



TOPIC

Empathy

LEVEL

Sixth Grade

THEME

Empathy vs. Sympathy

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the lesson, the students are expected to:

- Explain the difference between empathy and sympathy.
- Demonstrate ways to respond with empathy instead of sympathy.
- Connect empathy to Aavidum's message of "I've got your back."

MATERIALS

- Feelings Wheel
- Scenario Slides

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is the difference between empathy and sympathy?
- How does empathy help people feel understood and supported?

CHECK-IN / WELCOME (5 MINUTES)

Say: "Today we're talking about empathy, which is understanding and sharing how someone else feels. For our check-in, we're going to practice noticing emotions in ourselves and each other. Think of one word to describe how you're feeling right now. If you want, you can also give a short reason why, but that part is optional."

Pass around a feelings wheel to help students pick the right word.

- Invite each student to share their feeling word (e.g., tired, excited, nervous).
 - Example: "I feel tired because I stayed up late studying."
- After 3 or 4 shares, pause and ask: "How many of you have felt that same feeling before?" (Raise hands.)
- Say: "That's empathy. It's when we understand what someone else is feeling because we've felt it too."

Say: "At Aavidum, we say 'I've got your back.' Empathy is how we live that out. It's noticing what someone's going through and letting them know they're not alone."

GUIDED DISCUSSION / TOPIC INTRODUCTION (15 MINUTES)

Put both words on the board: Empathy and Sympathy.

Say: "Sympathy is feeling sorry for someone's situation from the outside. It's like saying, 'That must be hard.' Empathy is deeper. It means stepping into their shoes and feeling with them. It's saying, 'I get it. I've got your back.' Aavidum is about empathy because it's about really being there for others in a meaningful way."

Instructions:

- Project each scenario on the board.
- Read them aloud (or project on the board) one at a time.
- Have students decide: Is the response empathetic or sympathetic? They can vote by raising hands, or moving to designated corners of the room to get them up and moving.

CONTINUED GUIDED DISCUSSION / TOPIC INTRODUCTION (15 MINUTES)

Say: "We're going to practice telling the difference between empathy and sympathy."

- Empathy = Feeling with someone and connecting to their experience.
- Sympathy = Feeling for someone but staying on the outside of their experience."

Say: "I will read a situation and a response. After you hear it, decide: Is this empathy or sympathy? Show me your answer by moving to this side of the room if you think it's Empathy (point to one side) or this side if you think it's Sympathy."

Scenarios

- Situation: Jamie is upset because they failed a math quiz.
 - Response: "Wow, that's too bad. I'm sorry you failed."
 - Sympathy.
 - Ask: "Can someone tell me what an empathetic response would be instead?"
 - "I know how it feels to fail a quiz. Do you want me to help you study next time?"
- Situation: A new student is sitting alone at lunch.
 - Response: "It must be hard being new here. I hope you find someone to sit with soon."
 - Sympathy.
 - Ask: "Can someone tell me what an empathetic response would be instead?"
 - Response: "I remember being new once. Can I sit with you today so you don't feel alone?"
- Situation: Taylor is nervous about presenting in front of the class.
 - Response: "I get nervous too when I present. Want to practice with me first?"
 - Empathy.

Ask:

- "What made the two responses different?"
- "Which response feels more like Aavidum, like saying, 'I've got your back'?"
- "What happens when we choose empathy over sympathy?"

ACTIVITY: EMPATHY SCENARIOS (15 MINUTES)

Instructions:

- Say: "We are going to practice responding with empathy. I will read some scenarios and in small groups, you will come up with an empathetic response. You need to write something you could say or do to show you've got their back."
- Project each scenario:
 - Your classmate is sitting alone at lunch looking upset.
 - Your best friend didn't get the role she wanted in the school play.
 - A teammate misses the winning goal and feels embarrassed.
 - A younger student doesn't have anyone to play with at recess.
- Give groups a couple of minutes per scenario.
- Invite volunteers to share empathetic responses.
- Say: "When you respond with empathy, you're saying 'I've got your back,' which is exactly what Aavidum stands for. It's about action and connection, not just feeling bad for someone."

WRAP-UP (5 MINUTES)

Ask:

- "What is one difference between empathy and sympathy?"
- "How can practicing empathy make our school feel more like a place of belonging?"

Say: "This week, practice empathy by trying to use one of the responses you wrote when you see someone having a difficult day. Notice how it makes the other person, and you, feel. Empathy builds trust and connection. When we truly understand and support each other, we live out Aavidum's message of 'I've got your back.'"