



Rumbling with Vulnerability: **EMPATHY**

See pages 136 - 157 in *Dare to Lead*.

Length: 30-45 minutes

Our Why:

We will learn what empathy is and how it takes practice, messing it up, and circling back so that we can be empathic with ourselves and with our classroom community.

Vocabulary:

Circle back - coming back to talk to a person when we want revisit a conversation or interaction

Empathy - connecting to the emotion another person is experiencing and not the actual experience

Sympathy - to feel for someone instead of feeling with them (ex. "I feel so sorry for you.")

Materials:

Chart Paper | Markers

Starting with the Learning	Teacher Notes:
<p>Connection for engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have students silently think about a time when they had to share something personal and vulnerable with someone. (Students do not have to share what this is out loud.)• Read each question aloud and have students raise their hand when they relate to the answer:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ When I share something personal and vulnerable, I like the person listening to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ make eye contact◦ look away so I don't feel so self-conscious◦ reach out to hug me◦ give me my space◦ respond right away◦ just listen and stay quiet◦ When someone shares something painful and personal with me, I:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ worry about saying the wrong thing◦ want to say something really comforting	<p>Empathic Misses: Look to see if this would be developmentally appropriate for your students. It may be more appropriate for students in grades 3-5. We encourage you to use your judgment and skip going over the empathic misses or come back to it another day if necessary.</p> <p>Extension Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Recommended for grades 3-5) Empathic Misses: Have students role-play examples of the empathic misses and an example of how they could respond with empathy.

- get nervous
- worry about not feeling anything
- don't know what to do if I really don't want to know
- want to fix it

Mini-lesson:

- Discuss how the exercise above shows that we look for empathy and need empathy in different ways. I might need a hug, but you might just want me to sit with you at lunch.
- Define empathy as a way to connect to the emotion another person is experiencing and not the actual experience.
 - Ex. A friend doesn't understand what we are doing in math class right now. I am really good at math, so I haven't experienced feeling upset about math, BUT I know what it's like to not understand an assignment because I feel like that a lot in science.
 - We are connecting to the emotion of feeling lost and frustrated in class, not connecting with the specific experience of not understanding the math problem.
- Share with students the Attributes of Empathy.
 - Theresa Wiseman's Attributes of Empathy:
 - Staying out of judgment:
 - We practice non-judgment...just hear it.
 - Taking the other's perspective:
 - What does that mean for you? What is that experience like for you?
 - Understanding the emotion you are hearing:
 - How can I touch within myself something that feels like what the other person might be feeling? Check in and clarify what you are hearing. Ask questions.
 - Communicating our understanding about the emotion.
- We also think this fifth component of empathy (from Dr. Kristin Neff) is important - practicing mindfulness:
 - This is not pushing away emotion because it's uncomfortable, but feeling it and moving through it. This matters – if I think empathy is to jump into your dark hole with you, then I can't help you because now I'm stuck in the hole too. I must know the boundaries about where you end and I begin. I can't be empathic if I am taking on another's story.
 - Exercise: On a chart paper, as you go through each one of the attributes, have students share what this could "look like" and "sound like" in the classroom when interacting with each other.
- Review with students the common barriers to empathy that Brené likes to call Empathic Misses.



- Share each one aloud and have students share a silent hand signal indicating they can relate to that one. Depending on availability of time, have a few students share examples.
- Empathy Miss #1: Sympathy vs. Empathy
 - The friend who responds with sympathy (“*I feel so sorry for you*”) rather than empathy (“*I get it, I feel with you, and I’ve been there*”).
- Empathy Miss #2: The Gasp and Awe
 - The friend who hears your story and feels shame on your behalf. They may gasp and may tell you how horrified you should be (“*Oh my goodness, I’d just die*”) and you have to rush in to say (“*No, it’s okay*”) and try to make that person feel better.
- Empathy Miss #3: The Mighty Fall
 - The friend who sees you as the pillar of worthiness and authenticity. They are so let down by your imperfections and disappointed in you (“*I just never expected that from you. I didn’t think you would ever be someone who didn’t do well. What happened?*”).
- Empathy Miss #4: The Block and Tackle
 - The friend is so uncomfortable with vulnerability that they scold you (“*What happened?! What was going through your head?*”). Or the friend is looking for someone else to blame (“*Who is that person? Who do they think they are?! Ugh.*”).
- Empathy Miss #5: The Boots and Shovel
 - The friend who is all about making it better and, out of his or her own discomfort, refuses to acknowledge that you can actually be crazy and make terrible choices (“*You’re exaggerating. It wasn’t that bad. You rock. You’re perfect. Everyone loves you*”). They are trying so hard to make you feel better that they aren’t able to connect with your emotions.
- Empathy Miss #6: If You Think That’s Bad...
 - The friend who confuses “connection” with the opportunity to one-up you. (“*That’s nothing. Listen to what happened to me one time!*”).

Lesson Closing:

- Share with students how empathy takes practice, that we will likely mess up, have to circle back, and try again.
 - Discuss the idea of circling back. We don't always get empathy right, but we can circle back when we mess up. Model this for your group.
- On a chart paper write, *"I agree to practice empathy, mess up, circle back, clean it up, and try again."* We call this an Empathy Commitment.
- Have every student in the class sign the Empathy Commitment.

Moving from Knowledge to Daily Practice

- Have a poster of the Attributes of Empathy hanging somewhere in your classroom where it is visible to the class and refer to it throughout the year.
- Revisit this lesson when a class trend is recognized or when a classmate is needing empathy and students seem unsure of how to show it.
- Model what this looks like toward students throughout the year and acknowledge students who show empathy toward their classmates.

