

Category 4:Understanding
and Managing Feelings**Meeting 1****Got Empathy?****Background**

Empathy is a building block of moral development and provides a basis for making and keeping friends, developing healthy work and partner relationships, and parenting. The foundation of empathy is being able to recognize someone else's situation or emotion, which can trigger a similar reaction within us. Empathy allows humans to intuitively assess a situation and what another person may be feeling, and then to experience that situation or emotion almost as if it were happening to us. While humans are born with this capacity, empathy also involves a complex set of learned skills that must be nurtured from early childhood. Through experiences and modeling, we learn to label and identify our own feelings, recognize emotional cues and probable feelings in others, better comprehend situations from another person's perspective, and adjust our responses in ways that are compassionate and meaningful in a range of social situations. Adolescents need adult support and practice to recognize nuances of feelings in themselves and others, experience others' viewpoints, and learn to vary their responses in ways that reflect the needs of others.

This class meeting provides two options (activity 1 or activity 2). It is intended as a precursor to *What Would You Do?* (the class meeting immediately following this one), which focuses on acting in compassionate ways to the needs of others.

Learner Outcomes

By the end of this session, students will be able to

- define *empathy* and describe five components of empathy
- describe and evaluate their own feelings or reactions in a particular situation
- describe factors that help them “read” social cues about what someone else is feeling
- practice viewing situations from a variety of perspectives
- consider ways that factors such as relationships, popularity, gender, and social learning affect their points of view and reactions

Materials Needed

Activity 1:

- Got Empathy? Situation Cards, one copy 24₃
- Got Empathy? Perspective Cards, one copy 25₃
- Got Empathy? Personal Checklist, one per student 26₃
- Blank sheets of paper
- Pencils

Activity 2:

- Got Empathy? Self-Reflection Worksheet, one per student 27₃
- Your Personal Empathy Score and Action Plan, one per student 28₃
- Pencils

Preparation Needed

- Select either activity 1 or activity 2 to conduct with your students.
- Write the following key components of empathy on the board or prepare them to project overhead. Cover until ready to introduce them:

EMPATHY

- Innate (born with)
- Learned
 1. Name feelings
 2. Recognize body language clues
 3. Recognize different points of view
 4. Interpret social and emotional situations
 5. Act compassionately

Activity 1:

- Print the handouts from the CD-ROM as indicated in Materials Needed.
- Cut apart the Situation Cards and the Perspective Cards. Select cards that are most appropriate for your students. One card has been left blank for you to write your own situation if desired. Decide how to distribute the cards among the small groups (assign, random-draw, have all groups work on the same scenarios but with different perspectives).
- Consider ways of grouping students into small work groups of four to six. Vary groups so each includes both boys and girls. Talking about feelings can be challenging for teens, so it's important to have strategies that allow them to feel comfortable in their groups. Allowing students to self-select groups might improve their sense of comfort, but have a backup plan if you anticipate that some students will be left out or alone.

Activity 2:

- Print the handouts from the CD-ROM as indicated in Materials Needed.
- Consider having pairs of Situation Cards and Perspective Cards available for students to use for a follow-up writing assignment or for practicing empathy skills.

Class Meeting Outline

Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Have you ever cried while reading a sad story? Have you seen a tragic or feel-good news story involving someone you never met but that had an emotional effect on you? Have you ever felt upset about something that happened to a friend? Have you ever felt happy and excited for a friend when something good happened to him or her? We react that way because of our ability to empathize with others.
2. Empathy refers to our ability to identify with what someone else is experiencing almost as if it is happening to us. It involves both instinctive and learned components. It includes both an unspoken understanding of what another person might feel in a particular situation, and our ability to relate to that emotion, which we typically experience as a

- response within ourselves. Reveal prepared written information about empathy on the board or chart paper.
3. Some of the components of empathy include being able to (1) identify and name our own feelings; (2) recognize how facial expressions and body language tell us what others are feeling; (3) recognize how others might view or experience the situation the same or differently; (4) interpret how someone else might be feeling in a particular situation (seeing things from their perspective); and (5) act on that knowledge in ways that are appropriate to a particular situation and the individuals involved.
 4. Today, we're going to do an activity that gives us some insights about our own empathic (or empathetic) responses. We'll practice ways of taking someone else's perspective or point of view in various situations.

Activity 1 (25 minutes)

1. Divide students into groups of four to six students. Pass out a Got Empathy? Personal Checklist to each student. Ask them to turn the papers face down in front of them.
2. Give one or two Got Empathy? Situation Cards to each small group. Have students read each situation aloud within their group.
3. Ask students to turn over their Got Empathy? Personal Checklist and confidentially answer question 1. Pretending to be the "someone" in the situation, they will write five emotional descriptors that tell how they might feel. If there are circumstances that would alter how they would feel, they will jot those in the space provided.
4. Next, have students confidentially answer question 2. They will write down indications they use to tell how someone else might be feeling in the situation, such as facial expressions, body language, other behavior, or situational clues.
5. While remaining in their small groups, ask students to volunteer insights to the whole class about question 2. Remind them that no one is required to share information from the Got Empathy? Personal Checklist. At this point, give students the option to put their checklists away or to refer to them for the rest of this activity.
6. Distribute one or two Got Empathy? Perspective Cards to each small group along with some blank sheets of paper. The small groups will now reconsider how they might feel about each situation from these new points of view.

7. Ask the groups to discuss how their feelings might change and to consider why they feel differently. Ask them to record their group ideas and insights on the blank sheets of paper and to star one or two key insights to share with the class.



Activity 1 Discussion Questions (10–15 minutes)

1. Give each group a minute to share one key insight from their discussion.
2. What factors affected empathy?
3. Why do you think your relationship with someone influences how much empathy you might feel for them? For example, is it easier to feel empathy for someone you know personally or someone you read about in the news? What makes the difference or personalizes the situation for us?
4. What clues do you rely on to tell you how someone else might be feeling in a particular situation?
5. What can your own emotional reactions tell you about how someone else might be feeling? Do you think your reactions are reliable? Why or why not?
6. In your group, was it easier to take one perspective over another? Was one situation easier or more difficult? What do you think made it easier or harder?
7. Would anyone like to share personal insights about how you felt when the situation applied to you compared to different perspectives?
8. What role did gender play in how members of your group viewed the situations from different perspectives?

Activity 2 (20 minutes)

1. Distribute one Got Empathy? Self-Reflection Worksheet to each student. Ask students to seriously consider each statement and to honestly rate how they feel it describes them (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being Not at All Like Me to 5 being Most Like Me).
2. Distribute Your Personal Empathy Score and Action Plan and ask students to calculate their personal scores.
3. Reserve 5 to 10 minutes after the discussion for students to reflect on their scores and write a personal action plan. Consider assigning additional situation/perspective cards for students to practice boosting their empathy skills. You might ask students to submit their action plans for teacher review.

Activity 2 Discussion Questions (10–20 minutes)

1. Why do you think empathy is an important element in making and keeping friends? Developing healthy work and partner relationships? Parenting?
2. Why do you think empathy is considered a building block of moral development?
3. What roles do you think gender and social learning play in how you and other students your age responded?
4. What happens if you don't feel empathy for other people? How does that affect your ability to get along with others or to form positive relationships with them?
5. What can we do to try to experience a situation from another person's point of view, even in cases where we don't know the other person?
6. What can we do to try to experience a situation from another person's point of view, even in cases where we don't like the other person?
7. How do you think the media or relying on technology to interact with others affects our level of empathy for others?
8. Consider using some of the Situation Cards and Perspective Cards for a follow-up writing assignment to challenge students to build their empathy skills.

Wrap-Up

1. Empathy is our ability to relate to how someone else is feeling in a particular situation. It is an important ability that affects how we get along with others and form relationships. Even though we are born with a capacity to feel empathy, we need to hone our observation skills and practice our ability to see things from other people's points of view.
2. Be sure to highlight key points from the students' discussions such as: it may be easier to empathize with someone whom you know or who has shared experiences with you; gender and social learning can affect our viewpoints; it can be hard to accurately "read" someone else's feelings, especially if we aren't close to them; there is a difference between the kind of empathy we might feel about things that happen every day versus events in the larger world.

Curriculum Connections

English:

- Suggest that students do one of the following:
 - Compose a letter to someone who is going through a difficult time or someone whom you have hurt in some way. Actively take their perspective and express empathy for their feelings. (Sending the letter is not required.)
 - Based on the definition of empathy discussed in a class meeting, write an essay about what empathy means to you. Select a passage from a piece of literature (demonstrating a character's sense of empathy) that illustrates your point of view and describe why you think so.

Human Growth and Development/Child Development:

- Help students compare definitions of empathy from researchers such as Carl Rogers, Nancy Eisenberg, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Robert Coles. They should describe key components of each theory and how their proponents believe empathy contributes to moral development. They should also give their opinion, citing research to back up their point of view. (See Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy#TheoristsandDefinitions> for some possible resource ideas or themes.)

Life Science:

- Encourage students to research examples of displays of empathy in the animal kingdom and compare them to human empathy. Can animals feel empathy for members of their own or other species?

History/World Civilizations/Current Events:

- Invite students to write about a current or past leader they feel demonstrated a strong sense of empathy toward his or her people. They should use examples to show how empathy influenced the person's leadership style and impacted his or her ability to govern or inspire.