

EMPATHY

EMPATHY for the mix of emotions that we have in response to events at home, in school, the community and in the wider world. How can we respond with empathy, compassion and self-care, whether we are staff, students or parents?

What is empathy?

Empathy is “the ability to sense other people’s emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling”.

“Empathy is communicating that incredible healing message of “You are not alone” (Brené Brown).

Why is empathy important now?

Beginning interactions with empathy can keep people **safe** by preventing unnecessary escalation of conflict. Empathy is also important for recognising and **responding** to **trauma**. We should also be aware of the signs that individuals may be suffering. Challenging or difficult behaviour can often be a sign that children and young people are struggling to manage their emotions. According to Marshall Rosenberg, “every violent action is a tragic expression of unmet need”, and now more than ever we should be responding to these unmet needs with empathy.

It is crucial that we as educators find opportunities to develop empathy amongst children, young people and adults (staff, parents etc) to acknowledge and **recognise** that we have all had different experiences of COVID-19 as we emerge from lockdown.

How can we enact and build empathy at this time?

With the Senior Leadership Team and with the staff group:

- Can you start meetings with a check-in to ask how people are feeling and **recognise** what is important to them before beginning an agenda?
- What formal and informal networks are already in place to support staff and students who may be struggling? Does additional space need to be created in the school routine for peer support?
- How do you **recognise** those for whom empathy can lead to burn out? What targeted support is in place to support them?
- How can you communicate ‘It’s ok to not be ok’? What plans are needed for the possibility that staff and children may need extra time/ support as needs become identified?
- What has the school already taught about the importance of empathy and the ways it can be developed? Can this be revisited and developed as part of a return to school curriculum?