

Kindergarten–Grade 2  
Category: Identifying  
Feelings  
Topic: Building Empathy and  
Perspective-Taking

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## Our Talking Stick

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### Background

Teaching empathy to young children relies heavily on positive adult role modeling. Empathy involves two key components, both of which are essential to bullying prevention and need to be nurtured throughout childhood. The first component involves being able to understand what someone else is feeling without being told. Adults promote this aspect of empathy when they teach children to name and recognize feelings, and to observe body language cues in others. The second component involves responding to others' feelings with compassion, based on what they need. Adults reinforce this aspect of empathy when they promote sharing and turn-taking, and teach children ways of caring for all living things.

### Learner Outcomes

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

- discuss ways they can care for others and all living things
- talk about their feelings
- practice taking turns
- practice perspective-taking

### Materials Needed

- Something to use as a “talking stick” (a plain dowel, a short stout stick, or a paper towel tube about 12 inches long)

## Preparation Needed

None

## Class Meeting Outline

## Opening Activity (10 minutes)

**Teacher Tip**

Talking sticks help ensure that students listen to each other and to what is being said, and they can help keep a discussion focused.

1. Show your “talking stick” to the group. For our class meeting today, we are going to use this as our talking stick. Does anyone know what a talking stick is? (Whoever holds the stick may talk; everyone else must listen and pay attention.)
2. Our talking stick will help us take turns and practice listening while we have our class meeting.
3. Let’s practice using the stick: First we’ll pass it around and everyone will say his or name. As the students pass the stick around the circle, welcome or greet each child personally. Once everyone has said his or her name, the stick returns to you.
4. Next ask a few questions aimed at learning more about the students and reinforcing basic empathy concepts. Each time you ask a question, students pass the stick around the circle from person to person, offering their answers. If a child can’t think of a response, he or she may pass the stick on but still have the option to respond later. Choose questions from the following list, or feel free to think of your own. Two to four questions are sufficient for one class meeting.
  - How are you feeling today?
  - Name something that makes you feel excited.
  - Name something that makes you feel upset.
  - What is your favorite season of the year, and why?
  - What is your favorite thing to do when you are not at school?
  - Do you take care of a pet (or some other living thing)?
  - How would you feel if a friend looked very sad?
  - What could you do if a friend needed a pencil and you had an extra one?
  - What would it be like if you forgot your lunch one day?
  - What would it be like if you needed help to get on a swing?
  - How would you feel if you lost something, like your jacket?

- What could you do if someone told you he or she lost a glove at recess?
- How could you help someone if that person's belongings kept falling while he or she tried to put them away?
- What if someone needed help reaching something on a shelf that you could reach?

### Discussion Questions (15 minutes)

1. Process the activity. Encourage students to use the talking stick as they participate in the discussion.
  - What is it like to use a talking stick?
  - How can we show each other we're listening when others have the talking stick?
  - How can the talking stick help us to learn more about each other?
  - What is it like to take turns? Is it easy or hard? Why?
  - What has someone done to show you he or she cares about you this week?
2. Grade 1:
  - How does it feel to help someone else?
  - What ways do you show you care for your family? How do you show you care for pets or other animals? What about our Earth (or environment)?
  - How does it feel when someone helps you when you have a problem?
3. Grades 1–2:
  - How do you know when another student needs help?
4. Grade 2:
  - If someone feels upset, how do you know what help that person might need?
  - How do you show a friend you care about him or her?

### Dig Deeper



Talking sticks, feathers, or shells are part of Native North American tribal culture. They are traditionally used in council meetings to show respect for a chief so he can speak without interruption. This ceremonial object is then passed to council members who wish to speak. Talking sticks are carefully decorated to show their importance.

### Wrap-Up

1. Using our talking stick helped us to take turns. That took patience! Taking turns is one way to show we care about each other. Our class meetings help us to practice showing that we care about each other.
2. Encourage additional questions and comments.

## Curriculum Connections

**Vocabulary:** *care, empathy, help, talking stick*

### Language Arts:

- Create a Question of the Day chart to help students learn different things about each other. Write a question (such as What is your favorite season?) at the top of the chart. Make columns for the different answers and have the students mark their responses in the columns.
- Include a few age-appropriate books for talking about feelings in your classroom, such as *My Friend is Sad*, *I Love My New Toy*, *Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale*, and *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (all titles by Mo Willems).

**Math:** Using results from the Question of the Day, tally most/least common responses and report to the group.

**Science:** Use classroom pets or a plant to teach students about caring for other living things.

### Social Studies/Community Service:

- Explore with students the origins and use of the talking stick in Native American culture.
- Show picture cards depicting people helping each other. Ask the children to tell a story about each picture: what they see and what they think might happen next.
- If your school or community is involved in a caring activity such as supporting a local food bank or helping victims of a fire, find out what your students can do to contribute to this cause.

**Art:** Have students decorate the class talking stick with colored markings, feathers, or beads.