



Empathy & Compassion

Materials:

- Worksheet

Brainstorm

Ask students to think about a time they felt like someone just didn't understand how they were feeling or what they were going through and respond to the prompt on the worksheet. Ask: What did that feel like for you?

Discuss

As student volunteers share how it felt like when they didn't feel understood, continue to ask clarifying questions, such as: What were the circumstances? How could things have gone differently? What did you want to happen instead? What happened as a result? Continue to facilitate the class discussion as long as the discourse remains productive and on topic.

Dive in!

What I heard some of you say is that you did not feel that you were treated with empathy and compassion. **Empathy** means the ability to understand or relate to how another person is feeling. When we have empathy, we can then show kindness and act with **compassion**. We are living in a time where a lot of our communication and interaction does not happen face to face. This can make it difficult for us to understand where someone is coming from or how they might be feeling. It's easy to make snap judgments, make a mean comment, or send a rude text to someone when you're communicating from behind a screen. When we do these things, it can result in lots of unpleasant feelings and can negatively impact our relationships with others. The more we think and behave in ways that are negative or unkind, the more likely it is that that type of energy will be reflected back to you. You can think of your interactions with others as a boomerang. Compassion can be thought of as the opposite of unkind behavior. We can help someone who is going through a hard time by making the choice to connect to that person and to join them in the space that they're in. We can do this by thinking about how it has felt for us when we were in a similar situation, or if you can't relate to their situation, to imagine what it would be like to experience a similar situation. One great thing about empathy is that it can build stronger connections with others and when we show empathy and compassion toward others, we may be more likely to get that same treatment in return when we are experiencing difficulty.



High School

Activity

For this task, students can work independently, in pairs, or in groups. Have them read the scenarios on Worksheet 5 and answer the questions that follow. When students are finished with both scenarios, call on volunteers to share their responses.

Reflect

To wrap up the lesson, ask students to respond to the Reflect prompt on the worksheet: Can you think of an example of a time you felt grateful because someone showed you empathy or compassion? Explain the circumstances.

Optional Home Connection → Have students think of someone at home who they could be more empathetic to, such as a sibling or neighbor. Challenge them to come up with ways that they can show empathy to the person and how the person reacted as a result of their empathy. For example, helping an elderly neighbor with a task they are struggling to do alone. Ask them to share their examples with the class.

Professional Development

Take 5 minutes and reflect on your own level of empathy. Are you satisfied with your level of empathy and compassion? What steps might you take to improve your empathy and compassion?

For Further Study:

- Edutopia: *How to Help High School Students Develop Empathy:*
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-help-high-school-students-develop-empathy>
- Kids Health in the Classroom: *Teacher's Guide to Developing Empathy*
<https://classroom.kidshealth.org/classroom/9to12/personal/growing/empathy.pdf>
- Learning for Justice: *Showing Empathy*
[Showing Empathy | Learning for Justice](#)