



St. Christopher's School Richmond, Virginia



Fostering Empathy in the Elementary Classroom

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Imagine for a moment . . .

- Imagine schools and classrooms where everyone has empathy
- They are peaceful, productive, and positive places
- Teachers can teach and students can learn



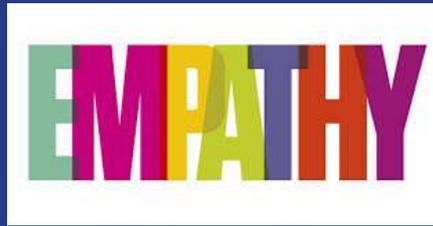
Why Empathy?

When young people have empathy, they display:

- More classroom engagement
- Higher academic achievement
- Better communication skills
- Lower likelihood of bullying
- Less aggressive behaviors and emotional disorders
- More positive relationship



Key Ingredients of Empathy



- Empathy is the ability to sense other people's emotions and imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling. (*The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, 2014*).
- “Cognitive empathy” is the ability to understand how another person feels but doesn't experience that same feeling.
- “Affective empathy” (or emotional empathy) refers to actually feeling the same feelings of another person. *Haynes and Avery (1979)*.

3 Components of Empathy

- Head



- Heart



- Hands



Head: the cognitive part

- One sees life through a different lens
- Put yourself in someone else's shoes



Teach → ⑧ How do you think Johnny sees this?

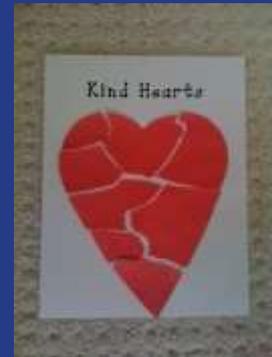
Heart: the ability to feel emotions with another person



Teach → ⑧ How do you think Jack *feels*?”

Hands: the action part

1. We can put ourselves in other people's shoes.
1. We can feel what others are feeling.
1. But now we must take action . . . We must *do* something about it.



- Teach → How will you respond?

First Steps Toward Developing Empathy

- Step 1. Prepare
 - Create a safe space
 - Develop emotional literacy
 - Lead by example



Activities to Prepare a Safe Space

- Students design a classroom charter based on how they want to feel in school
- Morning Meeting
- Afternoon Check-in



Emotional Literacy Activities

- Stop. Breathe. Listen. Respond.



- Pass the Face: Reading Facial Expressions



- Stop Light: a Conflict Resolution Tool

Step 2. Engage – Students must *experience empathy*

- **Practice Emotional Literacy:** identify feelings by looking at body language, voices, touch
- **Teach Active Listening**
- **Role Playing:** provide time to practice skills of empathy (being caring, listening, identifying feelings)
- **Collective Problem-Solving:** collaboration builds empathy



Step 3. Reflect and Act

- **Expand Children's Circle of Concern:** zoom in and out
- **Instill Courage:** teach children how to intervene



- **Enable Action:** create opportunities for children to put empathy into action

5 Skills to Develop Empathy

1. Watch and Listen
2. Remember
3. Imagine
4. Ask
5. Show You Care



Activities for Reflection and Action

- **Empathy Exit Ticket:** feeling-related questions help students recognize and name emotions



- **Bully Prevention:** Teach social responsibility skills → **Stop, Walk, Talk**
- **Service Learning Opportunities**