

# My Heart Feels Your Pain

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**Objective:** To raise awareness about the meaning and importance of empathy.

- Activity:**
- I. Initiate a class discussion about the difference between sympathy and empathy. As students offer suggestions, make sure they understand the distinction: Sympathy is feeling sorry for someone else. Empathy is putting yourself in someone else's shoes.
  - II. To clarify the concepts, ask students how empathy is possible if we are all different. Emphasize that empathy is possible, even though we are all different, because we have had similar experiences that generate the same feelings, e.g., anger, excitement, happiness, jealousy, pain, sadness. It is also possible to imagine how someone else might feel without having had that experience ourselves. Give examples. Ask students if they would prefer having someone feel sorry for them or having someone understand how they feel.
  - III. Continue the discussion by asking students about motions and feelings. Have students identify emotions, e.g., sadness, happiness, fear, nervousness, love, anger. Emphasize in the discussion the importance of being *honest* with oneself about having both positive and negative feelings; it is how we express them that also impacts others. During the discussion, ask if any of the students felt \_\_\_\_\_ (insert two or three of the emotions suggested by the class) during the past week. Then ask those students if they would be willing to share what triggered the emotion, and what caused them to feel that way. Ask the class if anyone has ever felt those emotions even though the circumstances may have been different.
  - IV. Hand out "My Empathy Worksheet." Emphasize that the goal of the activity is to try to think like the people in the examples listed *and* to examine the students' *own* feelings if they were in those situations. Emphasize that there may be more than one emotion in each situation, possibly some that are conflicting. These worksheets are not to be collected but used only for self-awareness.
  - V. After students have completed the worksheet, ask them to share their responses to help generate discussion about the range of emotions that one can feel in each situation. Ask students if it is possible to mistreat others when we have empathy for them. Ask why or why not?

# My Empathy Worksheet

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Expect to have more than one answer.

**1** You see on TV that a tornado has leveled a town in Kansas. Many people are homeless.

- a. How do you think they would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. How would I feel if this happened to my family? \_\_\_\_\_

**2** Your best friend's mother just died.

- a. How do you think she/he would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. As a best friend, how would I feel about this? \_\_\_\_\_

**3** A classmate has worked very hard and won the spelling bee.

- a. How do you think she/he would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. How would I feel if I won the spelling bee? \_\_\_\_\_

**4** A classmate has worked very hard and lost the spelling bee.

- a. How do you think she/he would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. How would I feel if I lost the spelling bee? \_\_\_\_\_

**5** You see an animal being mistreated.

- a. How do you think the animal would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. How would I feel if I were mistreated? \_\_\_\_\_

# My Empathy Worksheet

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Your friend has a new baby sister or brother.

- How do you think she/he would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- How would I feel if I had a new baby brother or sister? \_\_\_\_\_

7

Your friend's parents are getting divorced.

- How do you think she/he would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- How would I feel if my parents got divorced? \_\_\_\_\_

8

You see a classmate continually picked on by other classmates.

- How do you think she/he would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- How would I feel if I were picked on? \_\_\_\_\_

9

There is a new student in your class.

- How do you think she/he would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- How would I feel if I were a new student? \_\_\_\_\_

10

Another friend has been chosen to serve on the Student Council.

- How do you think she/he would feel? \_\_\_\_\_
- How would I feel if I were chosen? \_\_\_\_\_
- How would I feel if I lost the election? \_\_\_\_\_