Social Club

BRIDGE Lab

Activity 4.2

Empathy in Practice

Why are we talking about emotions when we are talking about tackling discrimination? Empathy is the core element and requirement to be able to recognize different forms of discrimination. In this activity, we'll explore the difference between sympathy and empathy, practice empathic listening, and discuss why empathy is essential not just for our personal relationships, but for creating inclusive communities and fighting discrimination. Empathy is what allows us to stand alongside someone in their experience, rather than above them. We'll discover that empathy isn't just a feeling, it's a skill we can develop and a tool we can use to make the world more just and compassionate.

Empathy and emotions cannot be separated and emotions are connected to how we respond in different situations. Emotions aren't dangerous, even when they feel overwhelming. What matters isn't whether we feel emotions, but how we respond to them. Just don't forget that all feelings are allowed. It's human to feel them. Feelings should not be used as a weapon.

Step 1: Emotional poll

Before getting into exercise let's do a quick poll to ground everyone in their own emotional experience.
In the last hour, how many different emotions have you felt? (Call out numbers)

Is it okay to feel angry?

Is it okay to feel happy?

Is it okay to feel confused?

Is it okay to hurt someone because you're angry?

Of course not!

This quick exchange showed us that we don't choose what we feel, but we do choose what we do with those feelings. ***All feelings are allowed — it's human to feel them. BUT feelings should not be used as a weapon.***

Step 2: Empathy vs. Sympathy

Discrimination often comes from a fundamental lack of empathy when we don't understand others' experiences. When we can't or won't empathize with people different from us, it becomes easier to discriminate against them. Empathy helps us recognize when someone is being hurt or excluded. Without empathy, we might see discrimination happening but think it's not my problem. Think about that in many professions — for example teaching, healthcare, social work, management among others where empathy is not optional. It's an essential tool for working effectively with diverse groups of people and creating inclusive environments.

Emotional learning is directly connected to empathy. Let's watch this video on empathy; what empathy really is and what it isn't.

Empathy vs. Sympathy (Diana Simon): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZBTYViDPlQ.

Let's talk about it. What did you understand? What is the difference between sympathy and empathy? (if you want you can write it down) .