

LEARNING GUIDE

EMPATHY

FINDING OUT

You have probably seen 'sympathy' cards in the shops, which we give to the family of someone who has died to show our concern and offer comfort. The word 'empathy' is very similar, but you probably won't find 'empathy' cards in the shops. Talk to your classmates about what you think empathy is. Check the dictionary definition. How can you explain the distinction between empathy and sympathy?

Can you think of a time when someone has shown you empathy? How did it feel to have your feelings acknowledged and understood? Try to explain to a classmate how you think empathy makes our world a better place.

Empathy is a helpful trait that can be learnt and practised. You may have often shown empathy to others, without even knowing there was a word for it. Having empathy is important as it promotes tolerance and acceptance of others and boosts our own wellbeing. Some people use the skill of empathy in their daily work. Make a list of jobs that you think must require empathy.

Brad Skinner works as an advocate for RSL Queensland. RSL Queensland provides support for men and women who have served, or currently serve, in the Australian Defence Force. Why do you think people who worked in Defence might require support from such an organisation? Take a look at RSL Queensland's website (rslqld.org) to find out more about what kind of services they offer.

SORTING OUT

This video (rsleducation.com.au/themes/health-and-wellbeing/years-7---10/empathy) features Brad talking about empathy. He explains how we can connect with others and show we care about and understand their feelings. As you watch, listen carefully to the three steps towards empathy that Brad describes. Write down the steps and draw a cartoon for each step that will help someone else remember the process.

Brad describes 'active listening'. Think about how active listening is different from listening to music or a movie. When and how can active listening be useful in developing our capacity for empathy and building strong relationships?

After viewing the video, talk to a friend about how you first connected with each other. Discuss how

Related content:

- Video rsleducation.com.au/themes/health-and-wellbeing/years-7---10/empathy
- Empathy Dice Activity rsleducation.com.au/themes/health-and-wellbeing/years-7---10/empathy



empathy and active listening has helped you strengthen your friendship. Talk about how it might be more challenging to make a similar connections with someone else.

- Why is it not always easy to understand another person's point of view?
- When is it most difficult to 'walk in someone else's shoes'?
- Why is it important to be respectful, tolerant and accepting of others, even when they think differently about things?

Brainstorm some different ways of communicating with others, especially in highly emotional times when finding the right words seems difficult.

TAKING ACTION

Find a news item that features someone who needs empathy. You can search social media, news and magazines for a story that shows someone facing a challenging situation that they may need support to overcome. Make a list of the emotions you think they might be feeling. How would you begin to connect with this person if you were in the same room? With a friend, role play a conversation where you can actively listen and demonstrate empathy for this person. What practical support could you offer? Apart from spoken words, in what other ways could you communicate with this person?

Examine the story on the Empathy cards. Act out the scenario with your group, card by card, and work through each set of questions as you go, sharing your ideas and actively listening to others.

Research some charitable organisations in your area to find out how they offer support to people in need. Find out who founded the organisation and how it has developed. How does this organisation make a difference in the community? Reflect on how empathy is involved. Here are some examples you may begin with:

- Lifeline (lifeline.org.au)
- Australian Red Cross (redcross.org.au)
- The Salvation Army (salvos.org.au)
- CanTeen (canteen.org.au)
- Meals on Wheels Queensland (gmow.org)
- RSL Queensland (rslqld.org)



Talk with your family about the possibility of volunteering with a charity. Or speak with your teacher and classmates about how your school could be involved in raising funds or support for a local charitable cause. Whenever you see someone in distress, or facing a challenging situation, embrace this as an opportunity to connect with them: Begin a conversation, try to relate to their feelings and show you care. Even in the smallest ways, showing empathy can help you make a positive difference in the world.

