

LESSON 2

What Is Empathy?

GOAL

Students will learn the definition of empathy and the importance of having the ability to show empathy toward others.

MATERIALS

Handouts: Other People’s Feelings Chart, Interview a Friend
A dictionary (optional)

REVIEW

1. Remind students of the story “The Problem Situation.” Ask them to give you a two- or three-sentence summary of the story.
2. Ask what they learned from the story. Answers should include the following ideas:
 - When a person is troubled, it is helpful to have someone willing to listen closely to the person.
 - Listening does not include giving advice, dismissing the person’s concerns, or interrupting.
 - Listening is a very important part of something called empathy, which is what you will be discussing today.

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Write *empathy* on the board. Encourage students to brainstorm their definitions/ understanding of the word. You can have one of the students use a dictionary to help arrive at a group-generated definition. Select a student to come to the board and assist with the writing.

The definition should include being able to understand another person’s feelings—to put yourself in another person’s shoes and see things from his or her point of view. One does not have to have experienced the same event to understand the feeling.

2. Have students come up with examples of empathy. These examples can be from news stories, books, TV, whatever. Have your student assistant continue to write the answers on the board while you facilitate the discussion.
3. Next discuss the following questions and write responses on the board:
 - Why is it important to show empathy?

In discussing why it is important to show empathy, you might talk about what a really close friend is and what makes the person such a good friend. It usually boils down to somebody's understanding how we feel. That is showing empathy. If we can improve that skill, we can be better friends. We can also use this skill to help stay out of fights and disagreements.

 - In what careers do people use empathy?
 - How can you show empathy in school and at home (in your life)?
 - Who in your life shows empathy? How?
4. Once you feel that everyone in the group has a basic understanding of empathy, move on to the Guided Practice/In-Class Activity. Let the students know that as they move forward they will be exploring their own feelings and the feelings of others to learn how to show empathy.

Guided Practice/In-Class Activity

This activity will help students better understand empathy because they must be "in someone else's shoes" to answer the questions. This may be challenging, so encourage students to be truthful and open. You may want to revisit this exercise in later sessions and see how their ability to empathize has improved.

1. Tell students to find examples of a classmate, an adult family member, and a community member who were in a situation in which they expressed a feeling.
2. Ask students to put themselves in that person's shoes and try to understand what the person was feeling.
3. On the **Other People's Feelings Chart**, they will describe the situation, the feeling, and why they think the person is having that feeling.

Independent Practice

Hand out copies of the **Interview a Friend** sheet. Students will interview a friend who is *not* in their empathy group. They will record the friend's answers after listening carefully.

Other People's Feelings Chart

Name _____ Date _____

Directions

Find examples of situations where you saw a classmate, an adult family member, and a community member express a feeling. Put yourself in that person's shoes and try to figure out what the person was feeling. On this chart, describe the situation, the feeling, and why you think they person was having that feeling.

Person	Situation	Feeling	Why?
Classmate			
Adult			
Community member			

Now tell what you have learned by putting yourself in someone else's shoes.

Interview a Friend

Name _____ Date _____

Directions

Interview a friend who is not in your empathy group. Ask the person the following questions, listen carefully, and fill in the blanks below.

Person interviewed _____

1. What is one thing that makes you sad?

2. If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you like to go? Why?

3. What was the best gift you ever received?

4. What is your favorite food?

5. If you could meet anyone famous, who would you would like to meet? Why?

6. If you could be in the Olympics for any sport, what would you choose? Why?

7. What is your favorite movie?

Comments/discussion: What feelings are generated in you by each of these questions?