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## Supporting Empathy during COVID-19

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### INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the “Supporting Empathy” webinar from the University of Virginia. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), individual coaching, or self-reflection.

### Goals

- ◆ Understand empathy and how it differs from sympathy.
- ◆ Explore intentional teaching practices to support children as they develop empathy in any learning format (fully virtual, hybrid, or physically distant/in-person).
- ◆ Reflect on current practices and plan to use concrete strategies to support children as they develop empathy skills.

### Activity

- ◆ Watch or listen to the webinar.
- ◆ After listening to the webinar, use the questions on the next page to guide your reflection and create an action plan to support empathy.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed.

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**"Empathy is the medicine the world needs."**

**Dr. Judith Orloff**

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the webinar? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?



- ◆ We teach empathy because we want children to understand how others feel and respond with care and kindness. As virtual and hybrid learning continues, children will likely have more opportunities to practice empathy and show care at home, rather than in the classroom.
  - What are some strategies and resources you could share with families to promote empathy at home?
  - How can you provide opportunities for families to share what works for them, how they support acts of kindness, or how they prompt their children to provide care for others?



- ◆ When planning activities for children to consider the feelings and needs of others, we should be sure to offer opportunities for children to take on the perspectives of people who are different from them. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the people who children regularly see and interact with are more limited than ever.
  - Why is it important for children to take on the perspectives of others?
  - Thinking back to your own experiences as a child, what opportunities did you have to get to know people who were different from you? How did that impact your ability to take on others' perspectives now?



- ◆ Virtual, hybrid, and physically distanced/in-person learning adds a new barrier to helping children develop empathy for others. The webinar outlines three effective practices:
    - Narrate and Label Empathy
    - Prompt Children to Consider the Needs and Feelings of Others
    - Prompt Children to Provide Care for Others
1. Assess each child on your roster and how they show empathy. Who may benefit from more support? What trends do you see across your children?
  2. Assess your current practice. How and when do you support empathy already? What could you continue to do?
  3. Based on the needs of your children, your current practice, and the three strategies described during this webinar, plan for specific ways to support children to show empathy for others. How will you modify to meet the needs of each child where they are? *Examples provided on the last page.*
  4. Regularly check in on your plan, assess its impact on children, and adjust as needed.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about how to support empathy during COVID-19:

- ◆ **Source:** Harvard Making Caring Common Project
- ◆ **Tip Sheet:** “For Families: 5 Tips for Cultivating Empathy” by Ashoka: Innovators for the Public and Tom Lickona
- ◆ **Link:** <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-families/5-tips-cultivating-empathy>
- ◆ **Description:** A list of tips and practical strategies to cultivate empathy.

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- ◆ **Source:** Mindshift, KQED
  - ◆ **Article:** “Why It’s Imperative to Teach Empathy to Boys” by Gayle Allen and Deborah Farmer Kris
  - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/36448/why-its-imperative-to-teach-empathy-to-boys>
  - ◆ **Description:** An article to support families to recognize and combat gender stereotypes related to empathy.

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- ◆ **Source:** PBS Kids
  - ◆ **Resource:** “How to Help Your Four-Year-Old Develop Empathy”
  - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.pbs.org/parents/learn-grow/age-4/social-skills/empathy>
  - ◆ **Description:** An interactive webpage with strategies, activities, and resources to support empathy at home.



### NARRATE AND LABEL EMPATHY

- ◆ **Label your own acts of empathy** - As situations arise in the classroom narrate your actions as you show empathy, e.g., “They seem to be frustrated that the blocks keep falling. I am going over to help.”
- ◆ **Label others’ acts of empathy** - Use books or real-life examples to point out acts of empathy. Point out how different people might be feeling in a situation. e.g. “You mentioned that you have cookies and milk with your grandma. How do you feel when you spend time together? I wonder how grandma feels when you have cookies and milk together.”



### PROMPT CHILDREN TO CONSIDER NEEDS/FEELINGS OF OTHERS

- ◆ **Consider others’ feelings in the moment** - Ask children to think about how they feel or might have felt in a certain situation. This can involve real life scenarios or acting it out with dolls or other toys, e.g., “The baby doll is crying. What do you think is bothering them?”
- ◆ **Help children to get to know people who are different from them** - It can be easier for children to take on the perspective of family, close friends, or people who are like them in some way. Offer plenty of opportunities for children to practice taking on the perspective of people who are different from them.
- ◆ **Practice empathetic listening** - Give children the opportunity to practice active listening by using puppets or other props to share a relatable story and how it made them feel. Ask the children if they can imagine feeling the same way.



### PROMPT CHILDREN TO CARE FOR OTHERS

- ◆ **Point out others’ feelings and ways to offer care** - During naturally occurring or made-up scenarios, point out how others are feeling and have children help come up with ways to offer care, e.g. “They are crying. They might feel sad. What do you think could help them feel better?”
- ◆ **Intentional dramatic play** - Create play opportunities that promote caring for others such as using baby dolls or stuffed animals. For example, set up a dramatic play area for children to give baby dolls a bath and model how to gently hold the baby as you wash it.
- ◆ **Build in opportunities for caring with classroom roles and routines** - Intentionally build opportunities for caring by having class pets, plants, gardening activities, partnerships with other classes, or even partner work peer pairing.

### CHECK-IN ON YOUR PLAN

- ◆ **Set a reminder!** Build in time bi-weekly to check in on your relationships with each child and consider how you’ve been using these practices. If they aren’t working, consider why and ways to adapt.
- ◆ **Find a buddy!** Sharing goals with a co-worker and checking in with each other can help keep us all on track.
- ◆ **Keep a journal** and make a quick entry when you try out a new practice. Note how the children react.
- ◆ **Record yourself** (live or video) and observe your interactions with children. Take note of how often you use these practices and how children react.