

Activity 4.5 Nurturing Intentional Empathy

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Description

This activity helps participants practice intentional empathy by viewing a situation from someone else's perspective and diving deeper into what they are thinking and feeling.

Learning Goals

- Understand how intentional empathy helps to build psychological safety.
- Utilize intentional empathy as a tool for deeper, more nuanced understanding.

Instructions (35 minutes)

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| Set Up | <p>Prepare for the Activity</p> <p>Use this Intentional Empathy Scenarios Slide Deck. It contains the two scenarios shown below and the Emotion Wheel. Make a copy and edit the slide deck to show only one scenario. Distribute hard copies, share on an overhead projector or share electronically (if working online).</p> <p>Organize participants into pairs or small groups (3-4 ppl).</p> <p>Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.</p> | |
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¹ **Citation for this activity:** Lori Britt and Noah Miller (2023). Nurturing Intentional Empathy. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-4>

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| <p>Step One</p> | <p>Introduce the Concept of Intentional Empathy</p> <p>Traditional notions of empathy tend to encourage individuals to place themselves in another's circumstances and consider how they would react if they were in that situation. It is a cognitive maneuver. Intentional empathy is when individuals try to place themselves in another's circumstances—in their shoes— and make a sincere effort to engage with their thought process and emotions from that perspective. This additional facet of viewing issues through the other's lens (and not just circumstance) allows for individuals to gain a fuller appreciation of others' perspectives and experiences and can allow for the development of a greater psychological safety net within the group.</p> <p>Building empathy in collaborative discussion requires us to not only recognize and respond to the emotions, but to inquire and explore with others the circumstances and situations which prompted these feelings. This exploration also helps ensure we are not acting from generalizations or assumptions about why people are experiencing or expressing emotions.</p> <p>Share that responding with intentional empathy requires two parts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. first acknowledging and reflecting back to the speaker the emotion that you sense they are experiencing and 2. asking a question that would help the person responding understand the circumstances that have generated these emotions. | <p>5 min</p> |
| <p>Step Two</p> | <p>Review the Scenario</p> <p>In small groups or pairs, review the chosen scenario. Participants can even read aloud the dialogue as a group or in pairs.</p> <p>Scenario One Students working on a group project, which counts for a significant part of their grade, are experiencing some challenges. Here is an exchange between two group members:</p> <p>Student 1: I know I did not make the meeting last night but my schedule is nuts and I figured I could just email you an update about my part.</p> <p>Student 2: But we needed you here to think with us. And I keep reminding the group this project is supposed to be a group effort, but no one seems to pay any attention to this.</p> <p>Student 1: We are all working on parts of it, so we are making it a group effort. Plus, there is no way I could have been here last night. I had to pick up another shift at work.</p> <p>Student 3: I have to get an A on this project. My GPA depends on it. I am applying to law school and I really need an A in this class.</p> <p>Student 2: Well the only way we will get an A is if everyone stops flaking and shows up for meetings!</p> | <p>5 min</p> |

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| | <p>OR</p> <p>Scenario Two A group of concerned community members have been engaging as an advisory group to help the city improve local transportation options. Here is an exchange within the group.</p> <p>Participant 1: We have been focusing on bus service quite a bit, but I think we also need to consider how the city might set up a formal mechanism for ride sharing as well.</p> <p>Participant 2: But ride share programs overlook the reality that many people face. As usual, it seems as if solutions are favoring those who have options and multiple options available to them.</p> <p>Participant 1: But our bus ridership numbers are way down so we need to look at other transportation options.</p> <p>Participant 2: You want to know why ridership is down? Because they have changed and decreased the bus routes. There is not one route that I can use every day at the same time to get to work. People are not using the buses because they have been forced to find other ways to get to work that are reliable. I have been late to work 5 times this month. I can't lose this job.</p> | |
| <p>Step Three</p> | <p>Craft Responses that Express Intentional Empathy</p> <p>Ask participants to review the Emotion Wheel and think about how Participant One can respond in a way that showcases intentional empathy. Prompt:</p> <p>Your goal is to write a response that includes a question for Participant One to ask either participant 2 or 3 that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognizes and names the emotion you think you are hearing (of either participant 2 or 3) and • helps you and others recognize the source of these emotions <p>Invite groups to share their responses with the full group.</p> <p>Facilitator Tip: Be prepared that participants may not succeed in creating intentional empathy responses on the first try. Participants' first attempts at this often result in responses that offer solutions to "fix the problem." They are often not even aware that this is what they are doing. It is a great learning opportunity to see that this is a first instinct for many of us so don't discourage or preempt this possibility. Allow it to happen and use it as a teaching moment.</p> | <p>10 min</p> |

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| Step Four (optional) | Refine and Edit Responses If needed, invite participants to repeat their efforts to shape messages of real intentional empathy and not problem-solving. Encourage them to ask questions and check if they are hearing others correctly as part of their response. | 5 min (optional) |
| Step Five | Debrief as a Full Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What does it feel like to reflect a person’s feelings back to them? ● Does the Emotion Wheel help you name emotions? ● How can asking questions help us to recognize the cognitive dimension of emotions? Does making this connection build empathy? ● How would demonstrating intentional empathy impact group dynamics? ● What role might sustained empathy have for group dynamics? How might you follow-up and check-in with group members? ● How would intentional empathy advance collaboration? ● When is intentional empathy NOT helpful in a collaborative experience? When should it be avoided? | 15 min |

Reflection Journal

- Why is intentional empathy important for collaborative discussion?
- What does intentional empathy provide that might be absent in a discussion?
- Why might intentional empathy have a negative connotation?
- Why might it be avoided by some in a collaborative experience?

Practice Journal

This week, practice intentional empathy in your day-to-day life. Make an extra effort to try and engage with others’ adversity through their eyes. Try to follow-up and develop sustained intentional empathy. Describe your experience and note how intentional empathy impacted your life this week. Reflect on how to best utilize intentional empathy as a facilitator to maximize the benefit.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

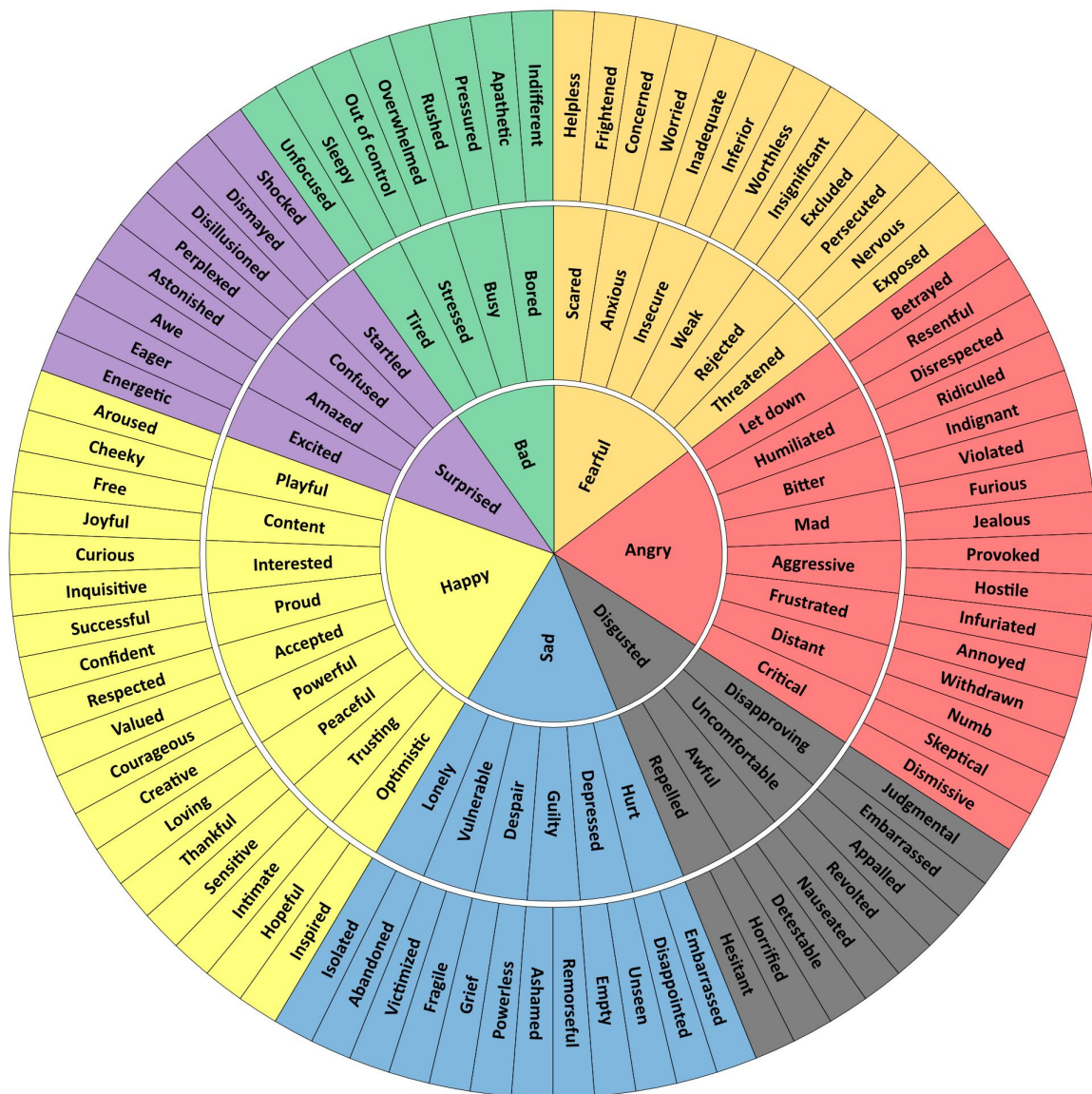
- [Critical Empathy and Expressivism](#): Leake, Eric. "The (Un)knowable Self and Others: Critical Empathy and Expressivism." *Critical Expressivism: Theory and Practice in the Composition Classroom*, edited by Tara Roeder and Roseanne Gatto, The WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press, LLC, 2015, pp. 149-160.
 “Processes of empathy may attempt to keep both self- and other-centered perspectives in mind at the same time.”—Eric Leake

- [Empathy](#): Schneider, Lindsay. "Empathy Is the Highest Level of Critical Thinking." *National Council of Teachers of English*, 31 Jan. 2020, ncte.org/blog/2020/01/empathy-highest-level-critical-thinking/. Accessed 7 Sep. 2023.

Activity Cluster

4.5 Nurturing Intentional Empathy

[3.2 Critical Feeling in Discussions](#)



Emotion Wheel used with permission of Geoffrey Roberts