

Activity 3

Empathy - Walk a Mile in My Shoes

Narrative

Have you ever heard the expression, 'put yourself in someone else's shoes'?

You may have heard your parents say it from time to time. What they're referring to is the idea of empathy – to put yourself in someone else's shoes means, try to see the world from that person's perspective.

Let's use an example to help explain:

⋮ Say, you got into an argument with your best friend, Kate. She's invited you around to her house to hang out, but instead you go out with another friend, Johnny. You know Johnny from your soccer team, but he's been injured so you haven't seen him for a few weeks. You have some homework to do, so your parents will only let you hang out with one friend on Saturday. Sad, but you need to do your homework at some point! Kate, has come up with a great new idea for a TikTok you can create together – she's been working on the idea all week, so when she finds out you're not coming, she complains and suggests you need to be a better friend. You felt hurt by this and the conversation spirals into an argument.

So how would empathy help in this scenario?

⋮ If Kate could put herself in your shoes, she'd understand that while you love spending time with her, you have a few friends and you want to see all of them. Perhaps she could ask to arrange a different time to meet on a day when you don't have other plans.

⋮ For your part, you could put yourself in Kate's shoes, and realise that the reason she is upset is because she values your friendship and is excited to create some awesome video content with you. She might feel hurt or upset that she doesn't feel like a priority to you.

⋮ But the big takeaway is this: if you and Kate can put yourselves in each other's shoes, or be empathetic, it's more likely that you'll see the other person's perspective. You might be more generous in your assumptions, and take extra time to explain your feelings. What does that mean? It means instead of arguing, you might find a way to reschedule so that you both feel valued, understood and heard.

Well, empathy doesn't just apply in friendships. It is a useful skill to use whenever you are dealing with groups of people, because it helps you understand others.

Resources

For this activity you will need the following:

- Pencil
- Paper

Activity steps

Activity 1:

In this activity, you'll be creating an empathy map. This activity can be challenging, so we'll give you a full example of how it could look. Then you can choose from a couple of scenarios to create your own.

Example scenario:

Imagine you've just started at a new school. On the day that you began, one other student started as well. His name is Jamie. You and Jamie are both 14 years old and come from a similar area. Jamie's first day may vary a little from your own however, as he is enabled by a wheelchair. The school has some ramps and lifts, but Jamie's first day may play out a little differently to yours.

Look at the experience of the first day of school through Jamie's lens – all the same new experiences as you, but with a little extra planning and forethought to ensure he his accessibility needs are met. Using an empathy map, we have written down some of the experiences Jamie may encounter in this new experience.

Below is an example of what this empathy map might look like.

[All the following to be put into the empathy map template]

Use this template to write out what you think Jamie might be:

- Feeling and thinking (e.g. excited to meet so many new people, frustrated that he has to take the long route to class because there is only a ramp on one side of the building)
- Saying (e.g. where are the accessible bathrooms)
- Seeing and hearing (e.g. lots of new people he's never met before, people asking about his wheelchair)
- Doing (e.g. answering lots of questions from people curious about his wheelchair, figuring out where the tuck shop is, swapping lockers so that he can access a bottom locker)

After you've identified these, think about some of the things that would help Jamie to make this experience smoother and write them in the 'Gains' section.

In the 'Pains' section, write out anything that might be bothering Jamie or stopping him from having a good day because his wheelchair has not been catered for.

Now it's your turn:

Pick 1 of the following scenarios and create your own empathy map to explore the experiences of the people in question.

1. You work at a local supermarket. They have decided to rearrange all of the products on the shelves to make shopping a more efficient process. You are working one day and notice one of your regular customers, a blind man names Charles, struggling to find his way about. He was used to finding all his products previously, but now that everything has changed, he is finding it a challenge.
2. Your best friend Samantha is a competitive swimmer. She is really good – she was even selected to swim at the national titles! Unfortunately, the local pool has to be closed because there is flu bug going around. Samantha is upset that she won't be able to train and might have to miss several competitions.
3. Your aunt loves to get out in the garden, kneeling down and weeding among her veggie patch. Lately though, she has been getting a sore back, so she has been struggling to spend as much time doing what she loves.

Once you have picked a scenario, use the Empathy Map template and, as demonstrated in the example above, fill in each section. How would this person think, feel, speak and react to the situation at hand? Try and include as much detail as possible.

Handy tips

If you're finding this activity challenging, take a deep breath! You're not alone. Just remember your goal is to 'experience' an issue from the perspective of someone else. There are no incorrect answers.

Empathy Map

Template: User Empathy Map

Gains

What are their needs & aspirations?

Pains

What are their frustrations and fears?



Feeling & Thinking

Seeing & Hearing

Saying

Doing

Excellent job!

You have come to the end of this activity. High-five!

What now?

Photograph your work to share with your teachers - alternatively, follow the instructions your teacher has given you.