

Cross the Line - Empathy

EXPLANATION:

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

GRADE LEVELS: 7–10

STUDENT GROUPING: Whole group

ACTIVITY LENGTH: 30–40 minutes

CASEL CORE COMPETENCY: *SOCIAL AWARENESS*

- Taking others' perspectives
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- You can learn more about the CASEL framework [here](#)

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 behaviors and healthy relationships.

Important Note: This activity may trigger strong feelings by participants. Some of the topics mentioned in this activity may or may not be appropriate for certain cohorts of students and contexts; choose topics that align with the needs and experiences of each individual group. School leadership, parents, and guardians may need to be consulted prior to the initiation of this activity. For an alternative activity about empathy, see grades 11–12 *The Story of Derek Redmond and His Dad*.

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

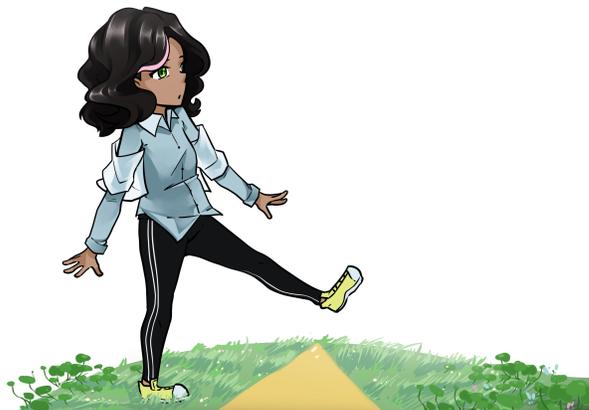
Stick a long piece of masking tape across the floor to represent a line.

1. Set class guidelines for this activity and emphasize 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, if 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 their 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? Why or why not?
- How would you feel standing in different shoes?



Statements that might be included in this activity:

- Cross the line if you have been left out of a group activity.
- Cross the line if you have experienced bullying.
- Cross the line if you have been made fun of because of your gender.
- Cross the line if you have been made fun of because of your culture.
- Cross the line if you have received a text or direct message that made you feel uncomfortable.
- Cross the line if you have been sworn at while at school or a youth activity.
- 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 color of your skin.
- Cross the line if you know someone who has struggled with mental health issues.
- 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 ever felt insecure about your body image.
- Cross the line if you, a friend, or a family member has been teased because of their sexual preference.
- 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 was hurt, and you were too afraid to speak up.
- Cross the line if the future sometimes scares you.
- Cross the line if you ever feel different from your friends.

4. Take time reading each statement, 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 that they are not commenting on the responses of individual students, but on how they felt knowing that their peers had gone through such diverse experiences. From this frame, pose questions, such as:

- 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 the students.

RESOURCES:

- Masking tape