heartedness and should not occur at all among human beings,” he said of compassion. Many question whether true compassion exists at all—or whether it is inherently motivated by self-interest.

Recent studies of compassion argue persuasively for a different take on human nature, one that rejects the preeminence of self-interest. These studies support a view of the emotions as rational, functional, and adaptive—a view which has its origins in Darwin’s *Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*. Compassion and benevolence, this research suggests, are an evolved **part of human nature, rooted in our brain and biology, and ready to be cultivated for the greater good.**

The biological basis of compassion

First consider the recent study of the biological basis of compassion. If such a basis exists, we should be wired up, so to speak, to respond to others in need. Recent evidence supports this point convincingly. University of Wisconsin psychologist Jack Nitschke found in an experiment that when mothers looked at pictures of their babies, they not only reported feeling more compassionate love than when they saw other babies; they also demonstrated unique activity in a region of their brains associated with the positive emotions. Nitschke’s finding suggests that this region of the brain is attuned to the first objects of our compassion—our offspring.

But this compassionate instinct isn’t limited to parents’ brains. In a different set of studies, Joshua Greene and Jonathan Cohen of Princeton University found that when subjects contemplated harm being done to others, a similar network of regions in their brains lit up. Our children and victims of violence—two very different subjects, yet united by the similar neurological reactions they provoke. This consistency strongly suggests **that compassion isn’t simply a fickle or irrational emotion, but rather an innate human response embedded into the folds of our brains.**

In other research by Emory University neuroscientists James Rilling and Gregory Berns, participants were given the chance to help someone else while their brain activity was recorded. Helping others triggered activity in the caudate nucleus and anterior cingulate, portions of the brain that turn on when people receive rewards or experience pleasure. This is a rather remarkable finding: **helping others brings the same pleasure we get from the gratification of personal desire.**

The brain, then, seems wired up to respond to others' suffering—indeed, it makes us feel good when we can alleviate that suffering. But do other parts of the body also suggest a biological basis for compassion?

It seems so. Take the loose association of glands, organs, and cardiovascular and respiratory systems known as the autonomic nervous system (ANS). The ANS plays a primary role in regulating our blood flow and breathing patterns for different kinds of actions. For example, when we feel threatened, our heart and breathing rates usually increase, preparing us either to confront or flee from the threat—the so-called “fight or flight” response. What is the ANS profile of compassion? As it turns out, **when young children and adults feel compassion for others, this emotion is reflected in very real physiological changes: Their heart rate goes down from baseline levels, which prepares them not to fight or flee, but to approach and sooth.**

Then there's oxytocin, a hormone that floats through the bloodstream. Research performed on the small, stocky rodents known as prairie voles indicates that oxytocin promotes long-term bonds and commitments, as well as the kind of nurturing behavior—like care for offspring—that lies at the heart of compassion. It may account for that overwhelming feeling of warmth and connection we feel toward our offspring or loved ones. Indeed, breastfeeding and massages elevate oxytocin levels in the blood (as does eating chocolate). In some recent studies I've conducted, we have found that when people perform behaviors associated with compassionate love—warm smiles, friendly hand gestures, affirmative forward leans—their bodies produce more oxytocin. This suggests compassion may be self-perpetuating: Being compassionate causes a chemical reaction in the body that motivates us to be even more compassionate.

Signs of compassion

According to evolutionary theory, if compassion is truly vital to human survival, it would manifest itself through nonverbal signals. Such signals would serve many adaptive functions. Most importantly, a distinct signal of compassion would soothe others in distress, allow people to identify the good-natured individuals with whom they'd want long-term relationships, and help forge bonds between strangers and friends.

Research by Nancy Eisenberg, perhaps the world's expert on the development of compassion in children, has found that there is a particular facial expression of compassion, characterized by oblique eyebrows and a concerned gaze. When someone shows this expression, they are then more likely to help others. My work has examined another nonverbal cue: touch.

Previous research has already documented the important functions of touch. Primates such as great apes spend hours a day grooming each other, even when there are no lice in their physical environment. They use grooming to resolve conflicts, to reward each other's generosity, and to form alliances. Human skin has special receptors that transform patterns of tactile stimulation—a mother's caress or a friend's pat on the back—into indelible sensations as lasting as childhood smells. Certain touches can trigger the release of oxytocin, bringing feelings of warmth and pleasure. The handling of neglected rat pups can reverse the effects of their previous social isolation, going as far as enhancing their immune systems.

My work set out to document, for the first time, whether compassion can be communicated via touch. Such a finding would have several important implications. It would show that we can communicate this positive emotion with nonverbal displays, whereas previous research has mostly documented the nonverbal expression of negative emotions such as anger and fear. This finding would also shed light on the social functions of compassion—how people might rely on touch to soothe, reward, and bond in daily life.

In my experiment, I put two strangers in a room where they were separated by a barrier. They could not see one another, but they could reach each other through a hole. One person touched the other on the forearm several times, each time trying to convey one of 12 emotions, including love, gratitude, and compassion. After each touch, the person touched had to describe the emotion they thought the toucher was communicating.

Imagine yourself in this experiment. How do you suppose you might do? Remarkably, people in these experiments reliably identified compassion, as well as love and the other ten emotions, from the touches to their forearm. This strongly suggests that compassion is an evolved part of human nature—something we're universally capable of expressing and understanding.

Motivating altruism

Feeling compassion is one thing; acting on it is another. We still must confront a vital question: Does compassion promote altruistic behavior? In an important line of research, Daniel Batson has made the persuasive case that it does. According to Batson, **when we encounter people in need or distress, we often imagine what their experience is like.** This is a great developmental milestone—to take the perspective of another. It is not only one of the most human of capacities; it is one of the most important aspects of our ability to make moral judgments and fulfill the social contract. When we take the other's perspective, we feel an empathic state of concern and are motivated to address that person's needs and enhance that person's welfare, sometimes even at our own expense.

In a compelling series of studies, Batson exposed participants to another's suffering. He then had some participants imagine that person's pain, but he allowed those participants to act in a self-serving fashion—for example, by leaving the experiment.

Within this series, one study had participants watch another person receive shocks when he failed a memory task. Then they were asked to take shocks on behalf of the participant, who, they were told, had experienced a shock trauma as a child. Those participants

who had reported that they felt compassion for the other individual volunteered to take several shocks for that person, even when they were free to leave the experiment.

In another experiment, Batson and colleagues examined whether people feeling compassion would help someone in distress, even when their acts were completely anonymous. In this study female participants exchanged written notes with another person, who quickly expressed feeling lonely and an interest in spending time with the participant. Those participants **feeling compassion volunteered to spend significant time with the other person, even when no one else would know about their act of kindness.**

Taken together, **our strands of evidence suggest the following. Compassion is deeply rooted in human nature: it has a biological basis in the brain and body. Humans can communicate compassion through facial gesture and touch, and these displays of compassion can serve vital social functions, strongly suggesting an evolutionary basis of compassion. And when experienced, compassion overwhelms selfish concerns and motivates altruistic behavior.**

Cultivating compassion

We can thus see the great human propensity for compassion and the effects compassion can have on behavior. But can we actually cultivate compassion, or is it all determined by our genes?

Recent neuroscience studies suggest that positive emotions are less heritable—that is, less determined by our DNA—than the negative emotions. Other studies indicate that the brain structures involved in positive emotions like compassion are more “plastic”—subject to changes brought about by environmental input. So we might think about compassion as a biologically based skill or virtue, but not one that we either have or don’t have. Instead, **it’s a trait that we can develop in an appropriate context.** What might that context look like? For children, we are learning some answers.

Some researchers have observed a group of children as they grew up, looking for family dynamics that might make the children more empathetic, compassionate, or likely to help others. This research points to several key factors.

First, **children securely attached to their parents, compared to insecurely attached children, tend to be sympathetic to their peers** as early as age three and a half, according to the research of Everett Waters, Judith Wippman, and Alan Sroufe. In contrast, researchers Mary Main and Carol George found that abusive parents who resort to physical violence have less empathetic children.

Developmental psychologists have also been interested in comparing two specific parenting styles. Parents who rely on induction engage their children in reasoning when they have done harm, prompting their child to think about the consequences of their actions and how these actions have harmed others. Parents who rely on power assertion simply declare what is right and wrong, and resort more often to physical punishment or strong emotional responses of anger. Nancy Eisengerg, Richard Fabes, and Martin Hoffman have found that parents who use induction and reasoning raise children who are better adjusted and more likely to help their peers. This style of parenting seems to nurture the basic tools of compassion: an appreciation of others’ suffering and a desire to remedy that suffering.

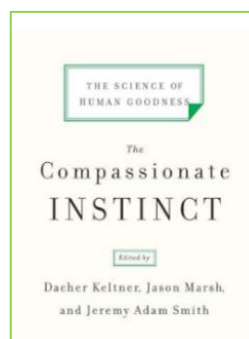
Parents can also teach compassion by example. A landmark study of altruism by Pearl and Samuel Oliner found that **children who have compassionate parents tend to be more altruistic.** In the Oliners’ study of Germans who helped rescue Jews during the Nazi Holocaust, one of the strongest predictors of this inspiring behavior was the individual’s memory of growing up in a family that prioritized compassion and altruism.

A more compassionate world

Human communities are only as healthy as our conceptions of human nature. It has long been assumed that selfishness, greed, and competitiveness lie at the core of human behavior, the products of our evolution. It takes little imagination to see how these assumptions have guided most realms of human affairs, from policy making to media portrayals of social life.

But clearly, recent scientific findings forcefully challenge this view of human nature. **We see that compassion is deeply rooted in our brains, our bodies, and in the most basic ways we communicate. What’s more, a sense of compassion fosters compassionate behavior and helps shape the lessons we teach our children.**

Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., a co-editor of Greater Good, is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, and a co-director of the UC-Berkeley Center for the Development of Peace and Well-Being.





Marlborough Elementary School - Better Together For Children

Our mission is to educate, challenge and inspire each individual to excel and become a contributing member of society.



Join the Superintendent for a cup of coffee and conversation at the Central Office at MES from 8:30 – 10:00 AM.

Thursday, September 3

Thursday, September 17

Thursday, October 15

Thursday, October 29



No taxpayer dollars used for coffee or supplies!

If you have questions, come in for coffee at your convenience with the Superintendent of Schools.

E-mail Paul Smith at psmith@marlborough.k12.ct.us or call (860)295-6236.

<u>Family Resources State of Connecticut</u> 	<u>Mental Health Resources</u> 	<u>Emergencies</u> GET HELP 24/7 Call 2-1-1 in CT 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988 Crisis Text Line: 741741	<u>MES School Calendar 2026-27</u> 	<u>Important Annual Notices from MES</u>
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Total Number of Days Absent	Acceptable Reasons for a Student Absence to be Considered Excused	Documentation Required within 10 Days
1-9	Any reason that the student's parent or guardian approves.	Parent or guardian note or email to the appropriate school email address.
10 and above	- Student illness - Religious holiday - Funeral - Mandated court appearance - Extraordinary educational opportunity pre-approved by the Superintendent of Schools. Contact the school for further information.	Parent or guardian note or email to the appropriate school email address and additional documentation as required and outlined in the Board of Education's Attendance Policy #5113 .

Build the habit of good attendance.

[View Marlborough Board of Education Policy 5113 - Attendance](#)



Nondiscrimination Statement of the Marlborough Public Schools:

The Marlborough Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national/ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, status as a victim of domestic violence, Veteran status, disability in its programs, activities, and employment practices, status as a victim of sexual assault, or status as a victim of trafficking in persons. Equal access is provided to Scouting America and other designated youth groups.