

Empathy

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH PLAY

Understand Emotions:

Step 1:

A major aspect of empathy is being able to relate to someone and the experience and/or emotions that they are feeling. Before we can relate to others emotions, we have to be able to understand our own emotions. A very kid friendly, and playing approach to this is watching the movie *Inside Out*. In this film kids get to watch another child have different life experiences and see her physical, emotional, and mental responses. This is a stress free way to expose children to the different emotions one may experience.

Replicate Emotions:

Step 2:

Once a child has been exposed to the different emotions, the next way to help them gain a full understanding of empathy is to practice emotions. The key when doing this is to not make one emotion appear to be “negative”. If we introduce an emotion to a child and portray a negative light on it - they may believe they should not express when they feel that way. To practice emotions you can ask a child to show you what happy looks like, or what sad look like. Continue this through all the different emotions. Not only will this help you learn what the child will demonstrate when they feel a certain way, but this will also force the child to think, in a playful way, “how would I show someone that I am feeling “ ”.

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Step 3:

Identify Emotions:

Now that a child has understood the different emotions and replicated the different emotions, a great next step, I believe, is to identify these emotions.

There are a multitude of different ways that this can be done. Students can participate in acting out skits that portray emotion, clips of films can be watched and then discussed how that person might be feeling. When students begin to look at other situations and identify how people may be feeling it, they are, without even knowing it, empathizing. In order to reflect on how the other person is feeling, they will think "how would that make me feel?"

Step 4:

Begin to Empathize:

By watching a movie, demonstrating their feelings, and identifying others' emotions - children have learned to empathize in a playful, non-intimidating way. A great step to bring a child full circle would be to go back to maybe the skit they put on with their classmates or, rewatch the clip where they had identified how someone was feeling. Now, after identifying how that person may be feeling is to ask them if they have ever felt that way or if they can connect with what the character is experiencing or feeling? This is, a playful level, what empathy is.

EMPATHY

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What is play?

To me the cognitive tool of play is an approach to helping someone, typically a child, understand a complex idea or concept through a stress free environment.

Playful and Meaningful

The activity explained is playful in the sense that children are learning through experience. They are not going to be listening to a lecture. They will be watching a show, acting, and pretending. All things that are great for kids and that kids enjoy. It is meaningful because it is applicable. Kids are going to watch a clip or act out a skit that does not pertain to the ideas of empathy. Each step of the plan leads kids closer to understanding the complex idea of empathy without realizing it.

The Activity

The reason I created this activity is because it allows for clear steps to be followed, but allows for flexibility within each step of how to accomplish the goal set. My activity mirrors the idea of a lesson plan so that teachers could replicate the tools for each step in the ways they know will best benefit their students.