

# Empathy Building

## Cultivating Empathy Habits



**EMPATHY:** Predicting how others may feel or think even if you have not had the same experiences. Empathy is more feeling than thinking, feeling what the other person is feeling. The behavior of empathy is acting out of consideration for how others feel. We use empathy when we put ourselves in someone else's shoes.

**SYMPATHY:** Understanding another person's feelings. Sympathy is more thinking than feeling. We use sympathy when we express feeling sorry or bad for someone.

### CULTIVATING EMPATHY HABITS

- 🌐 **Cultivate Curiosity About Others:** Develop an insatiable curiosity about people you do not know and people you already know. Children are naturally curious, but this innate sense may change as we grow feelings of fear or experience uncomfortable or unsafe social events. Reconnecting with your natural sense of curiosity can increase your knowledge, approachability, and empathy.
- 🌐 **Look for Commonalities:** Even if your first instinct is to see the differences between you and others, challenge yourself to see what you have in common with others, especially if they appear very different from you. This may require you to challenge your own preconceived ideas and prejudices.
- 🌐 **Do a Life Swap:** Literally spend time in someone else's shoes. Visit another person's religious organization, observe someone's work life, or volunteer in a village of another country. Take a field trip to another neighborhood or school to gain direct experience of other people's lives to shift your perspectives and build empathy.
- 🌐 **Practice Radical Listening:** Listening radically requires the quieting of your brain so that you can resist the temptation to respond with your own thoughts or opinions. Wait until the speaker is finished. Then, repeat or summarize what they said to make sure you understand before adding your two cents.
- 🌐 **Be Vulnerable:** To cultivate empathic bonds, open up. Reveal your feelings, experiences, and beliefs to help others understand you. Building mutual understanding is fundamental to building empathy.
- 🌐 **Empathize with Adversaries:** Think big and learn how to see situations and issues from the "enemy's" point of view. Seeing from the perspective of someone you do not agree with may cultivate social tolerance, build teamwork, and strengthen leadership skills.

### CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest, what is your comfort level when being curious about other people? How capable are you when asking questions to people you know? People you do not know?
- Initially, do you notice differences or similarities between you and others? What prejudices do you have that cause you to see differences first or serve as an obstacle from seeing commonalities?
- Who could you do a life swap with? How could experiencing someone else's living conditions, religion, circumstances, or daily routines effect how you treat yourself and others?
- On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest, how good is your radical listening? How does interrupting or turning the conversation toward your own thoughts and feelings affect others?
- What beliefs and feelings keep you from being vulnerable and opening up to others?
- What adversary should you consider empathizing with? What stands in your way of doing so?