

Bullying and Violence Prevention: Ryan Halligan

Lesson Title: Learning Empathy

Grade Level: Middle School



Project and Purpose:

Students role-play to build empathy.

Essential Question:

How does role playing help create empathy?

Materials:

- Black/white board
- Paper, pens, pencils
- Bullying Scenario handout
- "I" Statements handout/overhead

Procedure:

1. Begin by asking students: Do you think bullies ever stop to think about or ever care about how their behavior makes the victim feel? Why or why not?
2. Explain that one of the ways to combat bullying is to develop empathy for others. Empathy is defined as an ability to imagine what it's like to be in the shoes of another person, and then to be able to communicate that so the other person feels understood.
3. Explain that in today's session students will practice empathy through role playing an interview. Each student will have a turn to play the role of a person who has been bullied and to play the interviewer to ask questions that clarify the facts, emotions and consequences of the bullying.
4. Review how to ask questions in an interview. Ask each student to write down three generic questions they could ask in the interview you have described.
5. Distribute the Bullying Scenario handout, which students will read.
6. Next ask students to read the first scenario and write down three questions that are very specific to way the person felt in the scenario. Do the same for the second scenario. Remind the class that these will not be the only questions they ask in the interview, but are a starting point for them when playing the interviewer.
7. With the whole class, discuss the goals of the interviewer:
 - To collect information as to how the bullying happened
 - To identify the emotions and attitudes of the person who was bullied

- To communicate the events and the emotions to others
 - NEVER, at any time, should the interviewer try to be a therapist — do not give advice, only draw out the experiences, feelings and attitudes associated with the event/role.
8. Distribute the “I” Statements handout. Explain to the interviewer that he/she will need to use “I” Statements when speaking to the victim. An “I” statement helps both people clarify statements without judgment. Review the formats for a successful “I” statement from the handout.
 9. Break the class into pairs and have each pair turn their desks to face each other. Each pair should choose one of the scenarios as the basis of the interview and also decide who will be the interviewer and the bully victim.
 10. Tell the pairs to conduct an interview for the next five minutes; they will be timed.
 11. At the end of the interview time, give students an opportunity to reflect on the activity and process with each other how they felt about the exercise. Then repeat steps 8 and 9, having students switch roles.
 12. In the follow-up reflection time, ask:
 - What did you learn about the same situation by switching roles?
 - What new insights did you gain?
 - Can you empathize with the victim? Explain your answer.
 13. Gather students back together to discuss the results of the interview. Ask:
 - What if we were to present these interviews to the bullies? What would be gained by this? Anything? Explain your answers.
 - What if we were to conduct empathy interviews with the bullies? What information do you think we would find out?
 - Will we ever know what caused the bullies to commit these actions? Why/why not?

Conclusion:

Review the theme of the lesson. Ask students to write a response to the activity that answers the following question: How can empathizing with a victim help curb bullying?

Cyberbullied Shoes: **Bullying Scenarios**

Make multiple copies and cut stories apart. Distribute one story to each pair of students.

Scenario #1

Carla is new to Clarkstown High School, moving from a rural area of California to a new home in the city. Wanting desperately to make a good impression on her first day of school, she wore what she considered a special outfit, one that gave her confidence in her looks and made her feel happy. Instead of a welcoming school community, other girls rolled their eyes at her, turned their backs and laughed at the shirt she had carefully selected. When she selected a seat in her language arts class near two girls she thought she might befriend, they got up and moved across the room, muttering names under their breath. In the halls, kids barked like dogs when she walked by and several boys tried to knock her books out of her arms. It was all she could do to get through the day.

The next day, she wore the same clothes she had noticed the other girls wearing and fixed her hair so it looked like theirs, hoping they would see how hard she was trying to fit in with the new community. The reaction she hoped for was dashed when one girl called her a “wannabe” and a “loser,” and another one accused her of buying K-Mart clothes and Big Lots hairclips. Everywhere Carla went she met with mocking laughs and peers who distanced themselves physically. For two years Carla endured this kind of harassment — alone.

Scenario #2

Corey Brill had been the shortest guy in his class ever since he could remember. Always in the front row of class pictures with all girls, never making any teams, constantly called “Four Eyes,” he had come to see himself and call himself a “nerd,” a “doofus” and a “dweeb.” He was further humiliated when, after P.E., one of the guys on the football team pulled his gym shorts down and pushed him into the girls’ locker room.

One afternoon Corey was in the media center doing research on a project for physics when a couple of guys on the wrestling team surrounded him at his table and began to tease him about a girl named Shanna sitting at another table. He tried to ignore them, but they persisted, piling heavy research books on top of his papers and eventually slamming several down on his hands. Two of the guys grabbed him and carried him over to Shanna’s table, forced him into her lap and shoved his face into her chest. She was just as embarrassed as he was and tried to call for help, but one of the guys got in her face and threatened both of them with worse events if they said anything or moved before they left the room.

The guys left, laughing and making “kissy” noises, singing “Corey and Shanna sittin’ in a tree...” Corey pulled himself away from Shanna immediately and apologized over and over again, trying desperately not to cry. That night, Corey searched the Internet for a gun.

Cyberbullied Shoes: "I" Statements

Interviewers use "I" Statements to make sure they correctly understand the other person's situation and feelings. Keeping the statements simple and open-ended leaves room for the interviewee to adjust or correct the statement so there is a clear understanding and, hopefully, a stronger connection between the two people.

The following are open ended "I" statements that you should use in your interview:

- "I heard you say you felt _____ when _____ happened. Is that correct?"
- "If this happened to me, I would feel _____. Is that true for you?"
- "I often think _____ when a person does this. Is that true for you?"

Notice how each is a personal statement by the interviewer first, as the interviewer tries to identify with the situation or the emotion. The question that follows allows the other person to agree, disagree, and make the appropriate corrections. No words, opinions, attitudes or experiences have been put into the other person's mouth, only opportunities to communicate more.

Statements to Avoid:

- "I think you feel _____"
- "You must be feeling _____"
- "You must have thought _____"

These types of statements put words into the other person's mouth, and that could cause arguments instead of opportunities for clarification.

This information is adapted from "Using Role Playing in Teaching Empathy" by Adam Blatner, M.D., www.blatner.com.