

Caring

This is the 3rd week in the Caring unit. Students will focus on empathy and finding common ground with others regardless of personal interests, background, and location.

Begin the unit with the whole class lesson and then aim to complete at least two of the mini lessons with your students throughout the week. Each mini lesson is designed to present elements of the main lesson in new and engaging ways.

Main Lesson

Whole Class Lesson
30 minutes



In My Place

Students will challenge themselves to find empathy within a variety of scenarios. They will work with a partner to practice empathy as they explore how the other person might feel within each scenario. (See page 2 for lesson details.)

Mini Lessons

For Small Groups
15 minutes



Role Plays

Divide your class into groups of 4-6. Using the scenarios from the main lesson, have each group create a skit to illustrate how they could respond to the scenario they are provided.

For Partners
15 minutes



Common Struggles

With your partner, discuss one common struggle you have had this week at home or school. Share strategies you used to overcome this struggle and listen carefully to your partner to gather other ideas you may not have thought of.

For Individuals
15 minutes



Listen Up!

Ask one family member (or someone outside of school) to describe something they are currently struggling with. Practice empathetic listening while they talk. If you can relate to their struggle, share your perspective as well.

Technology-Focused
15 minutes



Empathy and Technology Use

As a class, guide a discussion on the use of technology and empathy. Do you think technology has helped or hindered your ability to empathize with others? Explain your answer.

In My Place

Students will challenge themselves to find empathy within a variety of scenarios. They will work with a partner to practice empathy as they explore how the other person might feel within each scenario.

Lesson Timeframe

30 minutes

Required Materials

No materials are required for this lesson

Standards Map

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, International Society for Technology in Education Standards, when applicable, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.

Lesson Objective

Students will:

- Explore the difference between sympathy and empathy.
- Develop an understanding of empathy as it applies to them personally.
- Practice empathy in a variety of scenarios throughout their daily routine.

Teacher Connection/Self-Care

Each student you work with is unique. Maybe you work with students who come from challenging backgrounds. Maybe you work with students who have very stable, loving homes. Maybe you work with students who are in foster care or who live with extended family or are homeless. Maybe you work with students who love school and do well. Maybe you work with students who do not like school and are behind grade-level. Whatever the situation, look for the common ground that you share with each student, both in their challenges and their triumphs. Being able to empathize with what they are going through outside of your care will help you be more caring and compassionate toward them when they are in your charge. Students at this age are forming their identities and long to be seen and known. Showing empathy toward them as individuals will go a long way in helping them cope with challenges and form healthy self-images.



Share

3-5 minutes

Reflect back on the past week. How were you able to show gratitude for the little things others naturally do for you? Invite student responses.



Inspire

5-7 minutes

We are halfway through our unit on caring and we have covered both self-care and gratitude. This week our focus is on empathy, what that means, and how we can really tap into it throughout our daily lives.

The word empathy is often thrown around lightly, but many people struggle to really define it for themselves. One way to help yourself create this personal understanding is to look at the difference between the two concepts that are frequently interchanged but have very different meanings: sympathy and empathy.

We have heard and probably even used both these terms interchangeably at times.

- How would you define sympathy?
- How would you define empathy?
- How is it different from sympathy?

Sympathy is defined as feeling pity or sorrow for someone else's situation. This is a common emotion for us as humans to experience. Even little children are capable of naturally recognizing when someone else is in pain. However, there is a big difference between feeling sorry for someone and actually understanding how they feel.

Empathy is the ability to truly understand someone else's emotions and look at things from their perspective. This is the key to empathy: you don't just recognize how that person feels (or might feel) but you do so *from their perspective*. We are able to step into their shoes and feel what they feel, see what they see, and ultimately understand the situation from their point of view. We often feel that this concept is easy when we have had a similar (or even the exact same!) situation occur within our lives. While this is somewhat accurate, true empathy pushes us to see things from the perspective of the other person, which is the true challenge. How you interpret a situation could (and often is) much different from others around you.

One example is the feeling a person might have after receiving a C on their last math test. Perhaps you struggle with math. Receiving a C might be a terrific grade because you studied for hours with your tutor and were happy that you got that many answers correct! You have clearly learned and understood several of the concepts you were struggling with and are able to move forward.

However, your friend LOVES math and receives a C. If you are truly using empathy when responding to them, you are taking their love of math into consideration. You understand they love math, they typically ace every test, and that this C represents a huge disappointment for them.

When you are truly showing empathy, your first thought is to put yourself in the shoes of the other person based on what they might be feeling towards the situation. Observing body language, facial expressions, and the tone of the words they use can all help you empathize.



Empower

15 minutes

Explain that the class will now practice exhibiting empathy using the skills above. The teacher will read a series of scenarios aloud. You will face your partner and using only body language you will convey your feelings and reactions to this scenario. Both of you will then practice using empathy as you try to describe how the other person is feeling and why. Make sure to tell your partner if they are accurate in their assumption. If they are not, correct them and explain how you really feel. Empathy takes practice!

Note: When pairing up, try and choose someone you know, but NOT someone you know extremely well (neighbor, best friend, teammate, etc.).

Scenarios:

- A snow day was just called an hour before you have to get on the bus. You are already dressed and ready to walk out the door.
- You broke your foot before a big championship game. You cannot walk on it and have to miss two months of school.
- You just found out you are moving to a foreign country because of your dad's job.
- You are nominated as class president.
- You are asked to give a speech about kindness for the entire school.



Reflect

5-7 minutes

The scenarios chosen today were real life situations that can and do happen every day to teens just like yourself. It's extremely important to take time to consider the other person before you share your understanding of their experience.

- What might happen if you don't think about the other person's perspective before you share your understanding?
- How can you be more cautious when showing empathy?

Remember, some topics cause you panic while others are excited by them. However, the reverse may be true and you might accidentally offend someone with your positive reaction to a situation that caused them a great deal of anxiety!