

For yourself, family, classroom or workspace.

Authentically stepping into someone else's shoes and comprehending their point of view enables us to communicate better. We believe that exercising empathy in our daily lives can not only make our lives more manageable, it can also positively impact the world in numerous ways as we begin to consider both our local and global communities in our decision-making.

Please remember to share with your audience that anxiety is a normal and natural part of imagining stepping into someone else's experience. You may want to add something like, *"Allow yourself to feel some discomfort, take deep breaths, and please allow yourself to stop anytime if it becomes overwhelming."*

These workshops will enable individuals to function with an elevated emotional intelligence and develop highly effective teams, leaders, and engaged citizens of the world. Empathy can be learned and advanced by anyone at any time. To learn empathy, try some of the following exercises in this document.

Engaging in empathy can at times leave us with a deep desire to participate in facilitating positive change. [Join our #actsofempathy campaign](#) and see how others are turning their compassion into action!

Envisage

Activity:

- Think about your significant other or a friend, family member, or coworker.
 - What has their mood been like in recent days?
 - What do they do on an average day?
 - What's going on in this person's life that might be making them happy?
 - What may be a goal or dream for this person?
 - What's going on in this person's life that might be making them sad or anxious?
 - What's going on in this person's life that might be making them sad or anxious?
 - What's going on in this person's life that might be making them sad, anxious, or upset?
 - What may give this person hope?
 - How are you contributing?
 - What could you do or say to improve this person's situation?
- Repeat with someone on another continent who is a different race and gender than you.
- Repeat with someone living in a dire situation like extreme poverty or a war zone.
- Repeat with an animal of your choice.
- Repeat with an animal in captivity. How do you think this experience might be different?

Materials:

- None

Benefits:

- This exercise is very effective in exploring another's experience in a thorough and precise manner.

Shape Shifting

Activity:

- Imagine instantaneously switching places with other people, animals, or even inanimate objects. What if you could just transport yourself into someone else's body and life? Maybe your best friend, or a bank robber, or the president, or your pet? What would it feel like to be them? What would you do?
- It is especially fun to play this game in public places. See that woman in the tiger-striped jumpsuit daydreaming on a park bench? What if—zap!—you suddenly switched bodies with her? What would it be like to wear that outfit, that face, hair, physique? What would you be daydreaming about? Where would you be going next?
- When you're more comfortable zapping yourself into other humans, try to vary your experiences. Try a different gender, race, different socio economic positions and try Including a variety of animals too.

Materials:

- None

Benefits:

- This exercise will make it easier to entertain unfamiliar thoughts and feelings.

Telling Stories

Activity:

- This is a silent writing exercise.
- Have all participants select and cut out an image from an old newspaper or a magazine. Have all participants sit in a circle and give their image to the person to their left.
- Ask participants to imagine and write down the life story of the person in the image. Where were they born? What was their childhood like? What do they do now? What was a high point in their life? What was a low point in their life? What brings them joy? What brings them pain?
- Have participants write silently for 3 minutes then rotate images to the left again and write a new life story. Repeat this 3 times.
- Follow-up with a group conversation about what this exercise was like for the participants. How close did they feel to the characters they created? Did they feel their pain and joy? Hold up some or all of the images and discuss the made up life stories. Observe the similarity or differences in perceptions.

Materials:

- Pen, paper, scissors, old newspapers and magazines.

Benefits:

- This exercise helps prompt the imagination and explore our perceptions while appreciating how different they may be from those around us

Feelings Into Words

Activity:

- Have all participants select and cut out an image from an old newspaper or a magazine. Label each image with a number on the top left corner. Ask participants to write the number of images in a column on their page. For example, if there are 18 images, have them list 1 through 18 on their page.
- Have each participant ask themselves: what was this person feeling when this image was taken? Does this person look sad, happy, thrilled, apprehensive, ashamed, etc.? Ask participants to write down in one word the emotion that the face in the image evokes and note the numbered image and write the emotion for that number on their page.
- Give each participant 6 seconds with each image as they rotate images to their left. This is meant to be a fast-paced exercise. Follow-up with a group discussion. Hold up each image and discuss what the participants wrote down. Was there a popular answer? A unique one?
- Suggest to participants to get in the habit of asking people how something in particular made them feel. Did seeing an image they identified as sad make them feel sad? Did seeing an image they identified as happy make them feel happy?

Materials:

- Pen, paper, scissors, old newspapers and magazines.

Benefits:

- This exercise will help expand the vocabulary and conceptualizations around emotions, including an introspective analysis of perceptions. Also, when we give words to emotions we are better equipped to deal with them therefore expanding our vocabulary is beneficial for our own well-being as well.

Self Check-In

Activity:

- Part of what makes empathy so powerful is that it extends and connects our understanding of our own emotions to those of others. Of course, that assumes that we're in touch with our own emotions first.
- Sometimes it can be difficult to empathize with others simply because we have not been paying attention to ourselves. This exercise gets teams used to identifying their emotions on their own terms first, which should make it easier to graduate to more easily empathizing with others.
- This exercise will come naturally for anyone that's set a reminder to drink water, sit up straight, or give their eyes a break from their screens. But instead of adjusting their posture, they'll be taking an emotional inventory.
- When: This exercise works best if done several times per day during the workweek (bonus if your team wants to continue over the weekend). If your team is used to setting regular reminders as a part of their daily routine, it can be combined with that or you can establish three or more set times per day for the team to spend a minute or two to check in with themselves.
- How: At the established times, have your team spend up to five minutes concentrating on how they're feeling. You can leave this free-form, or provide prompting questions like, "What's your mood like right now, and why?" This can either be a thought exercise, or something the team writes down. If you have your team jot down their responses, be sure to carve out time during weekly meetings to give people the chance to volunteer to share. This can be especially helpful if the team is working to meet a tight deadline or confronting challenges.

Materials:

- Timer/Reminder

Benefits:

- This exercise is effective not only because it helps your team get in touch with their empathetic self, but also because it provides them with the opportunity to share their thoughts. This gives the rest of the team the chance to experience and express empathy firsthand.

Emotion Party

Activity:

- This is a fun, theatrical exercise.
- As an ice breaker, ask the participants to repeat after you and say 'Purple Polka Dots'. They repeat in unison. Then have them say it like they are happy, overjoyed, super duper even more excited, then sad, devastated, crying, like they are cowboys, opera singers, zombies, babies, birds chirping, a big bear, a cow.
- Once everyone is comfortable being a bit silly together, create this scenario. Most of the participants are on one side of the room. One person is on the other and is asked to mimic hosting a party. They can pretend to clean or set tables, dust, etc. until one participant rings an imaginary doorbell at an imaginary door. When the host opens the door and greets the guest welcoming them with enthusiasm, the guest chooses to communicate with one specific emotion. This emotion is contagious! That emotion then transfers to and rubs off on the host. Each guest arriving brings their own contagious character or emotion that catches on slowly to each member of the party. This is a ton of fun as the party grows and the people are conversing in make believe conversations as an emotion or character carries through and infects the party. Encourage characters and emotions that encompass animals and the environment. Like sad, burned trees or happy wild horses.

Materials:

- None

Benefits:

- This exercise helps us be vulnerable and makes us more open to the human experiences that unite us

21 Questions

Activity:

- Select a story from the day's headlines.
- One person from the group takes on the role of a character mentioned in the story.
- The audience asks 21 questions of the character about their experiences in regards to the news story.

Materials:

- Newspaper.

Benefits:

- This exercise will help the participants explore how limited our perceptions or the information we have can be

Jury's Best Guess

Activity:

- Write out some scenarios on a piece of paper, fold them up, and toss them into a hat.
- One person is positioned on a seat facing the group in an imaginary witness box. Four or so individuals are seated at a slight distance as the Jury, also facing the audience. Although the individual in the witness box is referred to as a Witness, they can also be a Defendant depending on the scenario.
- For each scenario that is read out loud, a new witness takes the stand. The audience asks questions of the Witness in regards to the specific situation. The Witness writes down their answers. The Jury members write down their best guess of the Witness' answers. Jury members read out their answers before the Witness reveals their answers.
- The person on the Jury with the most accurate answers matching the Witness wins.
- Limit to approximately 15 to 20 questions for each scenario. Remember to ask plenty of questions about the Witness' state of mind and feelings. Switch the audience members with the Witness and Jury for each scenario to keep things interesting and interactive.

Example scenarios:

- You're a knight who witnessed a crime
- You're a thief who stole an apple
- You are arrested at a climate change rally
- You set the bunnies in the animal testing lab free
- You witnessed a parent hitting their child in a store
- You were arrested for using counterfeit currency

Materials:

- Hat (or cup/box etc.), pen, paper, chairs

Benefits:

- This exercise will help the participants explore how limited our perceptions or the information we have can be

How One Educator Builds Empathy

Here are some ways that Sana Ashfaq, a highschool teacher, has helped students to build empathy within her classroom and in clubs/extracurriculars:

- Teach high schoolers the difference between sympathy and empathy, providing lots of examples and real life scenarios (Brene Brown's videos on YouTube (<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewvngu369Jw&t=32s>), The 4 Agreements by Miguel Luis)- Give students short stories and ask critical thinking questions that formulate discussion and help guide and facilitate an open conversation about the plot.This will help students connect with your life stories and their own.
- Start all classes with open dialogue about your background, your life story and mission as a teacher/human (heavily focused upon being authentic and allowing them to feel comfortable sharing and understanding). This helps students understand that teachers are also humans with conflicts, who use healthy strategies and coping mechanisms to help them resolve issues.
- Connect empathy and important worldly topics back to novels we read, and have students use metacognitive strategies to reflect on their own lives (build empathy even if they have not experienced the exact same situation, they can use alternative points in their own lives to connect).
- Reflective journals to think, reflect, write, and share personal narratives with the class so they can build care, comfort and be able to empathize with one another.
- Respectfully call out negativity in the classroom and use passive explanation on how it impacted you and others who heard, saw or experienced whatever was said or done.
- Create opportunities for them to work with others in classroom and outside of classroom facilitating community building with their peers and others.
- In older grade classes, foster deeper conversations about social/political and worldly issues,allowing students to share and produce blogs to connect with their own lives.

- Facilitate interactive activities that allow students to partake in specific scenarios to enhance understanding of other narratives and voices.
- Watch and implement various voices/perspectives in class, ensuring we discuss authenticity and the connection to their own lives to build community and strong sense of empathy
- Extracurricular — Build awareness, research, volunteer and fundraise for specific organizations. This can be geared towards students interests and what is going on in the world at that time
- Provide case studies and have students discuss questions as a group and then as a class — this helps those reluctant learners that are scared to speak up about their own personal narratives. Case study examples can be based upon relevant issues or experiences that you believe the targeted age group has encountered. This can allow for more discussion and some understanding, albeit not all people in that age category will have gone through the specific situation, hence helping them to understand how to connect by using a personal story of their own. You can also start by using incidents that have been reported in the news to help guide you in creating case studies.

Examples of topics:

- War (people can relate with family, conflict etc.) but keep in mind this may be too heavy to start off with, especially with all the heinous violence going on right now
- Bullying (name calling, making fun of someone's clothes etc.) — connect via conflict, when someone felt hurt in their own lives, times of low self esteem etc.)
- Racial or ethnic discrimination
- Not getting something they've wanted in life
- Not passing a class or getting a mark on an assignment they wanted