

1: Empathy

empathy | 'empəTHē|, noun

the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

The origin of the word empathy dates to the 1880s, when German psychologist Theodore Lipps coined the term “Einfühlung” (literally, “in-feeling”) to describe the emotional appreciation of another’s feelings. Empathy has further been described as the process of understanding a person’s subjective experience by vicariously sharing that experience while maintaining an observant stance. (Zinn W. 1999)

It seems that empathy plays an important role in a therapeutic relationship (Wiseman T. 1996). Empathy means to recognize others’ feelings, the causes of these feelings, and to be able to participate in the emotional experience of an individual without becoming part of it (Keen S. 2007). Gagan (1983) indicates that empathy is the ability to perceive one’s feelings on one hand, while transmitting them on the other.

Empathy and emotion-management are essential to a child’s success in school and in life in general. Paul Ekman established the six basic emotions as anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise. Though there are theorists who propose varying models, most psychologists and many in the social and emotional learning community accept these as the basic emotions through which all others emerge as nuances of.

When speaking about empathy to children, it is crucial that they are guided through these basic feelings that they may or may not share with another person. It is harmful to classify some emotions as positive and others as negative because realistically, nearly every day, humans feel all six of the basic emotions. No one emotion is right or wrong or should be looked down on. For example, anger can be positive in that it drives people to action, to see what is wrong with any given situation and change it. In fact, the suppression of emotions leads to several adverse outcomes, and contrarily to that, emotional expression results in a host of beneficial outcomes. Unsurprisingly, emotional intelligence, “someone’s ability:

- to understand his feelings,
- to listen to others and to feel them, and
- to express his emotions in a productive manner,” can be strengthened through social and emotional learning which results in greater empathy, the cornerstone of emotional intelligence.

Unfortunately, our culture does not support boys and girls equally when it comes to their ability to express themselves openly, or process emotions and experiences through healthy means. This contributes to harmful behavior such as over-aggression, self-harm or emotional stoicism that is often characterized as “toxic masculinity” in men. Assisting boys and girls in first isolating, understanding, and then processing their emotions is a critical

2: Empowerment

empowerment |əm 'pouərmənt| noun

the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights.

Empowered individuals become leaders, innovators and free thinkers. Many studies link self-esteem and self-confidence to success. In contrast, people who doubt their capabilities are more prone to shy away from difficult tasks that they view as personal threats. Empowering individuals is paramount to preventing exploitation and objectification.

While still in the earlier years of growing and accumulating information, instilling youth with the tools of empowerment can lead to a genuine confidence in one's ability and capacity to lead themselves and others. Boy and girls alike are important agents of change in our community and thus they must be empowered to challenge harmful practices and cultural norms of power and privilege.

Five ways by which we can empower our youth, whether on a daily basis or over time, include: listening to the ideas and perspectives of others, providing mentorship, passing on the torch, exercising humility, and offering youth a seat at the table. These methods are encouraged to be demonstrated by not only the Facilitator, friends and family of the Participant, but amongst the Participants themselves. We wish for our youth to not only feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts and ideas, but to be open-minded in the face of those differing amongst their peers. They should feel empowered to pursue their goals, values, and interests. By combatting the repercussions of stoicism altogether, they can become positive catalysts of change within the community.

This section of the Project ROOTS curriculum offers skill-building activities to understand what healthy relationships look like, how to set boundaries and to both give and ask for consent, how to safely navigate the internet, and envisioning positive short and long-term outcomes.

"You need to be the driving force of your own future, your own career. What you should be wanting to do is going, "What is the world that I want to live in when I am an adult?" and shape that for what you want."

-Sean Smith, TEDxYouth@Bunbury

3: Equality

equality [ə'kwælədē] noun

the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

Historically, exploitation has risen due to one person's belief that another's beliefs, religion, and race are fundamentally inferior or "less than." This notion has manifested in many forms of dehumanization such as slavery and objectification. Some of the most palpable and recognized forms of inequality concern gender. Examples include the denial of women's voting rights until the early twentieth century and the present gender wage gap, with the US Census Bureau reporting that women earn 80 percent of what men are paid.

These practices, whether subtle or overt, influence the ideology that there is a hierarchy between man which may be capitalized on. This contributes greatly to the exploitation of others. In its most insidious forms, we find victims of human trafficking or modern-day slavery. Other prominent injustices regarding inequality include employment discrimination, class stratification and socioeconomic disparities. Cumulatively, these areas affect all aspects of modern civilization.

Equality is a necessity in that it's humbling capacities imbue the individual with a view of others as equally worthy of respect and dignity, regardless of race, class, creed or ethnicity. The Equality and Human Rights Commission affirms that "equality is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents and believing that no one should have less opportunities because of where, what or whom they were born, beliefs, or abilities. Equality recognizes that historically certain groups of people with particular characteristics (e.g. race, disability, sex and sexuality) have experienced discrimination."

In consideration of the issue of toxic masculinity, it not only poses as a threat of violence against women, but to other men who do not follow accordingly to those behaviors. "A system of gender inequality is fairly pervasive in societies globally which prescribes that men need to prove themselves as powerful and strong. Men who do not portray or even prove themselves as such can be victimized, stigmatized, or relegated to lower social status." Both the spaces in which this curriculum is administered, as well as the discussions guided by Facilitators, are shaped to allow youth to freely question and challenge the social injustices that surround them. "Men who are not perpetrating violence, but are complicit, may be contributing to the culture of violence that exists in our society by not challenging it."

While the theme of peer advocacy resonates throughout this toolkit, it is especially important to address the underlying tones of complacency. As a byproduct of the previous section, empowerment, to cultivate an equal community, we must recognize and intervene in such social disparities.