Empathy Strategies & Resources for Schools
About Making Caring Common

Our mission
Making Caring Common (MCC) helps educators, parents, and communities raise children who are caring, responsible to their communities, and committed to justice.

Our work
MCC uses research and the expertise and insights of both practitioners and parents to develop effective strategies for promoting in children kindness and a commitment to the greater good, to influence the national conversation about raising and educating caring, ethical children, and to develop partnerships that enhance our work and elevate our common message.
About your role

...develop “light lift” activities that educators can embed into their interactions with students, including lesson plans and case studies for whole class engagement, and resource guides that help build caring, inclusive school cultures, which include....

• Appreciation for others, respect for diversity
• Value in learning from and caring for others
• Showing compassion across “domains” (e.g., family, strangers)
Examples: you can submit a proposal to develop one of these, in a specific area of your choosing....

• Specific strategy with up to 5 lessons or activities to be integrated in the classroom, or during advisory/guidance

• Weekly or daily “routines” or “rituals” for teachers and students to practice

• Resource guide with practical information and tips/suggestions for various scenarios
Objectives

• Background on empathy
• Challenges in schools
• Our approach
• Ideas for final proposals
Why empathy?
“the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible”

- Hoffman, 2000, p.3

- Plays an essential role in interpersonal relationships
- Often linked to prosocial behavior and altruism
- Affective/ethical components consistently linked to less aggression/bullying
- Critical for the future and our changing landscapes (think AI, economic security, environmental concerns)
• **Affective:** experiencing feelings in response to another’s affective state
  – Emotional sharing (e.g., You feel upset so I feel upset; feeling “with”)
  – Empathic concern, Sympathy (e.g., I’m sorry about what you’re going through)

• **Cognitive:** differentiating among differing affective states and perspectives
  – Self-awareness, Emotion literacy
  – Theory of mind, Perspective taking

• **Ethical:** valuing the feelings and perspectives of others
  – Moral identity, purpose (e.g., I care about making the world better)
  – Caring, Compassion (e.g., I care about what you’re going through, and I want to help you)
Why is it so difficult?
Individual barriers

- **Affective**
  - Personal distress, anxiety
  - Destructive feelings, overarousal

- **Cognitive**
  - Problems with (emotion) regulation
  - Stereotyping, bias
  - “Me”-centeredness

- **Ethical**
  - Non-moral values/identity, moral disengagement
  - Lack of social responsibility or sense of social justice
Contextual barriers

• “plugged in” and “materialistic” culture
• Mixed messages
• Different expectations and biases based on gender, race, etc.
• Poor role models, weak support
• Peer pressure (adolescence)
• Little practice, no accountability
• Social geography, little/inconsistent exposure to diversity
What are the challenges in schools?
• Many programs to choose from
  – Limited **explicit focus on empathy** (the “social awareness” competency in SEL)
  – Require shared vision, voice, and **buy-in** from stakeholders
  – Need substantial **time** to plan, coordinate, train, implement, evaluate, etc.

• **Financial and logistical issues**
  – Professional development
  – Technical assistance

• **Wide variation in implementation quality**
  – Mismatches in classroom needs/teacher readiness
  – Limited teacher autonomy
Our approach
Empathy Strategies

- Light lift, interactive (currently for MS/HS)
- Allow teachers to select what works for them, at different times of the school year
- Set of exercises/lessons to be done in 5-wk cycles
  - Up to 5 lessons per strategy (2-4 pages long)
  - Each lesson can be done once a week for 15-20 mins
  - Rely heavily on peer discussion, reflection, application
- Accompanied by a list of games/routines
- 12 so far, developing more
Format for strategies

- Time required
- Tech needs, other materials
- Rationale, key elements
- Teaching or other considerations
- Rounds (or steps) 1 through 5
  - i.e., each round/step is a lesson, that could be done once a week for 15-20 mins a class period
Random Acts of Kindness

Everyday Gratitude

Humans of Your School

What Would You Do?

Valuing others, Respecting differences, Building relationships
Sample strategy: 
see Circle of Concern on our website

(Note: we have adapted this strategy to fit the format of all others in slide 17)
Ideas

• Specific strategies with up to 5 lessons (following our format): e.g., Teach about moral identity and bias by...
  – Applying studies on bullying, moral reasoning/disengagement to develop creative lessons that explicitly target empathy
  – Applying Teaching Tolerance, ADL lessons to ones that also explicitly target empathy

• Weekly or daily “routines” or “rituals” for teachers and students to practice; e.g.,
  – Ways to build a culturally responsive classroom
  – “Tuning in” techniques

• Resource guides with practical information and tips/suggestions for various scenarios; e.g.,
  – Address equity and diversity in the classroom
  – On digital literacy and social media use
Must-see resources

• Teaching Tolerance, Edutopia, Greater Good Science Center (e.g., search “empathy lessons edutopia”)

• Integrating SEL into curricula and general teaching practices [http://www.casel.org/csi-reports-tools-and-resources/](http://www.casel.org/csi-reports-tools-and-resources/)

Proposals

• 2-4 pages, double-spaced, 12-pt font, include name, program
  – What is the specific problem, gap in practice?
  – What is the proposed solution? What is the rationale for teachers/students wanting to do this?
  – What evidence and theoretical support are there for the solution?
  – What might “success” look like?
  – What do you hope to gain from this experience?

• Office hours available for support (Gutman, 1st floor), see Website
• Due Feb 9 at noon (12pm), Email to Milena @ milena_batanova@gse.harvard.edu
• Will be notified Feb 16 and receive workshops timeline
• Final materials due March 23, presentations to follow with Dean Ryan
• Students will receive $500 stipend (per “project”)

Office hours between now and then: Mon, Tues, Thurs at 12-2pm in Gutman, 1st floor, or email to make appt.
Thank you!

(Web) https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/deans-challenge

(Email) milena_batanova@gse.harvard.edu