

TEACHERS' NOTES

EMPATHY

FINDING OUT

In an era when social media is driving youth culture, promoting egotism and self-interest, young people are experiencing unhealthy levels of envy, anxiety and loneliness on an unprecedented scale.

Building empathy can counter this by promoting tolerance and compassion, leading to greater psychological wellbeing. Research has shown it is possible to build people's capacity for empathy by modelling caring behaviours and talking about how other people or characters might be feeling.

Start by determining what students already know about empathy. Read a picture book or novel that features empathy. Have the students build their emotional vocabulary by identifying what characters are feeling at various points in the story. Check that students understand the distinction between empathy and sympathy.

Before viewing the video (rsleducation.com.au/themes/health-and-wellbeing/years-7---10/empathy), ask students to research the services offered by RSL Queensland (rslqld.org), using their website. Depending on the age and experience of the students, you may need to provide guidance here as they navigate the website menu. Introduce the video and ask students to note particular information such as:

- What is active listening?
- What three steps towards empathy does Brad describe?
- What do you think Brad does in his job as an advocate for RSL Queensland?
- Why is it important to have empathy?

SORTING OUT

Copy and laminate the Empathy cards (rsleducation.com.au/themes/health-and-wellbeing/years-7---10/empathy), and copy and construct the Empathy dice. You will need one die and one set of cards for each group of two to four students. Read the scenario. Sketch or role play the scenario in groups and allow students time to discuss their responses to the questions on the cards.

This resource supports the following HPE, Years 7 and 8:

- ACPPS072 - Practise and apply strategies to seek help for themselves or others
- ACPPS075 - Analyse factors that influence emotions and develop strategies to demonstrate empathy and sensitivity

Related Content

- Video rsleducation.com.au/themes/health-and-wellbeing/years-7---10/empathy
- Empathy cards and dice activity rsleducation.com.au/themes/health-and-wellbeing/years-7---10/empathy



Once students have worked through each step of the scenario with their group, lead the Empathy Challenge game with the class: Each group takes a turn tossing the Empathy Die. Whichever face lands upwards is the part of the scenario that the group must display for the class. They could form a 'freeze frame' to illustrate the scene. Then the group summarises their responses to the questions. Encourage students to practise active listening skills when other teams are sharing.

Ask students to share scenarios involving challenging situations from their own lives. Consider how empathy was required or shown in these scenarios. Continue to collect news items or record relevant scenarios for discussion and sharing. If wall space allows, set up an 'Empathy Wall' – a display space where students can post articles, record memes and collect words to describe emotions.

TAKING ACTION

In pairs, students could use one of the collected scenarios, or a news item they have found, to create a scenario in the following parts that could form additional sets of Empathy cards:

1. Observe
2. Connect
3. Care
4. Communicate
5. Relate
6. Empathise

Have students create these new sets of Empathy Cards, exploring different emotional responses, different viewpoints and various helping strategies. Swap card sets so that groups can play the Empathy Challenge with cards created by other student groups.

Create a helping focus in the classroom. Set aside some time each week for students to review the collected news stories, or to present new scenarios where support is required. After discussing the various points of view and the emotions involved, have students devise practical ways to offer support where needed. Some examples might be:

- Donations of non-perishable foods, pet food or clothing for victims of bushfire or flooding
- Collecting toiletries or Christmas treats to send to drought-stricken farming families
- Collecting blankets, beanies and socks for the homeless
- Raising money for those affected by cyclones or other natural disasters
- Creating anti-bullying posters for display around the school
- Looking out for students on their own at lunch breaks and inviting them to join in games.

