

7. EMPATHY – How can we understand others' feelings?

GROUND RULES

Share Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: 'You have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously' and remind the children of the ground rules:

- We have the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously.
- Thumbs up if you want to speak.
- One person talks at a time.
- Everyone is valued.
- Respect each other's responses.

GETTING SET

Ask the children to sit in a circle and then to make a choice between being a farmer or a duck. Give them time to think about their choice as a reason will be required! Explain that there is no right or wrong answer but what is important is the reason for their choice. In turn ask the children the question:

- *Would you rather be a farmer or a duck?*

Children respond with such answers as, *"I would rather be a farmer than a duck because I would like to plough fields for ducks to waddle in."*

INTRODUCTION

Explain to the children that today they are going to be exploring what the word 'empathy' means and what it means to 'empathise' with someone else. Explain that empathy is understanding people's feelings. It's just like being 'in someone else's shoes'.

Share the story of 'Farmer Duck' by Martin Waddell:

There once was a lazy farmer who spent his days in bed eating chocolate while his duck did all the hard work around the farm. One day the other animals decide it's time to put a stop to the farmer's disgraceful behaviour and together hatch a plan to help their friend.

ACTIVITY

While you share the story or watch the YouTube film of Farmer Duck, pause and invite the children to think about the following questions and to offer some responses:

- *What is happening here?*
- *How do you think the duck is feeling?*
- *What sort of a character is the farmer?*
- *Why did the animals feel they could act in such a way?*

Invite the children to raise their own questions about this story, particularly about the idea of understanding what the characters are feeling. Invite them then to vote for a question that they think the class could discuss. [Encourage the children to close their eyes when voting so they are not influenced by their peers' votes.]

Once a question has been voted for, invite the children to share some initial answers. Clarify the question where needed and help them to build their understanding – agreeing and disagreeing with the ideas they are airing. Encourage them to listen carefully to each other so that they can appreciate other points of view and learn more about what they need to know to answer the question. After everyone has had an opportunity to participate, thank the children for their contributions.

ACTIVITY

Ask the children if they can think of another story that illustrates how others are feeling. They might mention such stories as 'Willy the Wimp' by Anthony Browne or 'The Little Red Hen' (a folk tale).

Ask them for their responses to such questions as:

- *What happened in these stories?*
- *How did the characters in the story feel?*
- *How would you feel if it was you in these stories?*
- *What might you do to overcome the problems?*

CONCLUSION

Offer some reflections on the importance of understanding others' feelings and how that might help to solve some problems. Challenge them with these thoughts about the week ahead:

- *I wonder what you would do in the playground if you saw somebody doing something that was not appropriate?*
- *I wonder how you would support someone who was having problems with friendships at school?*
- *I wonder how you would feel if someone was sitting down while everyone was tidying up in the classroom as instructed by the teacher. What would you do?*