Session

4

Addressing Barriers to Empathy

CHECK-IN: Learning outside the classroom

Begin this session by asking students how they got on with the *Learning Outside the Classroom* task from Session 3 (if applicable).

- What examples do students have from the week where they responded with empathy?

- Were there times it was difficult to respond with empathy?

Link to Junior Cycle SPHE Learning Outcomes:

Learning Outcome 1.8 Students should be able to reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy, and discuss ways it can be expressed.

Learning Outcome 4.8 Students should be able to identify actions young people can take, without putting themselves at risk, in situations where they are aware of incidents of abusive behaviour or bullying happening and explore the barriers to standing up.

Activity 1 – Barriers to Empathic Action

This activity will focus on:

Identifying the factors that influence people's empathy behaviours.

Type of Activity:

Discussion, Group Work, Situations, Diamond Nine

Materials:

Scenarios

Method:

1 Split the class into groups and give each group the list of Scenarios below (page 46). You may wish to photocopy these scenarios and cut them out for students in advance. Ask students to note how they would feel or react in each of these situations.

2 In their groups, the students should discuss how likely they would be to intervene in each situation and to think about what influenced their decision?

3 Ask each group to rank the scenarios depending on how likely they are to intervene in each situation, using the diamond nine format. Students should place the scenario where they would be most likely to offer help or intervene at the top of their diamond nine, followed by the other scenarios in rank order, down to the scenario where they are least likely to help.

Example Diamond Nine Format

Most Likely to Help/ Intervene

Less Likely to Help/ Intervene

Least Likely to Help/ Intervene
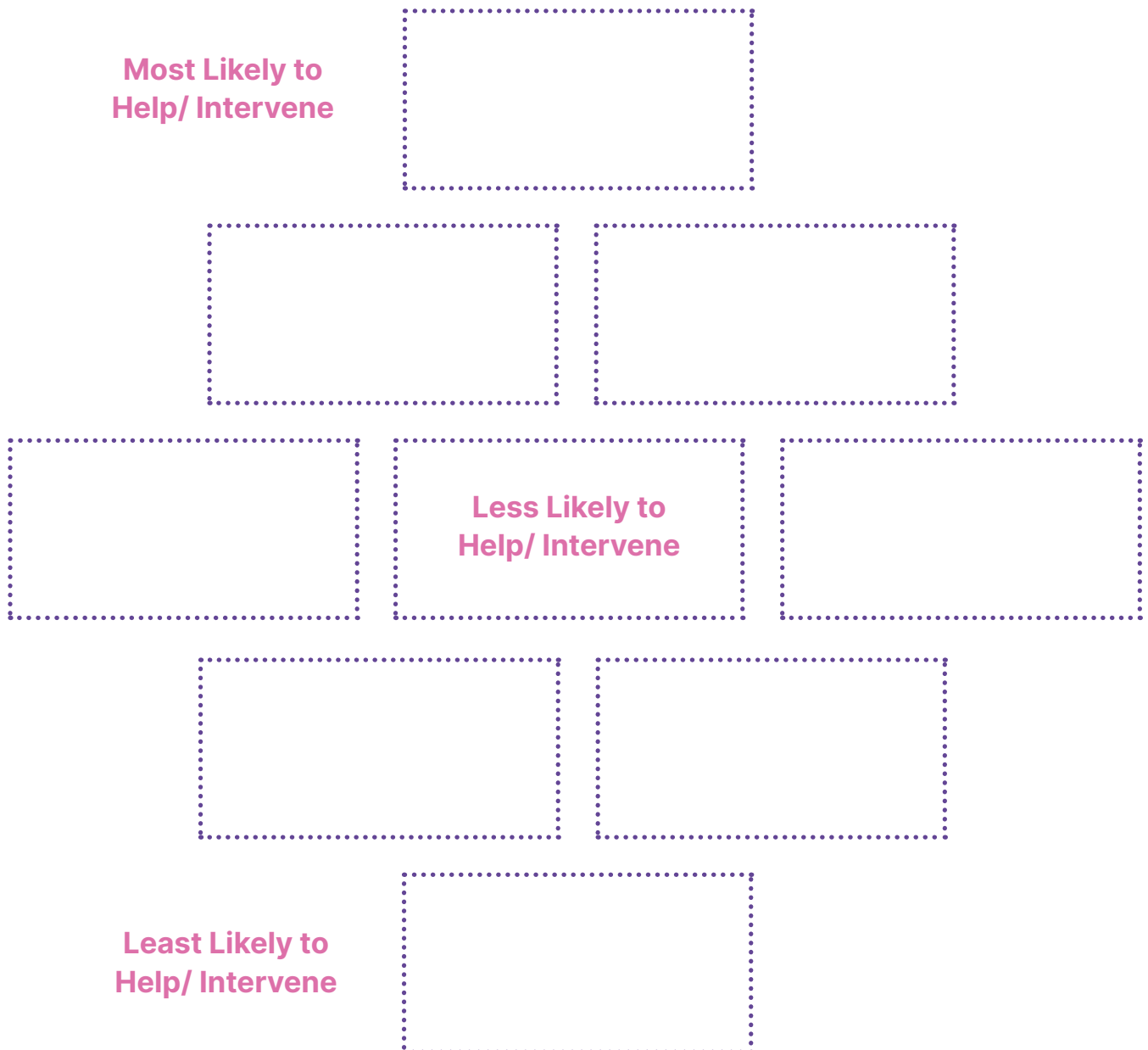
Scenarios

The final bell has gone and you are walking out of school with your friends. Everyone is around, heading home. You see another student drop their schoolbag and the contents fall out all over the path.

You are at basketball training and two of your teammates get into a fight. One teammate tells the other to go back home to their own country.

You are walking through the park to get home. It's quiet and there is no one else around. You see a man looking everywhere for his dog, calling the dog's name, looking really worried.

You are chatting on social media with a group of your friends when some of them begin to gang up on another member of the group and criticise their behaviour and appearance.

You are on your own and about to walk into the disco to meet your friends. You see another student from your year sitting alone on the ground outside. They do not seem well and look like they need to go home.

You are at school and see another student from your class attempting to break the teacher's laptop on purpose.

You had a falling out with one of your friends a while ago. One day at school you see them coming out of class looking really upset.

A person you met on social media is looking for help volunteering at the weekend and wants to meet you in town.

Your friend has written horrible notes about another person in your class on the back of the bathroom door.

Teacher's Note

There are a number of reasons why people may fail to help or intervene in certain situations.

One common barrier to empathic action is the Bystander Effect

The Bystander Effect is a phenomenon in which individuals are less likely to offer help to somebody when other people are nearby. People are much more likely to help when there is nobody watching.

Sometimes this happens due to 'diffusion of responsibility'. This means that when there are other people around, you feel less pressure to help as you assume the responsibility is not all yours. The trouble is that when everyone thinks like this, nobody takes responsibility.

A second reason is that we feel the need to behave in a socially acceptable way. When other people fail to react, we often take this as a signal that a response is not needed or not appropriate (*i.e. there must be a reason no one is helping...maybe they know something I don't know?*). We worry that if we respond we are overreacting and will look stupid.

The Bystander Effect is usually spoken about in cases of emergency such as if somebody is drowning and the people on the shore don't go to their aid. But it also applies to less serious situations, for example when somebody slips or drops their bag on a busy street and the contents spill out on the floor – and no one helps.

You could explain the Bystander Effect to students using the example provided below.

SoulPancake, **'The Bystander Effect | The Science of Empathy',** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy6eUTLzcU4&index=3&list=PLzvRx_johoA85tJ4dNepYNjRXM0svNOXH (Running Time: 5.53)

? Class Discussion

1 Can you think of any examples when you have not acted or helped or intervened when you thought you should have? What stopped you from acting or showing empathy?

2 What kind of things stop people from helping others or showing empathy?

PROMPT: *Does it depend on the situation or does it depend on our own skills?*

Activity 2 – Identifying Solutions

This activity will focus on:

Addressing barriers to empathy and identifying solutions

Type of Activity:

Brainstorm, Discussion

Materials:

Scenarios from activity one, Diamond Nine

Method:

1 Invite students to stay in the same groups from Activity 1.

2 Ask each group to look at the scenario that they placed on the bottom of their Diamond Nine list.

3 Taking the scenario from the bottom of the Diamond Nine list in Activity One – ask each group to identify the barriers

that would prevent people from acting in that situation.

4 Ask each group to come up with three suggestions of things they could do to tackle those barriers and show empathy in that situation. If the groups have chosen the same scenario at the bottom of their Diamond Nine, invite each group to work on scenarios from other parts of the diamond nine.

? Class Discussion

1 How can we overcome barriers and act empathically?

2 What are the most practical ways of showing empathy?

3 What skills have you learnt to help you show empathy?

Activity 3 – My Empathy Goals

This activity will focus on:

Identifying and committing to personal empathy goals.

Type of Activity:

Goal Setting

Materials:

Copy book or paper

Method:

1 To finish this session ask the students to devise empathy goals for the class as well as their own personal empathy goals.

2 To work on the class goals, break the class into groups and ask them to come up with three 'Empathy Goals' to aim towards as a group. These goals can include attitudes or behaviours e.g. 'We will be tolerant of different opinions in the class', 'We will protect each other from bullying behaviour', 'We will try to talk more to people outside our friend groups', 'We will do one volunteering or charity activity as a class', 'We will watch a film about a social issue'. The Guide to Increasing Your Empathy might help (see Appendix A).

3 Bring the class together and create a single list of Empathy goals. These might be displayed somewhere in the classroom or could be added to the SPHE class contract.

4 Finally, give students a few minutes to write out their own personal empathy goals in their copy.

Finished with the ASE lessons? We would love to hear your feedback.

Please follow the QR code or click the link below to complete a short (2-3 minute) feedback form:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ASEFEEDBACK1

My Empathy Goals

Empathy Goals
For the class

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Empathy Goals
For me

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