



My Name My Story

Stories Inspire Empathy **Empathy Drives Change**

EMPATHY ACTIVITIES



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HUDDLES

When working as a team we often get caught up in the work we have to do and forget that each person is dealing with other things in their life. This icebreaker helps students share how they are doing by gathering them together for a quick “huddle” to check in with one another.

Once in your “huddle” or circle of students, ask each student to share one personal high and one low point of their week. In order for this to be effective, each person should simply say their high and their low without a long description of the situation. When listening to their high and low you can determine whether you should follow up with a student after the activity. The goal is to make others more aware of what their peers are going through. They may also realize they have something in common with someone and be able to connect to help one another.

This icebreaker should be done on a consistent basis. I suggest doing it once or twice a month, even weekly if you have the time.



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TOSS UP

This is an easy icebreaker to use with students who may not know one another well. It is a great way to help them see things they have in common with others in the group and ways in which members of your group are unique.

Have students stand in a large circle with one person holding a tennis ball or other small object that is easy to toss. Ask each person in the group to say their name and to provide an interesting personal fact. If others in the group can relate to what was said, they say me too! The first person to share then tosses the ball to someone who yelled 'me too' and they share their name and a personal fact. If no one else in the group relates to what is said the entire group yells Unique! Continue play for at least 5 minutes to give everyone an opportunity to participate and share.

Following the activity ask students to share what it felt like to be "unique" or how they feel knowing they have things in common with other members of your group.



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Why Empathy?

Empathy is an action word. To be empathetic is a deliberate, intentional process that requires courage, compassion, and vulnerability. Empathy strives beyond being sympathetic, recognizing that not everyone can claim to identify with the emotions and experiences of others while also suggesting that we can seek to understand people's narratives, or stories, in relation to our own. It is not only walking a mile in someone else's shoes, but also taking that walk as an experience to guide the way we live our lives. In a divisive and diverse world, our narratives are our sole sense of connectivity, and they can inspire empathy to break down the barriers created by our differences.

Here's one way to look at it: Empathy is a muscle. Everyone has this muscle. We are all born with it. The muscle grows as we grow older, just like rest of our mental and physical beings. Some people are given opportunities to flex that muscle more than others. This could be because of the place they were born, the neighborhood they grew up in, an experience they had that widened their view, and host of other things. Regardless, everyone has the capacity to grow their empathy muscle infinitely, but they need opportunities to work it out. We hope the activities in this packet will help you and your students exercise your empathy muscle.



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CIRCLES OF CONCERN

Have your leadership students write all of the different groups on campus on individual slips of paper. Make sure they include your group as well. Samples of groups could be different sports teams, clubs, faculty, staff, or even groups of students such as the athletes, international students, high achievers, low achievers artists, musicians, etc.

Place your group name at the center of a table. Ask students to place each of the other groups on the table in relation to how the particular group is involved with or connected to your group of leaders. Have students think of who they serve - these groups would be closer than others. The goal of this activity is to help your students see who they may need to reach out and bring them in to the events and activities you plan. Looking at circles of concern can help students visualize who they need to add to their immediate circles. After doing this exercise, have your students consider how they can bridge the gaps between your group and other groups on campus.



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I WANT YOU TO KNOW (*Option Two*)

This option goes even deeper asking students to reflect on various ethnic, gender, religious, and cultural groups. In this option, you would choose categories based on the demographics of the students in your group. As you do this for different categories, there may be a single student forming a group. In this case, ask if the student is comfortable by them self or if they would like to join another group. Once you divide the groups have them discuss the following questions:

- What do you want others to know about your group?
- What do you never want to see, hear or experience as a member of this group?
- How can others be allies for your group?

Each time you separate the students into different groups have them discuss and then share with other groups. Due to the sensitive nature of these topics please be sure to set the tone for this activity and remind students to be respectful of one another.



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I WANT YOU TO KNOW (*Option One*)

The first step to this activity is to brainstorm with your students different labels or stereotypes on campus. Once you have your list, ask the students if they feel they fit into one or more of these labels. Narrow down your list to who is in your group. Ask student to get in groups according to the different labels. If they identify as an athlete and have been labeled a dumb jock they would be in one group, if they have a high GPA and have been labeled a nerd, they would be in a group etc. Once in these groups have them discuss the following questions:

- What are the positives to being in this group?
- What are some negatives to being in this group?
- What do you want others to know about your group?

After each group has time to discuss their answers, have them share with the other groups. This can help open student's eyes to the reality of each group and dispel some of the stereotypes that come along with labeling others.



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MY ROOTS ARE . . .

We all come from different roots. Our families, cultures, traditions, and upbringings make us who we are and tell a large part of our story. Have students reflect on the following questions and have them write down words, phrases, and descriptive memories that connect them to their roots.

My Roots are . . . (familiar sights, smells, and sounds from inside and outside the home where you grew up)

My Roots are . . . (familiar foods, especially those associated with holidays at your home)

My Roots are . . . (familiar expressions you grew up hearing, written in the language you heard them in)

My Roots are . . . (The names of your ancestors and relatives)

After answering these questions allow students time to share their answers with one another.



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TIPS FOR BECOMING AN EMPATHETIC LEADER

Practice the discipline of learning names: Nothing is more important to a person as their name. When you remember their name, you are saying something about how important they are to you.

Take time to listen and learn each individuals story: Everyone has a story and listening to someone share theirs can have a big impact on your future relationships.

Be visible on campus: Show up at events to support others in your school that don't typically get noticed. By being there you are showing that you care about others in your school community.

Be yourself: Don't work too hard at being "friendly" Sometimes just a smile or a small gesture can really make a difference.

Be a person of integrity: They say empathy is "caught not taught." Part of you will rub off on others, so make sure you are the kind of model you want to be.

Be welcoming: Always invite others to be a part of your school activities. Sometimes all a student needs is a personal invitation.

For more information on
My Name My Story Programming

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Please contact info@mynamemystory.org



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