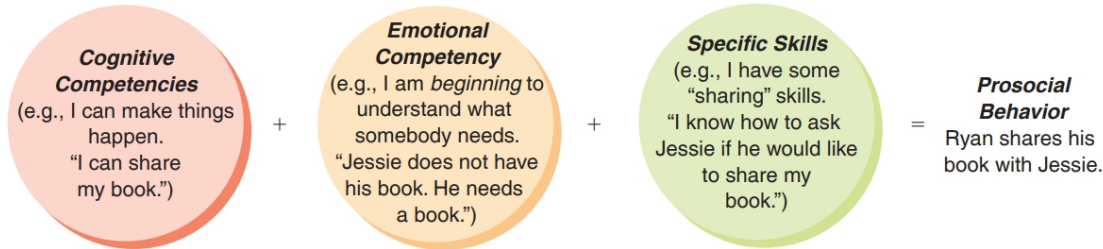




FIGURE 3.5 Children must have all three competencies to act compassionately



These abilities have their roots in early childhood. Glimmers of these abilities appear in older infants and toddlers, allowing the youngest children to begin to act in ways that appear to be helpful or cooperative. These cognitive competencies are not fully developed, however, in very young children. For instance, young children can often tell that someone needs something, but they are not very good at reflecting on another person's or animal's inner experience based on the need. Recall that they tend to focus on people's readily observable, external characteristics.

Emotional Competencies Children also need to have specific emotional competencies, which seem to develop quite slowly to respond to another's needs or distress.

- **Decoding emotion in another person's face.** This is the ability to look at a person's or animal's face and make sense of his or her facial expression. High-prosocial children seem to be much more accurate than are low-prosocial children in decoding emotion in other children's faces (Greener, 1998). This ability *begins* in infancy and continues to develop.

Even adults can learn how to better read another person's emotions through training (Klinzing, 2003). Some children, as teachers quickly realize, are better at decoding emotion or "reading faces" than are other children. For example, children with Asperger's syndrome (AS) had more difficulty decoding facial expressions than did children without AS (Lindner & Rosen, 2006). A child who decodes emotion very well has a far better chance of understanding how another child might be feeling.

EXAMPLE Mr. Russo discussed a playground incident with his class. Thomas responded, "Jason was mad!" "How do you know he was angry?" asked the teacher. Thomas: "His face looked mad."

- **Responding to the emotions of others.** Classic research demonstrated that a very young baby responds to emotions in other people (Sagi & Hoffman, 1976) and seems to be able to discriminate among her mother's different emotions; in some cases, the baby can imitate these emotions (Cohn, Campbell, Matias, & Hopkins, 1990). Some children do not learn to read emotions very well and become adults who do not read or deal with emotions well. Hildyard (2005) found that mothers who neglected their children could not discriminate emotions in their children very well and did not know many labels for emotions. Recent research highlights the important influence that imitation plays in human development (Hurley & Chater, 2005).

