

# Developing Empathy

This lesson helps students gain a deeper understanding of empathy and how to put it into practice.

## Objectives

Activities will help students:

- understand empathy
- practice ways to be more understanding
- reflect on the effects of empathetic listening

## Essential Questions

- What does it mean to put yourself in someone else's shoes?
- How empathetic am I?
- How can I better show empathy toward others?

## Vocabulary

**empathy** [em-puh-thee] (noun) the understanding of or the ability to identify with another person's feelings or experiences

## Overview

When we put ourselves in another person's shoes, we are often more sensitive to what that person is experiencing and are less likely to tease or bully them. By explicitly teaching students to be more conscious of other people's feelings, we can create a more accepting and respectful school community.

## Materials

- [\*Are You Empathetic?\*](#)

- [Someone Else's Shoes](#)

## Activities

1. Can you think of a time—maybe during an argument with a friend or when the boy or girl you liked hurt your feelings—when you wished that someone understood how you felt? When we try to relate to what another person is going through, we're being *empathetic*.
2. Do you think you're an empathetic person? Respond to each statement on [Are You Empathetic?](#) with "yes" if it describes something you do or "no" if you don't do what is described.
3. If you answered mostly "yes," you probably do a good job of showing empathy toward other people. The statements you answered "no" to are things you could do to be more empathetic.
4. As a class, use [Are You Empathetic?](#) to discuss how you can follow the behaviors suggested to show empathy toward others:
  - One way you can try to imagine what it feels like being in someone else's shoes is to ask yourself, "How would I feel in this situation?" How else can you try to understand how others feel?
  - When you listen to others, making eye contact, not interrupting the speaker, and asking follow-up questions can show that you're making a genuine effort to understand what they're going through. What other behaviors might show someone that you are being an empathetic listener?
  - What can you do to be more attuned to other people's feelings? For instance, when you talk to your friends, how many "you" questions do you ask compared to the number of "I" statements you make?
5. Now you are going to practice what you've learned about being empathetic. You will each receive one character card from [Someone Else's Shoes](#). You are going to complete the rest of the activity as this character, so take some time to think about how he or she feels in the given situation.
6. Pair up with a classmate (be sure your partner's character card is

- different* from yours; if you have the same character, you need to pair up with someone else). As your character, tell your partner about your situation. Your partner should practice being empathetic as he is listening to your story. Then, switch roles: practice being empathetic as your partner, as his character, tells you what he is experiencing.
7. With your partner, discuss how she showed empathy toward you, how it made you feel and what you wish she had done differently. Use statements like, “I could tell you were really listening to me because you maintained eye contact with me during the entire conversation, and that made me feel like you care.”
  8. Everyone in the class should now stand. Go around the room, sharing something you learned about practicing empathy, sitting after you share. If someone else shares your thought, sit down. Continue around the room until everyone is sitting.

## **Extension Activity**

Create a way to teach others how to be more empathetic (e.g., perform a skit, create a comic strip, write a short story, sing or rap original lyrics).