



Students work in groups to come up with ways to take an empathetic “first step” toward helping someone going through a challenging situation.



One copy of the “Take the First Step” Handout with enough scenarios cut out so each student has a unique one; One poster board or flipchart paper per 2-6 students with two columns on each labeled “Scenario” and “First Step”; Markers; Tape.

Total Prep Time: 15 mins.



As this is the second Monday of the month, please consider sharing or re-sharing the Monthly Kick-Off activity, and if appropriate, video at www.everymondaymatters.org. Additionally, a three-minute recap of the previous weeks may add extra context to this week and help connect the dots around the monthly theme.

Educator’s Note: This lesson brings up potential challenging situations that students might be facing currently or in the future. Be sensitive to the topics that students bring up and be available to provide additional support as necessary, including referring students to the school counselor or local mental and emotional health service providers.

4 C's		SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING		SERVICE LEARNING	
•	Critical thinking	•	Self-awareness	•	Integrated learning
•	Communication	•	Self-management		High quality service
•	Collaboration	•	Social-awareness		Collaboration
•	Creativity	•	Relationship skills	•	Student voice
		•	Responsible decision-making		Civic responsibility
					Reflection
					Evaluation

GOALS FOR THE WEEK

- Discover what it means to empathize by learning from others and about others
- Practice showing empathy and commit to doing our best to understand what others are going through
- Gain an appreciation for perspectives and experiences that are different than our own
- Understand how “WALK IN THEIR SHOES” is an important part of this month’s theme, “MONDAY GETS UNDERSTANDING”



STUDENT ACTIVITY: "TAKE THE FIRST STEP"

1) SHARE THE NAME OF THIS ACTIVITY WITH STUDENTS: "TAKE THE FIRST STEP"

2) ASK 1-3 QUESTIONS FROM THE LIST BELOW TO WARM STUDENTS UP ON THE ACTIVITY'S FOCUS:

***NOTE:** *Choose questions appropriate to your students' ages, grades, ability levels, and classroom goals. Students may share their answers in pairs, small groups, or as a large group.*

- **What is empathy?**
 - Answer: The act of sharing and "UNDERSTANDING" someone else's feelings
- **How does empathy relate to taking a "WALK IN THEIR SHOES"?**
- **When was the last time someone empathized with you?**
- **Has anyone ever gone out of their way to help you with a particular struggle you experienced or are experiencing?**
 - If so, how did that make you feel?
- **Why do you think it can be hard for people to open up about challenges or struggles they are experiencing?**
- **Why is it especially important to be empathetic when someone is sharing a challenge or struggle with us?**
- **How can being empathetic improve our relationships with others?**
- **Do you think being empathetic can help build trust in our relationships with others?**
- **What does it mean to "TAKE THE FIRST STEP" to help somebody in need?**
 - Answer: Offering help to someone who is going through a challenging situation instead of waiting for them to ask for help
- **Why is it important for us to help each other?**
- **How can "WALKING IN" other people's "SHOES" help us "GET UNDERSTANDING"?**
- **How can empathizing by "WALKING IN" other people's "SHOES" show others that they MATTER to us?**

3) SET UP THE "TAKE THE FIRST STEP" ACTIVITY:

- **Ask:**
 - Have you ever felt alone when going through a challenging situation?
 - Has anyone ever helped you when you were struggling with something?
 - How did it feel to have someone to empathize with you?
 - Why might people think it easier to just ignore other people's struggles, instead of acting with empathy?
- **Explain:**
 - It requires courage and effort to "TAKE THE FIRST STEP" and help someone else who is having a hard time
 - When we "TAKE THE FIRST STEP," we offer help to someone who is going through a challenging situation
 - Everyone at some point or another goes through struggles, and there is nothing to be ashamed about needing help from others
 - "TAKING THE FIRST STEP" shows other people that we are trying to "UNDERSTAND" their current situation, that we empathize with them, and that we want to help
 - By empathizing with someone and trying to "UNDERSTAND" their feelings or what struggles they are dealing with, we are "WALKING IN THEIR SHOES"
 - And, we can use that "UNDERSTANDING" to guide our actions and take a "STEP" to help them

4) START THE "TAKE THE FIRST STEP" ACTIVITY:

- **Note:** Prior to this activity, cut out scenarios from the "Take the First Step" Handout, enough for each student to have one, and place loops of tape on the back of each. Additionally, prepare poster boards or flipchart paper by making two columns on each labeled "Scenario" and "First Step"

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- **Break students into groups of 2-6, depending on how well they can respectfully work together on empathetic situations**
 - **Explain:**
 - Today we are going to practice different ways we can “TAKE THE FIRST STEP”
 - We will try to “UNDERSTAND” how someone might feel in scenarios and challenges real people face every day
 - Not only will we try and “WALK IN THEIR SHOES” to “UNDERSTAND” what they are going through, we will brainstorm ways we can help them by “TAKING THE FIRST STEP” to support them in their struggle
 - Everyone needs a shoulder to lean on sometime, even if they are quiet about their struggle
 - As we work on our capacity to empathize with people, we will grow our ability to “UNDERSTAND” when people are going through a rough time
 - **Tell students that the scenarios that they are about to use are based on real situations, so to treat them as respectfully as possible**
 - **Give each group a marker and hang one of the poster boards or pieces of flipchart paper at writing level on a wall next to each group**
 - **Then, give each student a scenario from the “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” Handout and ask students to share their scenario with the members of their group**
 - **Explain:**
 - Each member of your group has a different scenario
 - In your groups, take a few minutes to brainstorm how a person might feel if they were experiencing that challenge
 - More importantly for this activity, brainstorm how you could help this person with their struggle by acting empathetically and “TAKING THE FIRST STEP” to help them
 - This “FIRST STEP” is an action that would show the person that you either “UNDERSTAND” what they are going through, or that you want to “UNDERSTAND” more so you can help
 - When we “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” to help someone, we are “WALKING” in their shoes while also “WALKING” alongside them
 - **Tell students that as the group agrees on an empathetic “FIRST STEP” for each scenario, they can stick the scenario in the first column labeled “Scenario,” then the person who was originally given that scenario will write the group’s response in the “FIRST STEP” column**
 - **Challenge students to think about how they would want to be helped and “UNDERSTOOD” if they were going through the situation they’ve been given**
 - **If helpful, share some ways students could help by “TAKING THE FIRST STEP” in an empathetic way, such as: Offering to talk with the person who is having a hard time; eating lunch with that person; helping that person with the schoolwork they’re struggling with; etc.**
 - Remind students that there are many ways to “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” to help people, and that it’s okay if there is more than one idea for how to support other people in their challenges
 - **Make sure students understand the instructions and ask them to begin**
 - **As students work, move through the group and offer support as helpful and necessary**
 - **Allow up to 10 minutes for students to talk through their scenarios and decide how they can “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” to empathetically support other people**
 - **When time is up and all students have participated in the activity, ask for volunteers in each group to read out the scenarios and what their “FIRST STEP” would be to help the people struggling with those scenarios**

5) AFTER THE ACTIVITY, ASK 1-3 OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO HELP STUDENTS REFLECT ON WHAT THEY'VE ACCOMPLISHED AND HOW THEY CAN TAKE THIS FORWARD:

***NOTE:** *Choose questions appropriate to your students' ages, grades, ability levels, and classroom goals. Students may share their answers in pairs, small groups, or as a large group.*

- Did you enjoy the discussion with your group on different ways you can “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” to help people?
 - Do you think you came up with effective “FIRST STEPS” to help someone in need?
 - Have you ever met someone who is facing the same situation you had in your scenario?
 - If you met them now, would you attempt to “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” and act toward them with empathy?
 - Why do we need to do our best to “UNDERSTAND” when other people might need someone to “WALK” alongside them?
 - How can taking a “WALK IN THEIR SHOES” help you find a way to empathize and take a helpful “FIRST STEP” toward others?
 - Why is it important for us to “EMPATHIZE” with our family, friends, classmates, and community members, and to help them when they are going through challenging situations?
 - In what ways does this activity help you “GET UNDERSTANDING”?
 - How has this activity reminded you that YOU MATTER and can make a difference?
 - How can “TAKING THE FIRST STEP” to help someone in need show others that they MATTER?
 - How will you practice your attitude of empathy and help people when you see them going through a challenge like the ones we discussed today?
- 6) THANK STUDENTS FOR DISCOVERING HOW THEY CAN “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” TO HELP OTHER PEOPLE. REMIND THEM THAT EVERYONE EXPERIENCES HARDSHIPS, AND WE ALL NEED SOMEONE TO “WALK” ALONGSIDE US SOMETIMES. TELL STUDENTS THAT TAKING THE “FIRST STEP” IS A BRAVE WAY TO GROW OUR EMPATHETIC POTENTIAL AND TO SHOW OTHERS THEY REALLY DO “MATTER.”**
- 7) ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO MAINTAIN AN ATTITUDE OF “EMPATHY” AND NOTICE WHEN PEOPLE ARE GOING THROUGH TOUGH SITUATIONS. CHALLENGE THEM TO CONSCIOUSLY “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” FOR OTHERS WHO NEED HELP. FOLLOW UP WITH THEM ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES.**
- 8) CONTINUE EXPLORING HOW TO “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” THROUGH “UNDERSTANDING” BY LEADING ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING EXTENSION ACTIVITIES.**



EXTENSION IDEAS:

DO ONE OR MORE OF THESE EXTENSION IDEAS TO BRING THE LESSON FROM 15 MINUTES TO 30 MINUTES OR MORE.

- 1) Continue the Activity:** Continue to “TAKE THE FIRST STEP” by adding a third column or an extra poster board or flipchart paper to each group’s board or paper. Have each group then trade their posters with another group so each group has a new set of scenarios to discuss. Then have each group come up with an alternative “FIRST STEP” they could take to “WALK” alongside their classmate, friend, family member, or community member.
- 2) Journaling:** Have students spend some time journaling about either a challenge they are going through or have gone through where someone “TOOK THE FIRST STEP” to help them. They can also journal about a struggle or challenge they are experiencing.
- 3) Write a Letter:** Ask the students to write a “FIRST STEP” letter to someone close to them they know is going through a tough time. In the letter, challenge students do their best to empathize with the recipient’s struggle by being “UNDERSTANDING” and offering to help.

“ IF YOU SEE SOMEONE WITHOUT A SMILE, GIVE THEM ONE OF YOURS.”

- DOLLY PARTON



GROUP ONE:

I don't have many friends or a group to hang out with and am often lonely.

I have a condition where I sweat a lot and often get large pit stains that embarrass me.

I tripped and fell in front of a large number of people at school and was laughed at.

I am questioning my sexuality and heard people making mean comments about the LGBTQ community.

My parents are getting a divorce.

GROUP TWO:

I have to use leg braces and forearm canes to walk.

I am self conscious about being held back a year.

I don't know much English and have a hard time communicating to some of my classmates.

I am having a really hard time opening up to people.

I am very shy and struggle to make friends.

GROUP THREE:

I have a hard time controlling my body odor and I think people are making fun of me.

I just found out that my sister is pregnant and it is causing tension at home.

A close relative friend of mine recently passed away and I'm having a hard time processing the loss.



My parents are really hard on me about grades and I'm not doing well in school.

I'm being bullying consistently by the same person at school and I haven't told anyone about it.

GROUP FOUR:

I have trouble with anxiety and often feel inadequate.

I struggle with reading and have a hard time with material my classmates seem to find easy.

I'm self conscious about acne.

My family has been struggling with finances and my parents have been fighting because of it.

I have a visible hearing aide and am self-conscious about it.

GROUP FIVE:

I live with a single parent who works so much I hardly see them.

One of my closest friends recently hurt my feelings and stopped talking to me.

My sister has Autism and I overheard one of my classmates making fun of her.

I'm the only person in my grade that wears a hijab / headdress that is special to me because of my religion.

I have a large birthmark on my face that makes me feel very insecure when meeting new people.