

Cross the line - Empathy

EXPLANATION:

This thought-provoking activity gives students the opportunity to feel and share another person's emotions. *Cross the line* creates awareness of others' experiences, perspectives and circumstances building a unified and supportive group of learners.

YEAR LEVELS: Years 7–10

STUDENT GROUPING: Whole group

ACTIVITY LENGTH: 30–40 mins approx.

LINK TO CURRICULUM:

Health and Physical Education: Sequence of content F-10

Strand: Personal, social and community health

Identities –

- Investigate the impact of transition and change on identities
- Evaluate factors that shape identities and critically analyse how individuals impact the identities of others.

Strand: Communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing

Interacting with others –

- Investigate the benefits of relationships and examine their impact on their own and others' health and wellbeing
- Investigate how empathy and ethical decision making contribute to respectful relationships.

See also Personal and Social Capability learning continuum sub elements:

- Appreciate diverse perspectives
- Develop reflective practice
- Become confident, resilient and adaptable
- Understand relationships.

SCOPE OF TASK:

Empathy is important because it helps us understand how others are feeling so we can respond appropriately to situations. It is typically associated with social behaviours and healthy relationships.

This activity is best conducted with students who are part of a cohesive group where students feel safe to share.

Stick a long piece of masking tape across the floor to represent a line.

1. Set class guidelines for this activity and emphasise the need for everyone to agree to how the activity will be conducted. Some guidelines might include:
 - Show respect to people who are sharing information
 - Different feelings may arise as experiences are remembered – it is important that empathy is shown to all people
 - Care must be shown to people who may be divulging personal experiences or feelings
 - Other perspectives should be considered
 - The activity is completed in silence – opinions are not given.
2. Set the task for the students and explain the activity:
 - A statement is going to be read
 - If the statement or experience applies to you – that is, you have experienced it, you are to cross the line and stand on the other side of the line
 - Once you have crossed the line turn around and face the people standing on the other side of the line
 - Stop and notice how many people have personal experiences – think about how they must have felt
 - The group who crossed the line will return to their original places so the whole group stands together again
 - The next statement is read, and the same process followed.

It is important that students feel safe sharing – ensure that students know that if they do not feel comfortable crossing the line, they can stay exactly where they are.

3. To encourage deep thinking about others, their feelings and experiences the teacher can pose questions after each statement without expectation of response. Some examples may include:
 - How does it feel to cross the line?
 - How does it feel to see your friends cross the line?
 - Did you know that your friend/s had those feelings or experiences?
 - Can you understand how that must feel?
 - How would you feel standing in different shoes?



Questions that might be included in this activity:

- Cross the line if you have been left out of group activities?
- Cross the line if you have experienced bullying?
- Cross the line if you have been made fun of because you are a girl?
- Cross the line if you have been made fun of because you are a boy?
- Cross the line if you have been made fun of because of your culture?
- Cross the line if you have experienced sexting?
- Cross the line if you have been sworn at in the playground?
- Cross the line if sometimes you don't understand yourself?
- Cross the line if sometimes you don't feel good enough?
- Cross the line if you have been judged or teased because of the colour of your skin?
- Cross the line if someone in your family has a disability?
- Cross the line if you know someone who has committed suicide?
- Cross the line if you have a friend who has been teased because they are different?
- Cross the line if you've ever felt pressure from your friends or an adult to do something you didn't want to do?
- Cross the line if you have been ridiculed because of your weight or shape of your body?
- Cross the line if you, friend or family member have been teased because of their sexual preferences?
- Cross the line if you ever feel ashamed about something you have done?
- Cross the line if you have ever stood by and watched while someone is hurt, and you have been too afraid to speak up?
- Cross the line if the future scares you?
- Cross the line if you feel different from your friends?

4. Take time reading the statements giving students time to absorb the statement and think about how other students are feeling.

5. Bring the students back to a whole group and give them time to debrief and comment on the experience. Remind them they are not commenting on individuals sharing but on how they felt knowing that their friends had experienced such diversity. From this frame pose questions:

- What was the hardest part of the activity?
- What did you learn about your feelings?
- How does the knowledge make you feel?
- How does this influence how you view others?
- Why is empathy for others important in life?

Variation: this activity can be conducted with many different age groups – the depth and range of questions/statements can be altered to match the developmental stage of children and students.

Important: the examples of questions provided may or may not be appropriate for certain cohorts of students and contexts – choose statements that align with the needs and experiences of each individual group. School leadership, parents and caregivers may need to be consulted prior to initiation of this activity.

RESOURCES:

- Masking tape.

