

Little lessons in empathy

"Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets." -Jesus (Matt. 7:12)

Our interactions with others are based on the internal narrative we believe about ourselves, our place in the world, and how others are going to treat us. Children who—through trauma, a mental health struggle, or some other relational and emotional challenge—believe themselves to be “less than” others regularly have difficulty in relationships. Reciprocation, grace, and the empathy needed to form trusting bonds with loved ones must be modeled for these children to challenge their inner narrative of not being good enough.

Chaplain Sami Pack-Toner has spent many hours in the cottages on our Helena campus, seeking to build relationships with the children she is serving in ministry. She regularly finds herself one-on-one with a child that the staff have suggested might need a little extra attention. One such child is Alissa. A favorite activity of young Alissa, Sami related, is to play chess and other games where there is a clear winner and loser.

“I am not particularly good at chess,” Sami explains, “maybe that’s why Alissa chooses to play with me?” Sami proceeds to chuckle as she tells the story. “But, an interesting thing has happened as we play more and more. At first, I could see her satisfaction in beating me in a game of chess... self-validation that was just about her success. Now, whenever she wins, she makes sure to encourage me and tells me not to give up. She has learned empathy and shows it in these little ways, which is such a beautiful and lovely way to see that she is healing and trusting that she (and others!) are worthwhile, even when they don’t win.” This modeled behavior from her staff and family is starting to be internalized, helping Alissa trust that she deserves loving, healthy relationships.



Intermountain’s transformative approach of meets children where they are—developmentally and relationally—and builds empathy and trust in hurting children. Thank you for supporting our mission and ministry!

For more information or to support this life-changing work, call or text Chris at 465-9693 or email chrish@intermountain.org