



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



Activating Social Empathy

Junior Cycle
SPHE Resource



In partnership with



UNESCO Chair in Rural Community Leadership and Youth Development, The Pennsylvania State University



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UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

The Activating Social Empathy (ASE) lessons were developed by researchers at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre and School of Education in the University of Galway, in partnership with Foróige and Pennsylvania State University.

These lessons were designed as a resource tool to support Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) teachers working with junior cycle students in post-primary education settings. This resource builds on theory and practice in the area of Social and Emotional Learning and is underpinned by evidence and research on the development of empathy, social responsibility and prosocial behaviour during adolescence.

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Introduction to Empathy



Introduction

The Activating Social Empathy (ASE) lessons were developed as a planning resource to support teaching and learning for Junior Cycle SPHE. Specifically, this resource will support teachers in addressing important learning outcomes relating to listening, respecting and communicating with others, understanding the importance of empathy, and demonstrating empathy skills. Primarily tailored for first and second year students, these sessions are strategically designed to promote empathy skills, which underpin the three crosscutting elements of SPHE: Awareness, Dialogue, and Reflection and Action.

What is Empathy?

Empathy is a fundamental **social-emotional competency**, which lies at the basis of our ability to understand and respond to one other. It operates both on an interpersonal level in our communities and on a global level with others beyond our own national, ethnic and cultural groups. From a psychological perspective, empathy is believed to comprise both **cognitive empathy** (perceiving and understanding the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of others), and **emotional empathy** (joining with others in their feelings). A third proposed element of empathy is **empathic action**; an active behavioural response based on empathy which is aimed at supporting someone else (often called “prosocial behaviour”). The definition of empathy that underpins this resource is one that combines all three of these elements: empathy that is dynamic and active and involves a compulsion to act. We call this **Social Empathy**.

Why Teach Empathy?

Psychological and sociological research indicates that empathy is a skill that can be learned, and strengthened, over time. Teaching empathy skills in second-level education is important, as evidence suggests that adolescence is a critical period for empathy development. Empathy is an important skill for adolescents to hone, as it is intricately related to young people’s social and emotional wellbeing. Empathy helps young people form and maintain quality peer relationships; promotes psychological wellbeing; and encourages altruistic behaviours. The potential benefits of empathy education in schools include: more positive classroom climate and relationships; fewer disciplinary issues; reduced levels of bullying; a more positive school culture; and improved academic performance. Social empathy in young people matters because of its capacity to enhance personal and social development and to foster wider prosocial values that enable communities to thrive (see bibliography for further reading on empathy).

Facilitation Guidelines



Overview

Activating Social Empathy (ASE) is a short, interactive SPHE resource, which utilises active learning methodologies (e.g. Diamond Nine; walking debate; group discussions) to encourage students to learn about empathy, reflect on its importance, and practise their empathy skills. These lessons aim to help students become more aware of the feelings and emotions of others, and more capable of showing and expressing empathy.

This Junior Cycle SPHE resource aims to support teaching and learning relating to the following learning outcomes. Students should be able to:

- **Learning Outcome 1.8:** Reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy, and discuss ways that it can be expressed.
- **Learning Outcome 1.7:** Communicate in a respectful and effective manner and listen openly and sensitively to the views/feelings of others.
- **Learning Outcome 1.6:** Discuss experiences/situations of bias, inequality or exclusion and devise ways to actively create more inclusive environments.
- **Learning Outcome 4.8:** Identify actions young people can take, without putting themselves at risk, in situations where they are aware of incidents of abusive behaviour or bullying happening and explore the barriers to standing up.

The ASE resource is divided into four sessions, which are intended to be facilitated on a weekly basis. Each session addresses a different theme:

- 1 Understanding Empathy** – Students expand their understanding of empathy and its importance.
- 2 Developing Empathy Skills** – Students learn and strengthen empathy-related skills.
- 3 Responding with Empathy** – Students act on the empathy skills they have developed and practise how to respond with empathy in different situations.
- 4 Addressing Barriers to Empathy** – Students identify and address some of the barriers that can prevent young people from showing empathy.

These four themes are supported by the three key elements for effective teaching and learning in SPHE: Awareness, Dialogue, and Reflection and Action. The sessions focus on each of these elements to help students develop empathy skills. The goal is to equip students with the ability to engage with others in a compassionate and understanding way.

Guidance for Teachers

Step-by-step instructions on how to deliver each ASE activity are provided at the start of each session. Please note, while it is recommended that the sessions be implemented as per these instructions, teachers may adapt or modify activities to suit the strengths and needs of their individual class groups.

Sample materials (e.g. scenarios, video links etc.) are provided for each session. Teachers may prefer to source their own materials for the activities. It is recommended that teachers review the sample materials in advance of each session to assess their suitability, and source alternative resources if needed.

Teachers are encouraged to facilitate the ASE sessions in a sequential manner (starting at Session 1 and finishing at Session 4), as each session is designed to build on the skills and knowledge gained in the previous session.

It is recommended that each ASE session be delivered over the course of one double or 60-minute class (where possible), to allow for adequate discussion time.

Notes on ASE Manual

Materials

Students will need a dedicated copy book (or equivalent), along with additional paper and pen(s). Teachers will need access to a whiteboard and an internet connection for some activities. For some activities, teachers may want to photocopy materials for the students in advance of the session. Where additional materials are needed, this is highlighted at the beginning of each activity.

Resources

Resources such as videos are sometimes embedded as part of the activities. In other cases, a list of additional resources (e.g. A3 paper, pens, etc.) is provided. Teachers are encouraged to self-source resources if they feel they are better suited to their own specific context.

Key

The following symbols are used throughout the Teacher's Manual.



Teacher's Note

The Teacher's Notes throughout the manual provide teachers with prompts and information for facilitating the activities.



Class Discussions

The class discussions are an essential part of the sessions and are important for students' empathy development. The class discussion questions provided are prompts to stimulate discussion and promote reflection, but facilitating teachers are best placed to decide what kinds of questions will provoke discussion and reflection within their own student groups. Teachers are encouraged to engage students in class discussions throughout, and challenge students to reflect on their opinions, or learning from the session, in a meaningful way.



Learning Outside the Classroom

The Learning Outside the Classroom tasks are suggestions for students' post-session learning (e.g. testing out or practising skills outside of the classroom). They offer an opportunity for students to practise their learning and help create continuity between sessions. It is recommended that the 'Learning Outside the Classroom' tasks be briefly discussed at the start of each new session.



Student Reflection

At the end of each session, students are asked to reflect on their learning. Personal reflection helps students identify what new skills or information they have learned, and to consider how their opinions were similar to, or different from, their peers. Students can write their reflections in their copy book or share their key 'take-home message' with the class.

Setting the Tone

It is important to ensure that students are in the right frame of mind for the activities. Since the sessions involve activities like role-plays and class discussions which may force students out of their comfort zone, it is important to keep reminding them that there are no right or wrong 'answers' but rather different opinions, which are all valued, and that they do not have to be gifted actors or public speakers. **The aim is that students enjoy the activities, partake fully in them, and learn from the experience.** Teachers are encouraged to help students feel comfortable, and, where necessary, adapt the methodologies to suit the characteristics of the individual class. For example, some students may prefer to carry out the activities in small groups/pairs rather than as a whole class. Teachers are also encouraged to remind students of their Class Contract throughout.

This resource is designed to be **student-led**. As far as possible, students should be encouraged to initiate and lead discussions, direct activities and adapt them to their own interests, and exercise their own creativity in completing the activities. During class discussions, teachers should encourage students to share their opinions. **Strive to ensure that a variety of different voices and opinions are heard throughout the sessions.**

Teachers as Role Models

As a teacher, it is important to be aware of your positive influence on students, as an authority figure who can model a caring, empathic approach in interactions. In this sense, the teacher's own learning is a key element of this ASE resource, which should not be overlooked. Teachers should reflect on how they can extend an empathic approach to their teaching, their interactions with students, and their interactions and relationships with other school members.

Session

1



Understanding Empathy

* Teacher reminder:

Before beginning the session, students should be reminded of their class contract – placing particular emphasis on the importance of respect, trust and participation.

Link to Junior Cycle SPHE Learning Outcomes:

Learning Outcome 1.8 Students should be able to reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy and discuss ways that it can be expressed.

Activity 1 - Understanding Empathy

This activity will focus on:

- Explaining what empathy means.
- Describing the difference between empathy and sympathy.

Type of Activity:

Brainstorm, Discussion.

Materials:

Links to video resources; Definitions for Teachers.

Method:

This activity is broken into three parts: (1) defining empathy (2) giving examples of empathy and (3) distinguishing between empathy and sympathy. It is worth spending time on this activity to ensure that students have a good grasp of the concept before moving on to the rest of the activities.

1 Write the word 'Empathy' on the whiteboard and ask students how they would define empathy. Note any keywords on the whiteboard.

2 Explain empathy to the class. Sample definitions are given in Box 1.

3 Ask the students for some real-life examples of empathy. This could be a time when somebody showed empathy to them; an occasion when they showed empathy to another person; or a time they witnessed a display of empathy between other people. You may want to ask students to break into pairs and spend a few minutes with their partner coming up with some examples.

4 Ask students whether they think empathy is different from sympathy/pity. Explain that empathy is often confused with sympathy, pity or compassion, but that these are different things. Explain the difference between Sympathy and Empathy. Some definitions/suggestions are described in Box 2.

Box 1: Explaining Empathy

Use definitions:

Empathy is the ability to understand what other people are feeling and thinking, and to share their feelings and emotions.

Perhaps the most famous quotation from literature on empathy comes from the novel “To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee. Atticus tells Scout: “If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.” (Lee, 1989, p. 33).

Empathy is also very often described as ‘putting yourself in somebody else’s shoes’ or ‘walking in somebody else’s shoes’.

Empathy involves understanding another person’s perspective (this includes being able to recognise that different people respond differently to things) and feeling an emotional, visceral response.

Use examples:

Give the example of watching somebody drop something heavy on their foot and how you might wince, lift your own foot off the ground in an involuntary reaction, and maybe even feel a little flash of pain in your own foot.

Give the example of someone telling you about an experience that you yourself have gone through and how you find yourself understanding the other person’s thoughts and feelings in a very clear and profound way.

Give the example of watching a sad scene in a TV show, film or online video, and finding yourself feeling upset along with the characters.

Use videos:

Sesame Street, ‘**Mark Ruffalo: Empathy**’ (Running Time: 2.28)

Lifehacker, ‘**The importance of empathy**’ (Running Time: 3.30)

CogSai, ‘**What is empathy?**’ (Running Time: 3.31)

Box 2: Explaining the Difference between Empathy and Sympathy

Use definitions:

Sympathy is a feeling of care and concern for someone else, often accompanied by a wish to see him or her better off or happier. “I feel sad for you, I wish you were feeling better”. Sympathy can often lead to empathy but it is different. It does not involve understanding or sharing the other person’s perspective or feelings.

Use videos:

The Royal Society of Arts, ‘**Brené Brown on Empathy**’ (Running Time: 2.53)

SoulPancake, ‘**The Parking Ticket Experiment | The Science of Empathy**’ (Running Time: 6.48)



Class Discussion:

1

How did you feel when you showed empathy or were shown empathy?

2

How do you think empathy could lead to compassion and kindness for others? Why does this happen?

3

Is it easy or difficult to show empathy?

*PROMPT: Does it depend on who you are showing empathy to?
Is it easier to feel empathy for some people?*

4

Where do you think empathy comes from?

*PROMPT: Do you think that empathy is something
we are born with or something we learn?*



Teacher's Note

Psychology research shows that empathy is a key predictor of young people's helping behaviours. People with stronger empathy skills are not only more likely to help others, but also engage in more responsive and targeted helping (i.e. help in a way that better fits the person's individual needs). However, scientific evidence also shows that empathy varies across different situations. We tend to find it easier to empathise with our friends/families, and people we know and like, and find it more difficult to empathise with those we think are different from us, people we don't know, or people we don't like. While there are some genetic links to empathy, empathy is a skill that can be learned and practised over time. Some of the most important ways children learn and develop empathy include: Being shown empathy by others; Seeing empathy being modelled by others; Learning about empathy (and similar topics) in schools; Being in an environment where empathy is valued. Parents, friends and schools all play an important role in shaping young people's empathy development.

Activity 2 – The Importance of Empathy

This activity will focus on:

Developing an awareness of the benefits of empathy.

Type of Activity:

Think Pair Share - Discussion

Materials:

Stories of Empathy Cards.

Method:

- 1 Assign students to pairs and give each pair one of the 'Stories of Empathy Cards' (pages 16-19), describing situations where young people treated others with or without empathy.
- 2 In their pairs, students should discuss and decide whether empathy was shown in the situation they were given.
- 3 Ask the pairs to discuss the impact that empathy or the lack of empathy had on the situation depicted. Students could use the table below to jot down their ideas.



Class Discussion:

- 1 **How does being empathic/not being empathic change the outcome in each of these stories?**
- 2 **Does empathy make a difference?**
PROMPT: How does empathy impact our relationships or interactions with others?
- 3 **Why is empathy important?**



Session 1 Reflection

Allow the class a few minutes to reflect on their learning from the session. Ask students to identify and write down the key take home message they learned from the session.



Learning outside the classroom

Suggest to students that they make a note of any example of empathy they come across during the week. This might include a time when somebody shows empathy to them, an example of empathy they witness in their family or amongst their friends, or examples of empathy they see online or in books. At the beginning of the next session, ask students to share their examples.

Stories of Empathy Cards

Examples with Empathy

Stories of Empathy	Was empathy shown in this situation? Give examples to support your answer.	How did empathy or the lack of empathy affect the situation?
<p>1. Charlie and Luke have been friends since primary school. Charlie really likes Jenny and told Luke about this last month. At the weekend, Luke got together with Jenny behind Charlie's back. Charlie found out through another friend. When Charlie confronted Luke about it, he decided to listen to Luke's side, and understand the situation better, before deciding what to do. Luke could tell he had really hurt Charlie and felt awful about it, but explained that he had also liked Jenny for a long time and hadn't said anything because he knew Charlie liked her. Luke hadn't planned on doing anything but it turned out Jenny liked him too. Charlie could see how genuinely sorry Luke was.</p>		

Stories of Empathy	Was empathy shown in this situation? Give examples to support your answer.	How did empathy or the lack of empathy affect the situation?
<p>2. Jamie and Alex have just finished playing a football match. During the match, Jamie kept making loud comments about Alex and pointing out any mistakes Alex made on the pitch. In the changing room afterwards, Jamie continued to make jokes about Alex. Alex pulled Jamie aside and asked him to stop. Jamie said he only meant the comments as a joke and didn't think Alex would take it so seriously. Alex explained that he already felt bad about his performance and that Jamie's comments were just making him feel worse. Jamie could see that Alex was beating himself up over losing the game, and realised he had taken the jokes too far, and apologised.</p>		
<p>3. Ella has been dealing with some things at home recently and hasn't been feeling fully herself. Her friend, Aisling, noticed that Ella seemed a bit down and asked her if everything was okay. Ella explained what was going on and how she was feeling. Aisling patiently listened to everything Ella had to say, without passing judgement. Aisling told Ella that she could understand how Ella must be feeling, and that she was there to listen if Ella ever needed to talk about it. Ella felt better after talking to Aisling.</p>		

Examples without Empathy

Stories of Empathy	Was empathy shown in this situation? Give examples to support your answer.	How did empathy or the lack of empathy affect the situation?
<p>1. Charlie and Luke have been friends since primary school. Charlie really likes Jenny and told Luke about this last month. At the weekend, Luke got together with Jenny behind Charlie's back. Charlie found out through another friend. When Charlie confronted Luke about it, he was really mad and told Luke that what he did was not on. Charlie felt Luke was a bad friend and couldn't understand why he would go behind his back like that. Luke told Charlie to stop over-reacting and tried to explain what happened, but Charlie didn't want to hear it. Charlie and Luke couldn't see eye to eye and ended up having a big falling out over it.</p>		
<p>2. Jamie and Alex have just finished playing a football match. During the match, Jamie kept making loud comments about Alex and pointing out any mistakes Alex made on the pitch. In the changing room afterwards, Jamie continued to make jokes about Alex. Alex was hurt by the comments and snapped at Jamie. Jamie said he was only joking and that Alex should calm down. Jamie told the rest of the team that he hadn't realised Alex was so sensitive.</p>		

Stories of Empathy

Was empathy shown in this situation? Give examples to support your answer.

How did empathy or the lack of empathy affect the situation?

3. Ella has been dealing with some things at home recently and hasn't been feeling fully herself. Ella decided to open up to her friend Aisling, and explain what was going on with her and how she was feeling. Aisling told Ella that she should look on the bright side because things could be a lot worse and started to change the subject. Ella felt that Aisling hadn't really listened to her, and had made her feel guilty for feeling the way that she did. Ella felt even worse after talking to Aisling.

Session

2



Developing Empathy Skills

Link to Junior Cycle SPHE Learning Outcomes:

Learning Outcome 1.8 Students should be able to reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy, and discuss ways it can be expressed.

Learning Outcome 1.7 Students should be able to communicate in a respectful and effective manner and listen openly and sensitively to the views/feelings of others.

Type of Activity:

Game

Materials:

Emotion Cards; Hat/Box; Online Quiz.

Method:

This activity is divided into two parts: a game and a quiz. Both aim to get students thinking about how they read other people's emotions through body language and facial expressions.

1 Before you begin, ask the students to explain the difference between verbal and non-verbal communication, and define what is meant by body language. Some definitions to help them understand the concepts are provided in the Teacher's note below.



CHECK-IN: Learning outside the classroom

Begin by asking students how they got on with the Learning Outside the Classroom task from Session 1 (if applicable).

- Did you come across any examples of empathy during the week – in person, in the news, on social media?
- Can you give examples of when you witnessed or were shown empathy during the week?

Activity 1 – Reading Other People's Emotions

This activity will focus on:

Describing the importance of body language in determining the emotional states of others.

2 Explain that this activity is like a game of charades - Emotion Charades - designed to help them practise reading people's emotions through their body language.

3 Cut up the emotion cards (see page 23) and place them in a hat/box.

4 Ask volunteers to come to the top of the room and pull an Emotion Card (see below) out of a hat. They must act out the emotion using only their facial expressions and body language.

5

One of the tests psychologists use to study Emotional Intelligence is to ask people to guess what emotion is being conveyed in photographs of facial expressions (which are one type of body language). Load this Quiz from the Greater Good website http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/ei_quiz/. You can do some or all of this quiz with the class, accepting the answer that most of the class agree on in each case (the quiz gives you the answer).



Teacher's Note

Communication skills are divided into verbal and non-verbal communication.

Verbal Communication:

Any form of communication using verbal language (e.g. speaking, writing).

Non-verbal communication:

Any form of communication that does not use words. This includes facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, body position and posture, known collectively as 'body language'.

Body language is a form of non-verbal communication. It includes the gestures we make (e.g. with our hands), facial expressions we use (e.g. furrowing our brows, smiling, widening our eyes), and postures we adopt (e.g. folding our arms, crossing our legs). A significant amount of information is transmitted by our bodies in social interactions. Some would even say we unconsciously give things away with our body language. For example, it is suggested that when a person is lying or holding back information they might use certain hand gestures like concealing their mouth or blinking for slightly longer than normal.

It is also true that there are cultural differences in the use of body language. For example, maintaining eye contact when you are being asked a question is considered polite in some cultures but rude in others.

Why is body language important?

It is therefore important to be able to read people's body language to fully understand what they are saying or how they are feeling. For example, if somebody tells you they are not nervous before a test, but you notice they are fidgeting and their eyes are moving around a lot, do you think they are actually nervous?

Emotion Cards

Sadness	Disappointment	Excitement	Annoyance
Hurt	Irritation	Triumph	Pity
Worry	Anger	Shyness	Joy
Fear	Guilt	Loneliness	Pride
Boredom	Happiness	Frustration	Embarrassment



Class Discussion:

- 1 How does body language help us understand how others are feeling?
- 2 How easy or difficult is it to read body language?
- 3 Are some people easier to read than others? Does it depend on the situation?

Activity 2 – Empathic Listening

This activity will focus on:

Describing the importance of empathic listening and practising empathic listening skills.

Type of Activity:

Listening, Pair Work

Materials:

Guide to Empathic Listening

Method:

- 1 Ask students what they think are the signs of a good listener. Brainstorm with students as a group, writing their answers on the whiteboard.
- 2 Ask students to read through the *Guide to Empathic Listening*. Compare the guide to students' opinions about what makes a good listener.
- 3 Split the class into pairs and ask them to assign a Speaker and a Listener.
- 4 Ask each person to think of a low-level problem they are currently experiencing or a time when they felt unhappy or challenged in some way. Provide examples for the class, such as struggling with a school subject; being ill or injured; not performing as well as they expected in an exam or at sports; being embarrassed by something; or feeling unfairly treated by a parent/teacher etc. Tell students to only disclose information that they feel comfortable sharing (see teacher's note below).
- 5 Each Speaker will be given 3 minutes to tell their story while the Listener practises empathic listening. At the end of each conversation, they will swap roles.
- 6 Walk around the room observing the interactions and helping students if necessary.

Guide to Empathic Listening

1. Give your full attention.

- Give the speaker your undivided attention.
- Put away phones and get rid of other distractions if possible.
- If your attention wanders while the other person is speaking, gently bring it back to them.

2. Maintain eye contact.

- Try not to let your eyes wander around the room.
- Try to maintain good eye contact with the speaker without staring (if appropriate).

3. Remove barriers.

- Don't place yourself behind physical barriers, such as tables.
- Avoid crossing your arms when you are listening.

4. Use encouraging body language.

- Use encouraging body language signs like nodding and smiling.

5. Let them speak.

- Don't interrupt the other person unnecessarily.
- If you need to clarify what the person is saying, wait for a natural break in the conversation.
- Allow for silence, you don't need to fill every gap in the conversation.

6. Understand.

- Listen to the other person's words and read their body language.
- Really try to understand the emotions the other person is feeling and the thoughts they are thinking.

7. Show that you understand.

- Let the other person know that you understand them by using words and gestures.
- For example, reflect back to the person what you have heard (e.g. *'I think I know what you are saying that ...'*, *'I understand...'*, *'I totally get where you are coming from ...'*)
- Share examples from your own experience if you have any (but be careful not to make the conversation about you!).

8. Don't judge.

- Don't judge or criticise what the other person is saying.



Teacher's Note

To maximise the effectiveness of this activity, teachers may want to demonstrate this activity first before assigning students to their Speaker and Listener roles. You could use a student volunteer or show a short video of empathic listening.

Remind students that they should not share a deeply personal experience. Emphasise that students should focus on events/problems that trigger only mild to moderate feelings, rather than severe negative feelings, or relate to a problem that was temporary.

This short clip from the film 'Inside Out' may help students understand empathic listening more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t685WM5R6aM>



Class Discussion:

1

How did you find practising empathic listening? What was easy? What was most challenging?

2

Do you think empathic listening is important?

PROMPT: *How does it feel when someone listens to you with empathy/ how does it feel when someone doesn't seem to listen? How did you feel being the speaker?*

3

How can you best practise empathic listening?

4

Can you think of times/situations when you were an empathic listener? Or times/situations when you could be in the future?



Session 2 Reflection

Allow students a few minutes to reflect on their learning from the session. Ask students to think about what surprised them most about reading other people's emotions or being a good listener. Ask a few students to share their answers with the class.



Learning outside the classroom

Suggest to students that they try out empathic listening with somebody during the week. Ask them about this at the beginning of the next session.

Session

3



Responding with Empathy

Link to Junior Cycle SPHE

Learning Outcomes:

Learning Outcome 1.8 Students should be able to reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy, and discuss ways it can be expressed.

Learning Outcome 1.7 Students should be able to communicate in a respectful and effective manner and listen openly and sensitively to the views/feelings of others.

Learning Outcome 1.6 Students should be able to discuss experiences/situations of bias, inequality or exclusion and devise ways to actively create more inclusive environments.

Type of Activity:

Walking Debate.



CHECK-IN:

Learning outside the classroom

Begin by asking students how they got on with the Learning Outside the Classroom task from Session 2 (if applicable).

- How did you practise empathic listening during the week?
- Did you put yourself in the other person's shoes?
- How did you feel?
- What did you learn?

Activity 1 – Walking Debate

This activity will focus on:

Practising perspective-taking and feeling empathy for others in different circumstances.

Materials:

Role-Cards.

This activity is adapted from Barrett, J. & Richardson, F. (2007), 'Giant steps' in Ireland – a level playing pitch? A Transition Unit resource. Combat Poverty Agency, pp. 31-2.

Method:

1 Give each student a Role Card. Ensure that some students are given the same role cards, in order to compare and contrast perspectives at the end. When giving out the Role Cards, be sensitive to the individual circumstances of your class. If you feel that certain students should not receive certain cards, exclude these cards altogether.

2 Ask students to read their Role Card and to enter into their roles. They should think about who they are, where they live, how many are in their family, what kind of life they have, what opportunities they have, and whether they feel as though they belong in their community, school, family etc.

3 Ask students to line up on one side of the room with their backs to the wall. Ensure that they line up in random order, so that each person will move a greater or lesser distance than the person beside them.

4 Explain that you are going to read a series of statements. Students should take a giant step if they can do that

thing quite easily or if the statement fully applies to them. They should take a baby step if they can do it but with difficulty or if it applies to them a little bit. They should not move if the statement does not apply to them.

5 Read the Walking Debate statements to the students (see page 35).



Teacher's Note

Social exclusion is sometimes described as 'a process which pushes people out to the edge of society and distances them further and further from the chance of a job or an adequate income, from social and educational opportunities, from social and community networks and from power and decision-making' (Barrett & Richardson, 2007, p. 8). People can be excluded from society/community groups, or may have more difficulty accessing resources/opportunities/rights because of their gender, socio-economic background, race/ethnicity, or sexuality etc.

For the walking debate, it is important that the students feel comfortable engaging with their role cards. Remind students that they are answering the walking debate questions from the point-of-view of their assigned role card, and that answers do not reflect students' own personal circumstances. You may wish to give students name-tags with the names of the role-card characters, so that they feel more comfortable answering from their character's perspective.

For the class discussion, choose a number of students who moved to the top of the room to talk about their experience – who were they? When and why could they move forward, or when and why did they stay put? Repeat for students in the middle and at the back of the room. Try to compare students who have the same role card if possible (why might there have been a difference in their perspectives?)

Role Cards

SORCHA, 13

You live in Galway in a large house overlooking the sea with your two sisters. Your mother is a solicitor and your father is a doctor. You enjoy school and are good at learning so have asked for a laptop for your birthday to help with your studies. This summer you are hoping to go to Irish College and French College to improve your languages. You went on the school tour to Paris this year and loved it and are hoping to do some more travelling with your family this summer.

Overview: Plans to get a laptop; Plans to go to Irish & French Summer Colleges; Went to Paris; Hopes to do more travelling.

JOHN, 14

You live in Athlone, Co. Westmeath with your two older brothers. Your father and mother run a café in the town, but this year it was flooded for the second time in four years. The family lost lots of money as a result and things are stressful at home and money is tight. One of your older brothers is already in college and the other is hoping to start a degree next year. Your parents are struggling to pay the bills so you help out more in the café after school.

Overview: Parents' café was flooded; Money is tight at home; Helps out in the café.

OWEN, 12

You live with your mother, step-father and three younger siblings in Cork. You're really close with your grandmother. She lives nearby so she usually collects you after school and you stay with her until your mom finishes work. You hate doing homework and spend most of your free time playing Playstation and hanging out with your friends in town. Your mom thinks you spend too much time having fun and that you should work harder at school, and the two of you sometimes fight about this.

Overview: Close to grandmother; Hates homework; Likes PlayStation & hanging out with friends; Fights with mom about school.

JAMES, 13

You live on a halting site with your mother, father, brothers and sisters. You like it but it can be difficult sometimes as the facilities aren't great. You go to the local school but you find it hard because there aren't many other young people from the Travelling Community, and you get a lot of hassle all the time so you only hang out with other young people from your community. You've stopped going to school some days and you're not sure how much longer you will bother with it. Your father says there's no point staying on in school as it won't help you get a job because employers all hold being a Traveller against you anyway.

Overview: Lives on a halting site; Part of the Traveller community; Gets hassled at school; Stopped going to school some days

SARAH, 12

Your father lost his job and the landlord raised the rent a year ago. As a result you, your parents and two younger brothers were made homeless and were placed in a hotel room while the council try to find you all a place to live. It takes three buses to cross the city from the hotel to your school, and you are exhausted by the time you arrive. It's really hard to do homework on a hotel bed with your brothers jumping around and you have no space of your own. You are tired and upset much of the time and are losing focus at school. You're also cut off from your friends now that you live so far away.

Overview: Family made homeless; Lives in a hotel room; Takes 3 buses to get to school; Tired & upset a lot; Feels cut off from friends

ELAINE, 13

You have been a wheelchair user for as long as you can remember. You live at home with your parents and older sister, who are all really helpful and supportive. Your family is well off and your house is very wheelchair-friendly. Your parents bring you to lots of places and buy you what you need so you don't feel different. You are going to the local secondary school and have plenty of friends. You miss out on some things like sport, and it's not always as easy for you to get around which can make socialising a problem depending on where your friends want to go. You want to go to college one day but worry about your ability to live on your own away from the support of your family.

Overview: Wheelchair-user; Family is well-off; Plenty of friends; Misses out on some things; Worries about ability to live alone

SHANE, 15

You live with your sister, brother and parents in County Limerick. You realised you were gay two years ago but so far you have only come out to your two best friends, who were very supportive. You love sports and working out and want to be a personal trainer when you're older. You have a hard time in school, with people calling you hurtful names. You can't wait to leave school and get as far away from home as possible.

Overview: Came out as gay to best friends; Loves sports; Has a hard time in school; Can't wait to leave school and get away

LISA, 14

You live in a small town in Donegal with your mother and 10-year-old sister. Your father passed away a year ago and you are all still grieving. You go to the local school near your home. You have ADHD and sometimes you find it hard to concentrate in school, but you love music and art. You like making online music videos with your friends and hope to be able to work in the music industry when you're older.

Overview: Father passed away; Finds it hard to concentrate in school; Likes music and art.

MERCY, 14

Your parents are from Nigeria and moved to Ireland before you were born. You were born in Ireland and are attending a secondary school near where you live. Most of the students at school are friendly, and you have a large group of friends, but you feel that some of the teachers look down on you. You feel that some teachers don't ask for your contribution as often as they do with other students and you think that they assume you don't have any ambitions to go to University.

Overview: Parents are from Nigeria; Most students are friendly; Large group of friends; Feels ignored by teachers

QUINN, 15

You live in rented accommodation in Kerry with your mother and younger brother. You are transgender and sometimes have a hard time in school because of this, but your family is really supportive. You are passionate about advocating for better trans rights and like connecting with other like-minded people online. You don't like going to school and feel that schools should spend more time teaching important life-skills.

Overview: Lives in Kerry; Transgender; Doesn't like school; Thinks schools need to teach more life-skills.

PETER, 14

You are from Canada but are living in Dublin as your parents travel for work. You are attending a private school and are working hard to do well. You find it easy to make friends as you play sports and socialise after school. Your parents give you money each month so you can go out with your friends. You love to travel but wish that you could stay longer than a couple of years in any one city.

Overview: From Canada; Travels a lot; Parents give him money; Likes to socialise with friends; Doesn't like moving house so often.

PHIL, 13

You were recently diagnosed with Autism. Sometimes you feel a bit stressed with group-work in class and your Teacher doesn't always recognise this. You have some really good friends but sometimes you feel that the other students at school don't understand you. You really want to hang out with your classmates more, but it can get a bit overwhelming when there's lots of noise and people around. Your parents do whatever they can to help you get involved in stuff that interests you, and they can afford this because they have well-paid jobs.

Overview: Has Autism; Finds lots of noise and people overwhelming; Has some really good friends; Would like to hang out with classmates more.

Walking Debate Statements

- You will do well in school.
- You will easily get a part time job.
- You will go to third level (college, university) when you finish school.
- Your basic needs for food, drink and medicine are met.
- You feel physically safe.
- You have your own bedroom.
- You can get most of the things you ask for like clothes, spending money etc.
- You are happy at school.
- You have a secure and happy home life.
- You like living where you do.
- You have plenty of friends.
- You can easily go out and socialise with friends.
- You have enough money to go on holidays each year.
- You can join in the life of your school and community easily.
- You get extra help and support when you need it.
- You are confident you will reach your full potential in life.
- You don't feel isolated.
- You have various skills and talents.
- You probably won't suffer from mental health problems.
- You can go to the shop easily on your own.
- You have access to social media.
- You are able to read and write.
- You feel accepted and valued in the community where you live.
- You can be yourself without being bullied or made to feel different.
- You are looking forward to the future which is pretty secure.
- You can easily access facilities in your town such as restaurants and cinema etc.
- You are happy.



Class Discussion:

1

For those who could take most of the steps, why was this the case?

How did that feel?

What statements could you move on?

What statements made you stay put?

2

For those who were left behind, why was this the case?

How did that feel?

What statements could you move on?

What statements made you stay put?

3

How did you feel when others beside you were moving ahead or being left behind?

4

How could those who stayed behind be helped to move forward?

5

What practical things can we do to support people who have less access to resources, or don't have the same opportunities as others?

Activity 2 – Acting with Empathy

This activity will focus on:

Describing ways we can respond with empathy in different situations.

Type of Activity:

Group work, Role play, Scenarios

Materials:

Situation Cards

Method:

- 1 Divide the students into groups and give each group a different Situation Card (page 38-41).
- 2 Explain that each group should write down how they would respond with empathy to the situation they have been given. Ask them to write out the actions they would perform and the words they might use. They can give a few different responses if they like. Remind them to consider things from the point of view of the person at the centre of the scenario.
- 3 Ask the groups to prepare a role play to act out the scenario.
- 4 Walk amongst the class prompting and helping if necessary.
- 5 Ask some or all of the groups to role-play the scenario to the rest of the class. After each role play has been performed, ask the other groups if they can come up with any other ways of responding with empathy in that situation.



Class Discussion:

1

Is it sometimes difficult to know how to respond with empathy or kindness? Why/In what ways is it difficult?

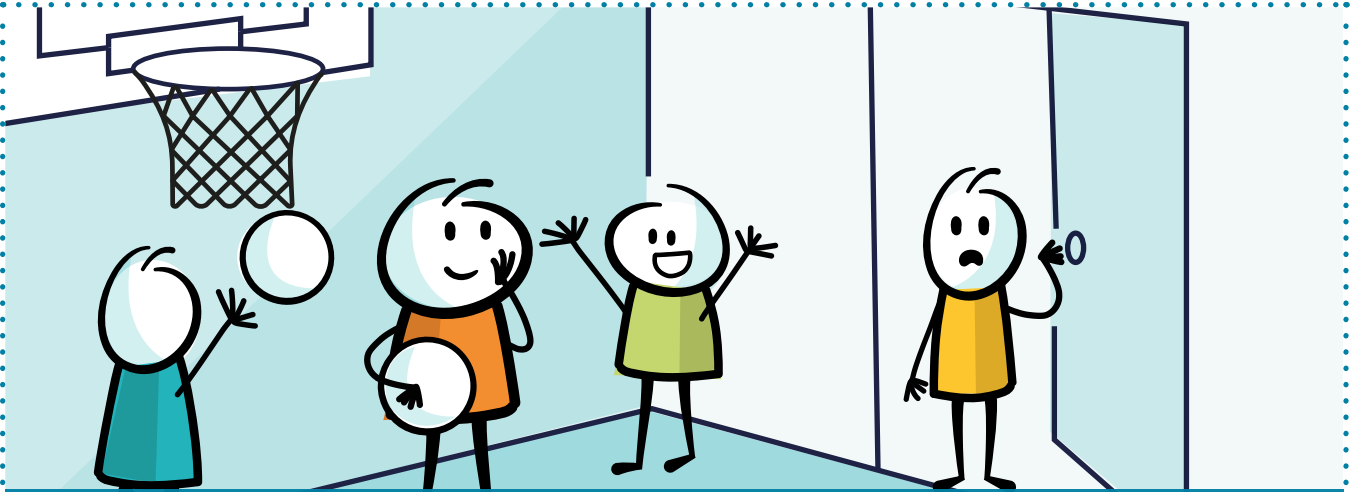
2

What are the potential consequences of showing empathy to others?

PROMPT: *Does it differ depending on the situation you are in or the person you are with?*

3

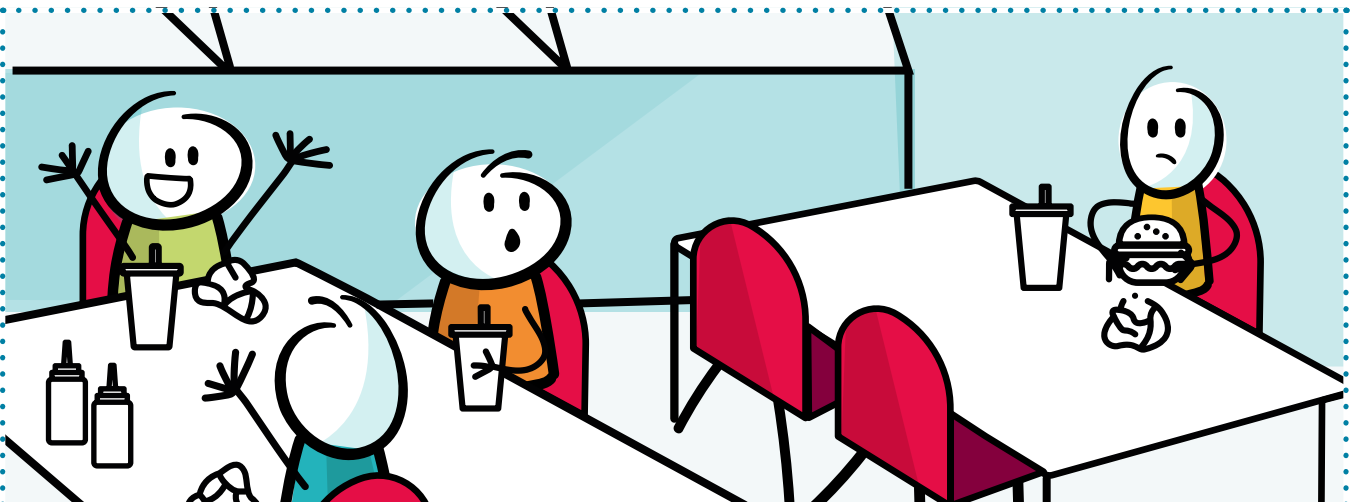
Can you think of some everyday examples where you are called on to respond with empathy or kindness? How might you respond in these cases?



Situation Card - Responding with Empathy

A new person arrives to join your sports club or youth club and seems shy. They hang back by the door and seem afraid to come into the room.

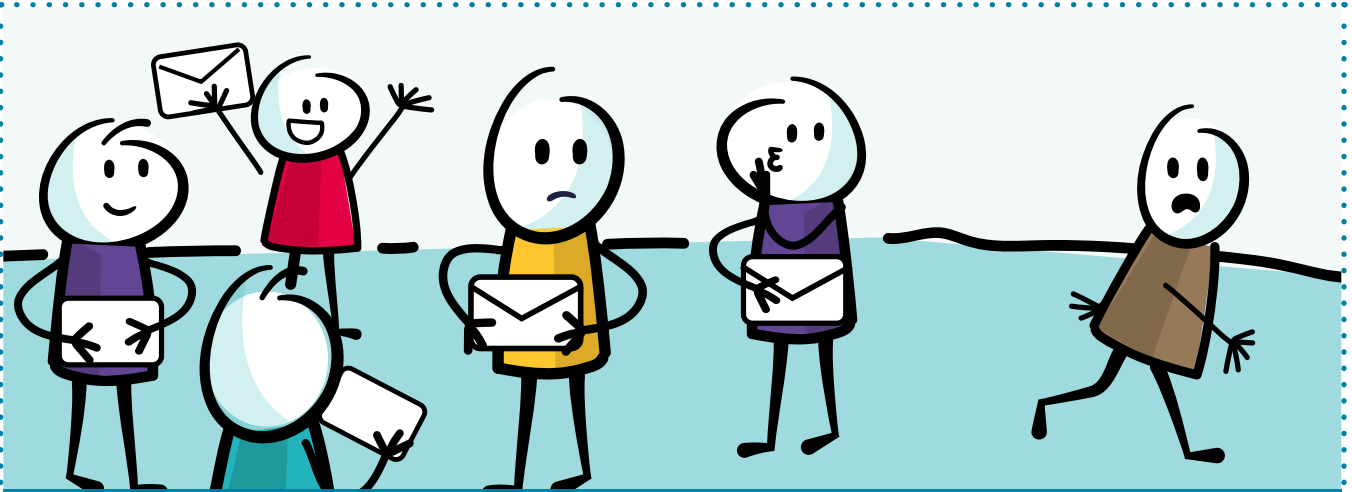
How would you respond?



Situation Card - Responding with Empathy

You are in the chipper with your friends at the weekend when you notice another classmate eating alone. They look embarrassed to see you.

How would you respond?



Situation Card - Responding with Empathy

Your friend is organising their birthday party. You find out that they invited everyone in the class, apart from one person, and you think your friend left that person out on purpose.

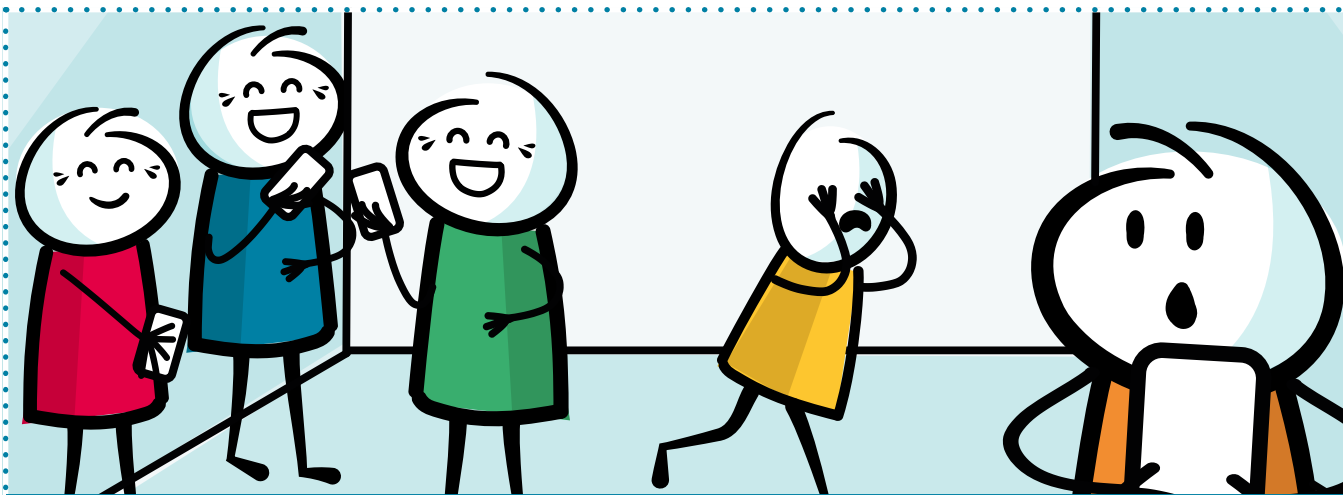
How would you respond?



Situation Card - Responding with Empathy

In the hallway at school, you see that some older students have grabbed another student's phone and are looking through their social media, laughing and making comments. The student seems upset.

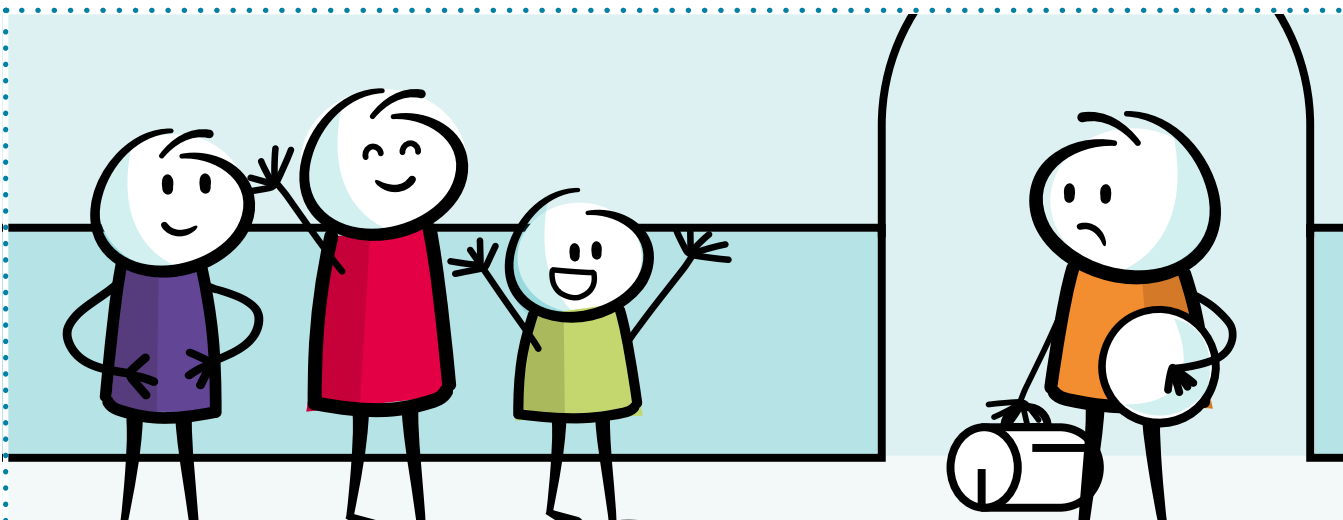
How would you respond?



Situation Card - Responding with Empathy

You were recently sent a photo of a student in your class. The whole class is talking about the image and the student seems pretty bothered about it.

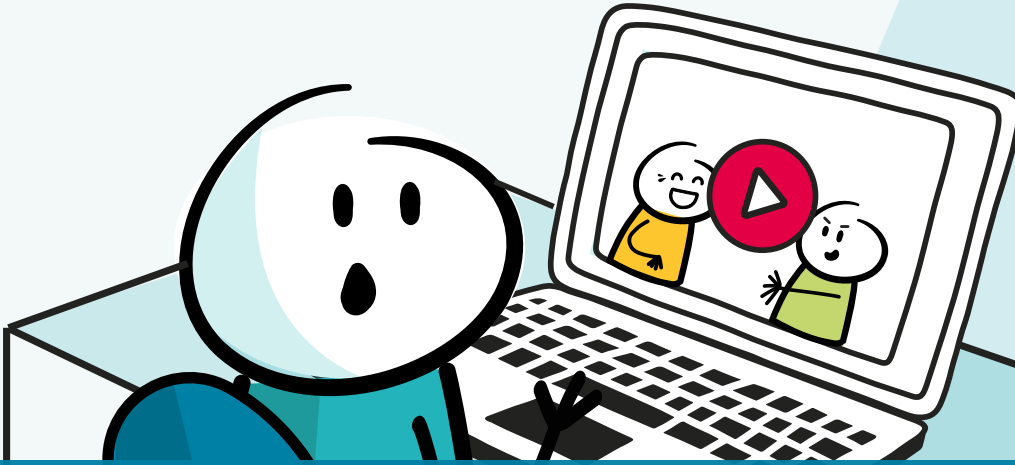
How would you respond?



Situation Card - Responding with Empathy

You and your pals have just seen your other friend lose an important match, where they did not perform their best. You meet them leaving the venue afterwards.

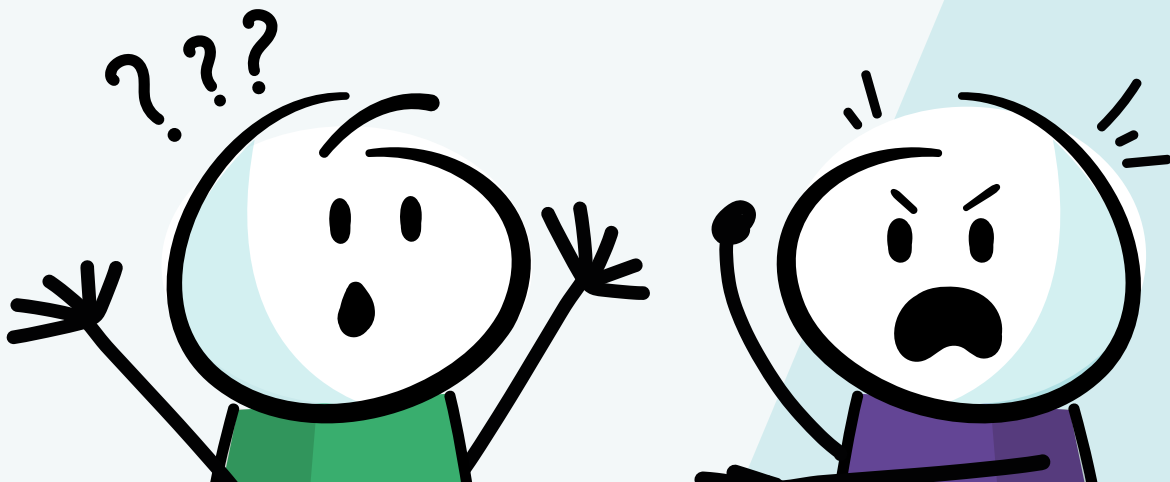
How would you respond?



Situation Card - Responding with Empathy

You're watching videos online and you see a video that some students in your class uploaded making fun of another student. You don't know that student very well, but get the feeling most people don't like them.

How would you respond?



Situation Card - Responding with Empathy

One of your closest friends has been acting off with you recently. They have lashed out at you a few times for what seems like no reason at all.

How would you respond?



Session 3 Reflection

Allow the class a few minutes to reflect on their learning from the session. Ask students to think about what they learned in the session and whether their opinions about how to show empathy changed. Ask students to write-down three things they learned or feel different about, after taking part in the session.



Learning outside the classroom

Ask students to keep note of how they show empathy to others during the week and ask them for examples at the start of the next session.

Session

4



Addressing Barriers to Empathy

Link to Junior Cycle SPHE Learning Outcomes:

Learning Outcome 1.8 Students should be able to reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy, and discuss ways it can be expressed.

Learning Outcome 4.8 Students should be able to identify actions young people can take, without putting themselves at risk, in situations where they are aware of incidents of abusive behaviour or bullying happening and explore the barriers to standing up.

Type of Activity:

Discussion, Group Work, Situations, Diamond Nine



CHECK-IN: Learning outside the classroom

Begin this session by asking students how they got on with the *Learning Outside the Classroom* task from Session 3 (if applicable).

- What examples do students have from the week where they responded with empathy?
- Were there times it was difficult to respond with empathy?

Activity 1 – Barriers to Empathic Action

This activity will focus on:

Identifying the factors that influence people's empathy behaviours.

Materials:

Scenarios

Method:

1 Split the class into groups and give each group the list of Scenarios below (page 46). You may wish to photocopy these scenarios and cut them out for students in advance. Ask students to note how they would feel or react in each of these situations.

2 In their groups, the students should discuss how likely they would be to intervene in each situation and to think about what influenced their decision?

3 Ask each group to rank the scenarios depending on how likely they are to intervene in each situation, using the diamond nine format. Students should place the scenario where they would be most likely to offer help or intervene at the top of their diamond nine, followed by the other scenarios in rank order, down to the scenario where they are least likely to help.

* Teacher reminder:

Please see below links for more information on Diamond Nines:

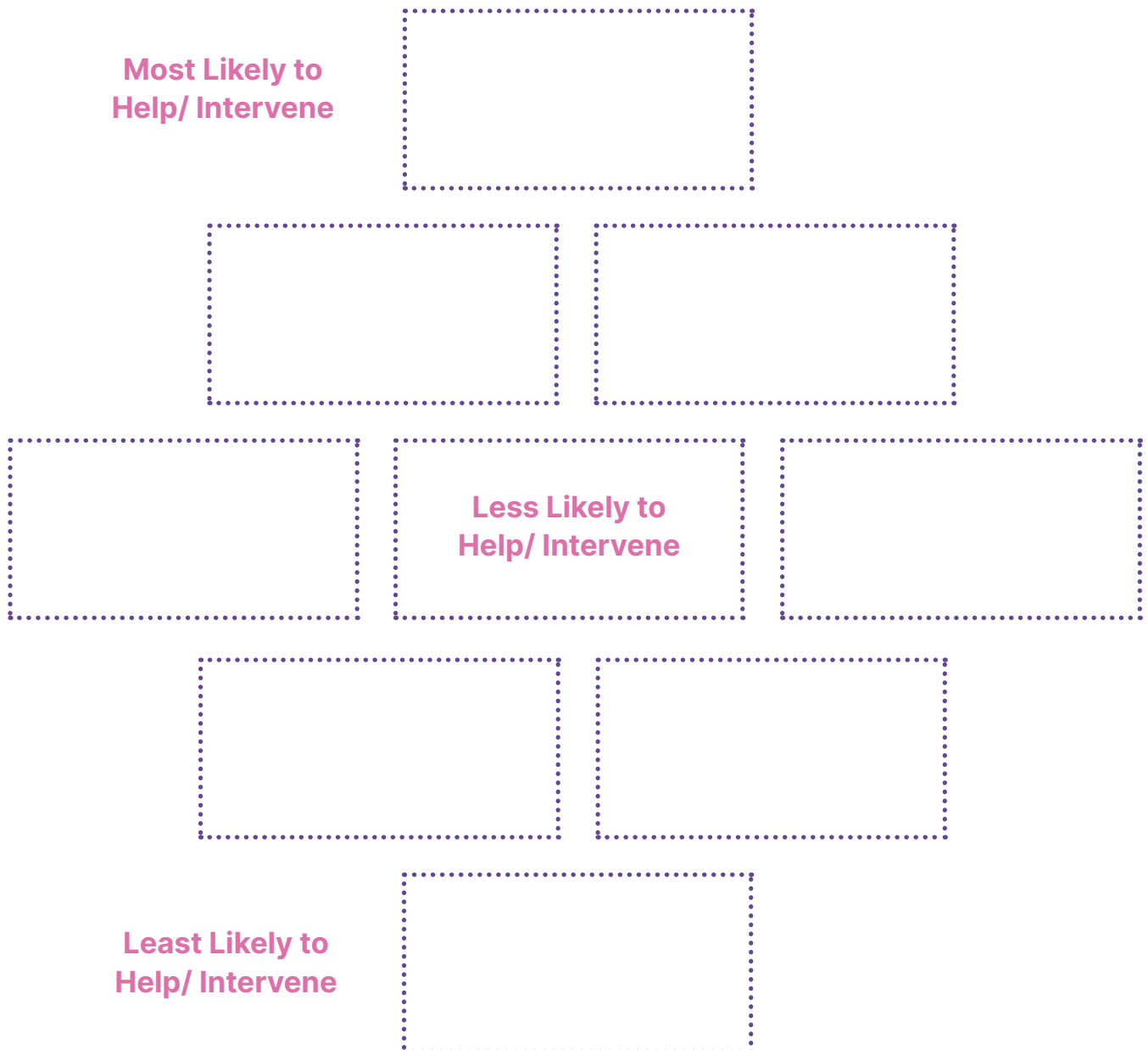
<https://www.jct.ie/perch/resources/english/diamond-nine-strategy-sheet-1.pdf>

(Link to diamond nine activity on JCT)

<https://pdst.ie/sites/default/files/teaching%20toolkit%20booklet%20without%20keyskills.pdf>

(diamond ranking from PDST)

Example Diamond Nine Format



Scenarios

The final bell has gone and you are walking out of school with your friends. Everyone is around, heading home. You see another student drop their schoolbag and the contents fall out all over the path.

You are at basketball training and two of your teammates get into a fight. One teammate tells the other to go back home to their own country.

You are walking through the park to get home. It's quiet and there is no one else around. You see a man looking everywhere for his dog, calling the dog's name, looking really worried.

You are chatting on social media with a group of your friends when some of them begin to gang up on another member of the group and criticise their behaviour and appearance.

You are on your own and about to walk into the disco to meet your friends. You see another student from your year sitting alone on the ground outside. They do not seem well and look like they need to go home.

You are at school and see another student from your class attempting to break the teacher's laptop on purpose.

You had a falling out with one of your friends a while ago. One day at school you see them coming out of class looking really upset.

A person you met on social media is looking for help volunteering at the weekend and wants to meet you in town.

Your friend has written horrible notes about another person in your class on the back of the bathroom door.



Teacher's Note

There are a number of reasons why people may fail to help or intervene in certain situations.

One common barrier to empathic action is the Bystander Effect

The Bystander Effect is a phenomenon in which individuals are less likely to offer help to somebody when other people are nearby. People are much more likely to help when there is nobody watching.

Sometimes this happens due to 'diffusion of responsibility'. This means that when there are other people around, you feel less pressure to help as you assume the responsibility is not all yours. The trouble is that when everyone thinks like this, nobody takes responsibility.

A second reason is that we feel the need to behave in a socially acceptable way. When other people fail to react, we often take this as a signal that a response is not needed or not appropriate (*i.e. there must be a reason no one is helping...maybe they know something I don't know?*). We worry that if we respond we are overreacting and will look stupid.

The Bystander Effect is usually spoken about in cases of emergency such as if somebody is drowning and the people on the shore don't go to their aid. But it also applies to less serious situations, for example when somebody slips or drops their bag on a busy street and the contents spill out on the floor – and no one helps.

You could explain the Bystander Effect to students using the example provided below.

SoulPancake, '**The Bystander Effect | The Science of Empathy**',
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy6eUTLzcU4&index=3&list=PLzvRx_johoA85tJ4dNepYNjRXM0svNOXH (Running Time: 5.53)



Class Discussion

1

Can you think of any examples when you have not acted or helped or intervened when you thought you should have? What stopped you from acting or showing empathy?

2

What kind of things stop people from helping others or showing empathy?

PROMPT: *Does it depend on the situation or does it depend on our own skills?*

Activity 2 – Identifying Solutions

This activity will focus on:

Addressing barriers to empathy and identifying solutions

Type of Activity:

Brainstorm, Discussion

Materials:

Scenarios from activity one, Diamond Nine

Method:

- 1 Invite students to stay in the same groups from Activity 1.
- 2 Ask each group to look at the scenario that they placed on the bottom of their Diamond Nine list.
- 3 Taking the scenario from the bottom of the Diamond Nine list in Activity One – ask each group to identify the barriers that would prevent people from acting in that situation.
- 4 Ask each group to come up with three suggestions of things they could do to tackle those barriers and show empathy in that situation. If the groups have chosen the same scenario at the bottom of their Diamond Nine, invite each group to work on scenarios from other parts of the diamond nine.



Class Discussion

1 How can we overcome barriers and act empathically?

2 What are the most practical ways of showing empathy?

3 What skills have you learnt to help you show empathy?

Activity 3 – My Empathy Goals

This activity will focus on:

Identifying and committing to personal empathy goals.

Type of Activity:

Goal Setting

Materials:

Copy book or paper

Method:

- 1** To finish this session ask the students to devise empathy goals for the class as well as their own personal empathy goals.
- 2** To work on the class goals, break the class into groups and ask them to come up with three 'Empathy Goals' to aim towards as a group. These goals can include attitudes or behaviours e.g. 'We will be tolerant of different opinions in the class', 'We will protect each other from bullying behaviour', 'We will try to talk more to people outside our friend groups', 'We will do one volunteering or charity activity as a class', 'We will watch a film about a social issue'. The Guide to Increasing Your Empathy might help (see Appendix A).
- 3** Bring the class together and create a single list of Empathy goals. These might be displayed somewhere in the classroom or could be added to the SPHE class contract.
- 4** Finally, give students a few minutes to write out their own personal empathy goals in their copy.

Finished with the ASE lessons? We would love to hear your feedback.



Please follow the QR code or click the link below to complete a short (2-3 minute) feedback form:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ASEFEEDBACK1>



My Empathy Goals

**Empathy Goals
For the class**

**Empathy Goals
For me**

Appendix A

Guide to Increasing Your Empathy

This guide was prepared by the Activating Social Empathy Team: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, University of Galway

We know from studies that certain things influence the development of empathy and what psychologists call 'prosocial behaviours'. These are behaviours like helping, sharing, comforting others, and defending others. This guide is based on studies from around the world that looked at teenagers, empathy and prosocial behaviour.¹

Sports and Group Membership

Sports participation and sports team membership are linked to empathy and prosocial behaviour.

Involvement in activities like music, volunteering or extra-curricular groups (e.g. girl guides, scouts, after-school clubs) promote greater prosocial behaviour.

What can you do?

- ✓ Take part in team sports. Join a local sports club, get involved in school sports, check if there are any informal leagues for less-competitive sport. (Get your friends to join with you!)
- ✓ Join a youth group. For local groups see Foróige and Youth Work Ireland.
- ✓ Look for opportunities to volunteer in your community.
- ✓ Play music with others: join an orchestra or a choir, start a band.
- ✓ Go to concerts or gigs, anywhere that music is played live for an audience.

1 Silke, C., Brady, B., Boylan, C., Dolan, P. (2018) Factors influencing the development of empathy and prosocial behaviour among adolescents: A systematic review. Children and Youth Services Review.

Peer Relationships

If your friends and peers think prosocial responding is a positive thing, then you are more likely to show higher levels of prosocial behaviour yourself. The reverse is also true (teenagers whose friends or peers think aggressive behaviour is normal show lower levels of prosocial behaviour). Positive, supportive connections with peers promote higher levels of prosocial behaviour.

What can you do?

- ✓ Are you comfortable with the kind of behaviour your friends take part in? Do you find yourself being led along with behaviours you don't think are right? You might want to rethink your friend group, but this isn't always possible. Can you try to encourage different behaviour?
- ✓ Support your friends and classmates, encourage them in positive ways. You'll be helping them to show empathy and kindness to others (including you if you need it!). If they do the same back, you might see your own empathy increase without even realising it.

School Climate

Positive, democratic school environments where students are involved in decision-making promote prosocial behaviour. Positive classroom environments, including teacher support, student involvement and positive peer connection are also important.

What can you do?

- ✓ Approach your Principal or Year Head about creating a more positive environment in school and offer suggestions.
- ✓ Get involved in the Student Council or talk to members of the Council about issues in school and the classroom that you think can be improved.
- ✓ Start a campaign or organise an activity to help make school a more positive environment.
- ✓ Ask your teachers to let you have more of a say in class, e.g. giving your opinions or helping decide what types of teaching and activities help you learn best.
- ✓ Create classroom charters where you agree to respect each other in class, including different opinions.

Neighbourhoods and Culture

How connected your neighbourhood and community are and your own sense of connection to your community are important influencers of prosocial responding.

What can you do?

- ✓ Get involved in your community by volunteering or join a local youth group.
- ✓ Is there a library, community centre, sports club, community garden or church in your area? These places are often the heart of the community. Can you attend and get involved?
- ✓ If you live in a housing estate, organise a neighbourhood event.

Media

The length of time spend watching TV or playing video games is linked with lower levels of prosocial behaviour and exposure to media violence is associated with a reduction in empathy. BUT exposure to prosocial media content may increase prosocial behaviours. Reading literature has been shown to improve empathy.

What can you do?

- ✓ Try to spend less time playing video games or watching TV.
- ✓ Try to avoid watching violent programmes or videos or playing violent games and focus on prosocial media with a positive message.
- ✓ Get reading. Join a book club, start a reading journal, join the library.

Other People

There are differences in the type of prosocial behaviour we direct toward different groups like family, friends and strangers. There are some indications that we are more likely to help others who are 'similar' to ourselves.

What can you do?

- ✓ Challenge yourself to show empathy and kindness to people you don't know and to people who are different to you, e.g. strangers, people from different social backgrounds, religions and cultures.
- ✓ Strike up conversations with strangers.
- ✓ Make an effort to get to know people who are different to you.

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