

# Session

# 2



# Developing Empathy Skills

## Link to Junior Cycle SPHE Learning Outcomes:

**Learning Outcome 1.8** Students should be able to reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy, and discuss ways it can be expressed.

**Learning Outcome 1.7** Students should be able to communicate in a respectful and effective manner and listen openly and sensitively to the views/feelings of others.



## CHECK-IN: Learning outside the classroom

Begin by asking students how they got on with the Learning Outside the Classroom task from Session 1 (if applicable).

- Did you come across any examples of empathy during the week – in person, in the news, on social media?
- Can you give examples of when you witnessed or were shown empathy during the week?

## Activity 1 – Reading Other People’s Emotions

### This activity will focus on:

Describing the importance of body language in determining the emotional states of others.

### Type of Activity:

Game

### Materials:

Emotion Cards; Hat/Box; Online Quiz.

### Method:

This activity is divided into two parts: a game and a quiz. Both aim to get students thinking about how they read other people’s emotions through body language and facial expressions.

**1** Before you begin, ask the students to explain the difference between verbal and non-verbal communication, and define what is meant by body language. Some definitions to help them understand the concepts are provided in the Teacher’s note below.

**2** Explain that this activity is like a game of charades - Emotion Charades - designed to help them practise reading people’s emotions through their body language.

**3** Cut up the emotion cards (see page 23) and place them in a hat/box.

**4** Ask volunteers to come to the top of the room and pull an Emotion Card (see below) out of a hat. They must act out the emotion using only their facial expressions and body language.

5

One of the tests psychologists use to study Emotional Intelligence is to ask people to guess what emotion is being conveyed in photographs of facial expressions (which are one type of body language). Load this Quiz from the Greater Good website [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/ei\\_quiz/](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/ei_quiz/). You can do some or all of this quiz with the class, accepting the answer that most of the class agree on in each case (the quiz gives you the answer).



## Teacher's Note

### **Communication skills are divided into verbal and non-verbal communication.**

#### **Verbal Communication:**

Any form of communication using verbal language (e.g. speaking, writing).

#### **Non-verbal communication:**

Any form of communication that does not use words. This includes facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, body position and posture, known collectively as 'body language'.

Body language is a form of non-verbal communication. It includes the gestures we make (e.g. with our hands), facial expressions we use (e.g. furrowing our brows, smiling, widening our eyes), and postures we adopt (e.g. folding our arms, crossing our legs). A significant amount of information is transmitted by our bodies in social interactions. Some would even say we unconsciously give things away with our body language. For example, it is suggested that when a person is lying or holding back information they might use certain hand gestures like concealing their mouth or blinking for slightly longer than normal.

It is also true that there are cultural differences in the use of body language. For example, maintaining eye contact when you are being asked a question is considered polite in some cultures but rude in others.

### **Why is body language important?**

It is therefore important to be able to read people's body language to fully understand what they are saying or how they are feeling. For example, if somebody tells you they are not nervous before a test, but you notice they are fidgeting and their eyes are moving around a lot, do you think they are actually nervous?

## Emotion Cards

Sadness	Disappointment	Excitement	Annoyance
Hurt	Irritation	Triumph	Pity
Worry	Anger	Shyness	Joy
Fear	Guilt	Loneliness	Pride
Boredom	Happiness	Frustration	Embarrassment



### Class Discussion:

- 1 How does body language help us understand how others are feeling?
- 2 How easy or difficult is it to read body language?
- 3 Are some people easier to read than others? Does it depend on the situation?

## Activity 2 – Empathic Listening

### This activity will focus on:

Describing the importance of empathic listening and practising empathic listening skills.

#### Type of Activity:

Listening, Pair Work

#### Materials:

Guide to Empathic Listening

### Method:

- 1 Ask students what they think are the signs of a good listener. Brainstorm with students as a group, writing their answers on the whiteboard.
- 2 Ask students to read through the *Guide to Empathic Listening*. Compare the guide to students' opinions about what makes a good listener.
- 3 Split the class into pairs and ask them to assign a Speaker and a Listener.
- 4 Ask each person to think of a low-level problem they are currently experiencing or a time when they felt unhappy or challenged in some way. Provide examples for the class, such as struggling with a school subject; being ill or injured; not performing as well as they expected in an exam or at sports; being embarrassed by something; or feeling unfairly treated by a parent/teacher etc. Tell students to only disclose information that they feel comfortable sharing (see teacher's note below).
- 5 Each Speaker will be given 3 minutes to tell their story while the Listener practises empathic listening. At the end of each conversation, they will swap roles.
- 6 Walk around the room observing the interactions and helping students if necessary.

# Guide to Empathic Listening

## 1. Give your full attention.

- Give the speaker your undivided attention.
- Put away phones and get rid of other distractions if possible.
- If your attention wanders while the other person is speaking, gently bring it back to them.

## 2. Maintain eye contact.

- Try not to let your eyes wander around the room.
- Try to maintain good eye contact with the speaker without staring (if appropriate).

## 3. Remove barriers.

- Don't place yourself behind physical barriers, such as tables.
- Avoid crossing your arms when you are listening.

## 4. Use encouraging body language.

- Use encouraging body language signs like nodding and smiling.

## 5. Let them speak.

- Don't interrupt the other person unnecessarily.
- If you need to clarify what the person is saying, wait for a natural break in the conversation.
- Allow for silence, you don't need to fill every gap in the conversation.

## 6. Understand.

- Listen to the other person's words and read their body language.
- Really try to understand the emotions the other person is feeling and the thoughts they are thinking.

## 7. Show that you understand.

- Let the other person know that you understand them by using words and gestures.
- For example, reflect back to the person what you have heard (e.g. *'I think I know what you are saying that ...'; 'I understand...'; 'I totally get where you are coming from ...'*)
- Share examples from your own experience if you have any (but be careful not to make the conversation about you!).

## 8. Don't judge.

- Don't judge or criticise what the other person is saying.



## Teacher's Note

To maximise the effectiveness of this activity, teachers may want to demonstrate this activity first before assigning students to their Speaker and Listener roles. You could use a student volunteer or show a short video of empathic listening.

Remind students that they should not share a deeply personal experience. Emphasise that students should focus on events/problems that trigger only mild to moderate feelings, rather than severe negative feelings, or relate to a problem that was temporary.

This short clip from the film 'Inside Out' may help students understand empathic listening more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t685WM5R6aM>



## Class Discussion:

1

**How did you find practising empathic listening? What was easy? What was most challenging?**

2

**Do you think empathic listening is important?**

**PROMPT:** *How does it feel when someone listens to you with empathy/ how does it feel when someone doesn't seem to listen? How did you feel being the speaker?*

3

**How can you best practise empathic listening?**

4

**Can you think of times/situations when you were an empathic listener? Or times/situations when you could be in the future?**



## Session 2 Reflection

Allow students a few minutes to reflect on their learning from the session. Ask students to think about what surprised them most about reading other people's emotions or being a good listener. Ask a few students to share their answers with the class.



## Learning outside the classroom

Suggest to students that they try out empathic listening with somebody during the week. Ask them about this at the beginning of the next session.

**Finished with the ASE lessons? We would love to hear your feedback.**



Please follow the QR code or click the link below to complete a short (2-3 minute) feedback form:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ASEFEEDBACK1>

