

Create a Caring Community: Practice Empathy!

Empathy is recognized as an important life skill for building healthy relationships. It's also essential to building a caring classroom community. But what is empathy? Empathy is being able to understand how someone feels because you can imagine what it is like to walk in their shoes. Educator and author Bob Sornson says that empathy is the foundation of all emotional intelligence. When we learn empathy, we can have strong relationships, truly care for others, and set appropriate limits in our own lives without becoming angry.



But how can we develop empathy? Sornson suggests that learning to calm ourselves, manage our emotions, and stay focused on the right things gives us the ability to look beyond ourselves. This creates empathy that makes a caring classroom community possible.

Here are some tips for practicing empathy.

1. Be a friend to yourself first. Be honest about your own feelings and name them: “I feel angry/ frustrated/sad/happy about ____.” This helps you understand and relate to others’ feelings.
2. Listen deeply without interrupting, judging, or offering advice. Give your full attention.
3. Pay attention to people’s body language, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues. Learn what these clues mean.
4. We sometimes feel uncomfortable and don’t know exactly what to say. Saying “I see your pain” or “I am here with you” lets the person know that you care and are present.
5. When someone is happy, share in their joy! Congratulate them and ask about what happened.

As we learn to identify deeply with one another’s feelings and experiences—positive, negative, and in between—we can make our classroom a place where each person feels cared for.

Reference: Sornson, B. (2014, June 23). Developing empathy in the classroom. Leadership, Teaching Methods. Corwin Connect. Retrieved from <https://corwin-connect.com/2014/06/developing-empathy-classroom/>

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