



5 WAYS TO SPARK EMPATHY AND KINDNESS IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Participate

By Empatico

While many teachers are passionate about fostering empathy and kindness in their classrooms, they don't always have the time or resources to make it happen. Recognizing this critical need, [Empatico](#) and Participate are thrilled to announce the **Empatico Fellows Program**.

The program will build community, offer experiential professional development, and provide unique growth and leadership opportunities. Kicking off this September, it will form an integral part of the The Empathy Project. This semester-long experience will be open to 150 educators from around the world. If you teach students in grades 1-5 (ages 7-11) and are interested in being added to the inquiry list, [please complete this form](#). Then, watch for information about how to apply coming in August.

In the meantime, here are five Empatico activities to spark empathy and kindness in the classroom:

1. ACTIVE LISTENING, TAKING TURNS AND RESPONDING POSITIVELY

Actively listening and communicating respectfully can help students have meaningful experiences with others and deepen learning. Try posting the following list of sentence starters in your classroom and encourage students to use them to respond to classmates.

Paraphrasing:

- I think you're saying that...
- In other words, you believe/think that...

Giving your opinion:

- I believe/think/feel that...
- From my perspective...



Checking for understanding:

- Can you explain _____ again?
- What did you mean when you said _____?

Agreeing:

- I agree with ____ because...
- I want to add to what you said...

Disagreeing:

- I understand your point of view, but I respectfully disagree because...
- I'm not sure about _____, can you tell me why you think that?

Showing empathy and understanding:

- I see why you feel/think that way because...
- I hear what you're saying, can you tell me more?

2. MODEL RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS

Model respectful communication for your class by having a practice conversation with a student (e.g. ask what the student did last weekend) and thinking aloud as you demonstrate the steps of respectful communication:

- Be attentive and respectful of the person speaking. For example, in Western cultures, making eye contact and turning towards the speaker indicates respect and consideration.
- Focus on what the person is saying (don't think about other things).
- Show interest in what you're hearing by using nonverbal cues, such as nodding or facial reactions.

Repeat with another student, but this time show what poor communication looks like by avoiding eye contact, looking bored, interrupting, etc. The comparison will demonstrate for your students exactly what respectful communication does and does not look like.



3. RECOGNIZING AND RELATING TO DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The ability to understand another person’s perspective is beneficial for all social interactions and relationships. While reading a story/book, try choosing one character in the story and help students understand how this character feels or thinks during specific situations. Ask questions like:

- What is life like for that person?
- What might be influencing how they perceive this situation?
- How can I relate to their experience to begin to understand how they feel?

Show how characters can have different perspectives based on having different knowledge, preferences, experiences or culture than others. You could also ask students how the story might have been told differently if communicated through another character’s point of view (e.g. “[The True Story of the Three Little Pigs](#)”).

4. COOPERATING TO ACHIEVE A COMMON GOAL

Cooperation is a foundational life skill for students as they learn to navigate relationships in the classroom, at home and eventually, in the workplace. When students cooperate to achieve shared goals, they must consider each other’s perspectives and experiences as they take on unique roles.

Promote a “better together” mindset in your classroom by reading a story that emphasizes teamwork and how it’s better to cooperate than to compete with one other (e.g., “[The Fighting Mynahs](#)”). Lead a class discussion to help students link the cooperation concept to their personal experiences.

5. THINKING CRITICALLY AND INVESTIGATING NEW IDEAS WITH AN OPEN AND CURIOUS MIND

Critical thinking skills can deepen students’ academic learning and are beneficial for successful interactions and relationships. These include supporting perspective-taking and conflict-resolution skills. Read a story that involves characters making assumptions based on limited information (e.g., “[Fish is Fish](#)” or “[Seven Blind Mice](#)”). To promote critical thinking, pause periodically while reading the story to ask students a few questions relevant to the critical thinking topics below:

Understanding character intentions:



- Why do you think the character did _____? Are there other explanations for this?
- Why do you think the character assumed _____?
- What was influencing the character when he or she decided to _____?

Making predictions:

- Based on what you know about the character, what might he or she do next? Why do you think that?
- Encouraging investigation:
- What could the character do to investigate whether his/her assumptions are true or not?

Promoting logical reasoning and cause and effect:

- If the character did _____, what do you think would happen?

Applying knowledge to new contexts:

- When else have we seen this?
- How can we apply this situation/lesson to our own lives?
- When have you experienced something like this?


Emphasizing how perceptions can change:

- How did our thinking change as we learned more about the situation?

Teaching social skills doesn't have to take time away from your existing lesson plans - short questions and exercises can be incorporated into instruction to enhance lessons and deepen learning. Start with a two- to three-minute exercise at the beginning or end of your lesson, and go from there.

As you help your students learn key social skills for interacting with others, you'll help them navigate experiences with people from different backgrounds and cultures with curiosity and kindness—in the present and for years to come.





*To continue practicing social skills and connect your classroom with others around the world, sign up for a free account at empatico.org. You can also join the *Empatico Community of Practice* to connect with other teachers interested in the **Empatico Fellows Program** and The Empathy Project.*

