

MODULE

4

**BUILDING
EMPATHY**



MODULE 4

Building Empathy

MODULE OVERVIEW

If students completed Modules 1 to 2, they uncovered three key attributes and skills that contribute to kindness: Self-Awareness, Empathy, and Relationship Skills. While there are many skills and attributes that support kind behaviors, these three are particularly powerful. Exploration of these skills allow students to scaffold up to potentially challenging or vulnerable acts by following a natural learning progression:

- **Self-Awareness:** I understand what's going on *inside of me*.
- **Empathy:** I understand what may be going on *inside of you*.
- **Relationship Skills:** I can use empathy and caring communication to *build relationships* with others.

The majority of Modules 3-5 focus on the immersive experience of each skill, rather than learning about each skill. Each module can be implemented individually, or in part, or can be taught as a scaffolded learning progression.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to exercise the Self-Awareness skills of Identifying Emotions and Accurate Self-Perception.
- Students will be able to identify, explain, and exercise the Social Awareness skills of Empathy and Perspective-Taking.

STANDARDS AND CORE COMPETENCY MAPPING

- (CASEL) Self-Awareness - Identifying Emotions, Accurate Self-Perception
- (CASEL) Social Awareness - Empathy, Perspective-taking, Respect for Others
- (CASEL) Relationship Skills - Communication



Estimated Total Time

60-80 minutes

Module 4 consists of 5 parts that can be completed in one extended session, taught individually over 5 days, or combined as needed.

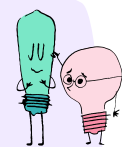


Materials

- Student Journals ([pdf download](#) | [copy Google Slides](#))
- Whiteboard, Smartboard, Digital Presentation Tool, or Chart Paper
- [Name the Emotion Deck](#)

FACILITATION TIPS

Module 4 consists of 5 parts that can be completed in one extended session, taught individually over 5 days, or combined as needed.



If you are facilitating virtually, Learn Kind recommends that:

- Parts 1-4 be facilitated *synchronously* in whole group virtual sessions if possible, given the nuanced aspects of nonverbal cues and perceived emotions.
- *If needed*, however, some introductions and modeling can be done *asynchronously* via recorded video, and some discussion can be facilitated through tools like Flipgrid, Google Docs, or other discussion board platforms.

Note: See *Teacher Rx, Section 2* for student accessibility tips.

Prior to facilitating this module, it will be important to revisit the Classroom Commitment and Discussion Guardrails you established through the Kind & Connected Classroom Community resource, or other community guidelines you've put in place.

Reflection Options: Throughout the module you will see a number of opportunities for students to reflect on their learning. These opportunities are included in the Student Journals, but you may choose to facilitate reflection in a variety of ways. Consider small group discussions, exit tickets, recorded responses, discussion boards, and others. Consider the major takeaways you want your students to have, and facilitate reflections accordingly.

PART 1

Introduction to Empathy



Estimated Total Time
10-15 minutes

SEL Skills: Social Awareness: Empathy, Perspective-Taking

1. INTRODUCTION (Whole Group)

Self-awareness is a powerful piece of the kindness puzzle, but for students, it's just the beginning. The next step is to build on the understanding of our own internal processes, and realize that everyone has their own inner orchestra playing as well.

Tell students, "We each have internal thoughts, emotions, and processes taking place at every given moment. And even though there are many similarities between us, it's important to understand that each person is wholly unique and may think, respond, and feel differently about a given circumstance than you do. We have to be able to put ourselves in other peoples' shoes, and imagine what they may be thinking, feeling, or needing to truly show kindness."

"The ability to share someone else's perspective and feelings is called **empathy**."

2. WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION

Choose one or both of the following questions.

- "Think of a moment when you were feeling a certain way, and you felt totally understood by another person."
- "Think of a moment when you were going through something big and feeling strong emotions, and someone responded exactly in the way you needed."

Allow students the opportunity to share verbally, through a group chat or discussion board, or any other appropriate way. Explain that when they felt understood or cared for, they were on the receiving end of empathy. How did it feel?

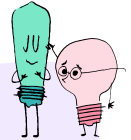
3. TEACHER MODELING

Explain that we are able to develop appropriate empathy by observing someone's words, facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and actions. As we do, we begin to understand what their perspective or feelings may be. Take a few moments to demonstrate this to students, modeling your own thoughts, feelings, and actions as you empathize with someone.

- **Story:** You might share a story and explain what you noticed going on with the other person, what you imagined they may be feeling, and what sorts of behaviors/actions it led to. Prepare your story in advance.
- **Role-Play:** You might ask a student to act out a scenario with you, giving them an emotion or situation (excitement, sadness, loneliness) to demonstrate. As they act out the given scenario/feeling, role-play your response, describing your observations, thoughts, and feelings.

Role Play ideas:

- You scored the game-winning goal for your team.
- You lost your favorite toy.
- You got sick and will have to miss a party you've been looking forward to.



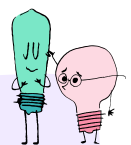
FACILITATION NOTE

You may be working through unique challenges while facilitating this activity. If you are virtual, you won't have the benefit of seeing all of the body language and nonverbal cues of your students. If you are in-person and do not have the benefit of full facial expressions, it is still possible to gain enough understanding to develop empathy! No matter what situation you are in, speak to these dynamics explicitly so students can begin to navigate these skills even in challenging circumstances.

4. DISCUSSION

Facilitate a discussion using the following questions:

- What are some ways we can try to understand what another person may be thinking or feeling, even when...
 - people are wearing masks and we can't see their facial expressions?
 - you're communicating virtually, either on a computer, tablet, or a phone?



FACILITATION TIP

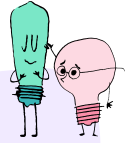
It's important to note that while empathy is usually discussed in the context of negative emotions (sadness, loneliness, fear), it's also important to be able to empathize with positive emotions and situations (excitement, joy, optimism). In fact, the ability to empathize with positive emotions can create greater connection than empathizing with negative emotions.

Wrap-up: Tell students, "Perhaps the most important attribute or skill under the umbrella of kindness, is this ability to *empathize* with other human beings, and step into their shoes for a time. There's always more going on under the surface than we realize - just like you may be feeling a certain way or dealing with something that no one in this class knows about. But if we pause and observe closely, we can find a lot of opportunities for empathy."

5. STUDENT REFLECTION

Have students reflect on the following question in their journal:

- Describe a moment where you recently felt empathy for another person, or have been able to “put yourself in their shoes”.



FACILITATION TIP

You may choose to facilitate this reflection in a variety of ways. Consider small group discussions, exit tickets, recorded responses, discussion boards, or other strategies. Consider the major takeaways you want your students to have, and facilitate reflections accordingly.

6. (OPTIONAL) VIDEOS

You can show students the following videos to further explain and model empathy.

- [What is Empathy?](#): From Ashoka, a video of middle school students describing what empathy means and how they express it.
- [Brene Brown Empathy vs Sympathy](#): The big idea here is that students don’t need to have the “right words” when empathizing. Connection, not a response, is what helps.
- [Inside Out Listening with Empathy](#): This is a great demonstration of what empathy versus non-empathy looks like in action.

PART 2

Empathy “Face-to-Face”



Estimated Total Time
15-25 minutes

**SEL Skills: Social Awareness: Empathy, Perspective-Taking;
Self-Awareness: Identifying Emotions**

1. INTRODUCTION (Whole Group or Partners)

For this experience, students practice demonstrating and interpreting a variety of emotions. The practice of embodying each emotion themselves, while interpreting the emotions of others, provides a safe opportunity to deepen empathy and build emotional literacy.

2. RECOMMENDED PROCEDURE (Virtual or In-person)

1. **Tell students:** “One way to understand what somebody may be thinking is to observe their facial expressions, their body language, or their tone of voice. In this activity you will act out different emotions while the rest of the class tries to determine what emotion you’re embodying.”
2. Have students volunteer to role-play and select one student at a time.
3. Using the emotional vocabulary list from the [Name the Emotion](#) activity in Module 3, select an emotion and silently indicate the emotion to the role-player (if in person), or have the student select (if virtual).
4. You might prompt the role-player to respond to the question “How are you doing?” without using the term that they are demonstrating.
5. Have students write down the emotion they think is being demonstrated and after 5-10 seconds have students share verbally, in a group chat, or however else is appropriate.
6. Discuss why students guessed the emotion that they did, citing specific facial expression, body language, or tone of voice.
7. Repeat with a new student for as many rounds (and as many emotions) as you like.

3. ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURE (In-person)

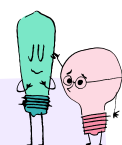
If possible, facilitate this activity using partner pairs.

1. Pair students into two lines, A and B, and have them begin by facing away from each other.
2. Using the emotional vocabulary list from the *Name the Emotion* activity in Module 3, select an emotion and silently show group A.
3. Instruct both lines to turn and face each other, with partners directly across from each other.

4. Allow group B to take 5-10 seconds to interpret the emotion portrayed by their partner in group A (tip: Allow students to ask their partners "how are you doing?" and have partners respond appropriately, without using the term they are demonstrating).
5. When time is up, have group B indicate which emotion they believe their partner was demonstrating (this can be done in a variety of ways).
6. Now have the group switch roles, face away from each other again, and give group B a different emotion to demonstrate, with group A interpreting.
7. Repeat for 3 rounds.

4. GROUP DISCUSSION

- Did your classmates or partner express emotions differently than you do?
- What was difficult about this activity?
- Why is it important to be able to interpret facial expressions and body language?



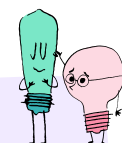
VIRTUAL FACILITATION TIP

If needed, some of the reflection prompts can be added to your digital discussion board for written or recorded responses after the completion of the activity.

5. STUDENT REFLECTION

In their journals, have students answer one of the following questions:

- Why is it important to be able to interpret facial expressions and body language?
- How does this connect to kindness?



FACILITATION TIPS

You may choose to facilitate this reflection in a variety of ways. Consider small group discussions, exit tickets, recorded responses, discussion boards, or other strategies. Consider the major takeaways you want your students to have, and facilitate reflections accordingly.

PART 3

Empathy Mapping



Estimated Total Time
10-15 minutes

SEL Skills: Social Awareness: Empathy;
Self-Awareness: Identifying Emotions, Accurate Self-Perception

1. INTRODUCTION (Small Group)

In this activity, students will answer several prompts that map emotions and thoughts to attitudes, behaviors, and actions. Then they'll reflect and share within small groups, in discussion boards, or with the whole class (whichever is most appropriate for you). As students find both similarities and differences, they will experience a deepening sense of community and safety, and build their muscles for empathy.

Tell students, "To understand what kinds of thought processes and emotions other people are experiencing, it's helpful to work with others who are willing to "pop the hood" and give you a glimpse of what's going on under the surface."

2. PROCEDURE

- Create student groups of 4 or 5 (if possible) or facilitate with the whole class.
- In their journals, have students complete the following prompts, considering their thoughts, facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, and specific actions.
 - When I'm feeling angry I _____
 - When I'm feeling nervous I _____
 - When I'm feeling excited I _____

Students can either write or draw their responses.

- Facilitate each question one at a time, with students reflecting and responding, and then sharing their responses with their small group or with the whole class (as appropriate).
- After they share within their groups, allow one to two minutes for each group to share 1 major similarity or 1 major difference they discovered. (If facilitating for the whole group, ask students to identify 1 major similarity and 1 major difference they noticed as others shared.)

3. (OPTIONAL) STUDENT REFLECTION

In their journals, have students answer the following question:

- What was one major similarity and one major difference you discovered between yourself and one of your classmates?

PART 4

Empathy in Action



Estimated Total Time
10–15 minutes

SEL Skills: Social Awareness: Empathy, Perspective-Taking;
Relationship Skills: Communication, Social Engagement;
Self-Awareness: Identifying Emotions

1. INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION (Whole Group)

In this activity, students begin to put empathy into action, starting with a group brainstorm of opportunities for empathy, and ending with an individual empathy plan. To start, facilitate a discussion with students, beginning with a review of what empathy is.

Say to students: “Let’s review. Does anyone remember what empathy is?” (Reminder: “The ability to share someone else’s perspective and feelings is called *empathy*.”) Ask students to share a few real-life examples of empathy. Remind students that empathy is just as important when it comes to positive emotions (like joy and triumph) as negative emotions (like loneliness and grief).

Now say: “Sometimes we say ‘Put yourself in someone else’s shoes.’ This doesn’t mean we actually put on their shoes, but it means to imagine what it would feel like to be that person. This is an example of empathy. What does empathy look like when it’s put into action?” Have students share some ideas and guide them to consider things like facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and other empathetic behaviors.

2. BRAINSTORM EMPATHY IN ACTION IDEAS

Tell students that it’s time to start thinking about how to put empathy into action. Select a series of emotions (or ask students to share appropriate emotions) that could readily benefit from empathy and have students brainstorm ways they could demonstrate empathy for someone they know who is feeling that way. Some emotions you might select are:

- Loneliness
- Anxiousness
- Joy
- Confusion
- Sadness
- Enthusiasm
- Triumph or Pride (for having met a goal or achieved something)

Use a whiteboard tool or brainstorming tool like [Miro](https://miro.com) to capture students’ ideas for each emotion.

3. STUDENT PLANS

In their journals, have students think about someone they know that may be experiencing one of the emotions discussed. Have them make a plan to put their empathy into action and show kindness toward that person in a specific way that is appropriate for that emotion. Plan to come together as a group (or use discussion boards) to discuss and reflect on the results after students put their empathy plans into action.

PART 5

Reflecting on Empathy



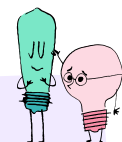
Estimated Total Time
10 minutes

**SEL Skills: Social Awareness: Empathy, Perspective-Taking;
Responsible Decision-Making: Reflecting**

1. INTRODUCTION (Individual)

This activity can be introduced in a whole group setting as a class discussion or assigned as an independent activity. Guide students to reflect on each of their experiences in the empathy module and consider one or two of the following questions:

- What can you do to feel empathy more consistently?
- How is empathy connected to kindness?
- What are some ways you could put empathy into practice right away?



FACILITATION TIPS

You may choose to facilitate this reflection in a variety of ways. Consider small group discussions, exit tickets, recorded responses, discussion boards, or other strategies. Consider the major takeaways you want your students to have, and facilitate reflections accordingly.

2. (OPTIONAL) ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Get ideas for additional [empathy activities](#).

Congratulations! You've reached the end of Module 4.

Choose Kindness Now

When it comes down to it, kindness is a choice – and a choice we can make over and over again. Use this simple step-by-step tool at the end of every module, or as often as needed to help students strengthen their internal kindness muscles. Since science tells us kindness is contagious, every choice can create ripples of positive impact.

1 **CHOOSE** your kind act from the list below (or choose your own!)

2 **PLAN** the WHO, WHEN, and WHERE for your act

WHO – Do it for a friend, family member, teacher, or yourself

WHEN – Choose when you will do the act (maybe it's right now!)

WHERE – Where will you do it? School, home, or somewhere else?

3 **DO** your kind act!

4 **OBSERVE** what happened and how you feel

5 **(Optional) SHARE** with the class next time you meet

☐ Invite someone to something

☐ Help someone with schoolwork

☐ Pick up litter or trash

☐ Smile at someone

☐ Give someone a compliment

☐ Thank someone for something they did

☐ Help with a chore you don't normally do

☐ Draw a picture for someone

☐ Go outside and enjoy nature

☐ Take a mindful moment for yourself