

‘What’s the Buzz?’ PRIMARY - Lesson 10 of 16

Empathy, responding to others

“Did you think about us?”

Key social and emotional principles (*learning intention*)

This lesson examines how to respond to the emotional needs of others with empathy. To do this, two vital components must occur. The first is to find a way to acknowledge how the other person is feeling. This validates what they are experiencing and reassures them they are cared for. Second, something should be said or done that eases that person’s difficulty or gives them hope. The definitive goal is to be emotionally available for another.

Materials required for this lesson

- Name tags
- Chairs arranged in a social circle for students to sit on
- Whiteboard/ butcher’s paper/ screen and markers
- Create a simple outline of the lesson on the whiteboard/ butcher’s paper/ screen for students to follow
- Display the ‘What’s the Buzz?’ GROUP VALUES (located in the introduction or <http://www.whatsthebuzz.net.au/main-menu/content-whats-the-buzz-for-primary-students>)
- Organise ‘thumbs up’ and reminder cards, or similar, to strengthen responsive behaviours (located in the introduction or <http://www.whatsthebuzz.net.au/main-menu/content-whats-the-buzz-for-primary-students>)
- Have Archie’s story ready to read to students. This can be done directly from this lesson. Or, for a small registration fee, you can download the 16 Archie stories as you want them. Each story contains text, audio in the form of the authors reading to your students, and 2 large illustrations in full colour that will fill your screen. Access is available from; <http://www.whatsthebuzz.net.au/main-menu/content-whats-the-buzz-for-primary-students>
- Print the Role-play cards for ‘Empathy, responding to others’ in ‘*Show me the Buzz*’ (located at the end of the lesson or <http://www.whatsthebuzz.net.au/main-menu/content-whats-the-buzz-for-primary-students>)
- Prepare handouts for parents(s);
1 copy of this lesson for each parent to read
1 copy of After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers to send home (located at the end of the lesson ready to photocopy or <http://www.whatsthebuzz.net.au/main-menu/content-whats-the-buzz-for-primary-students>)

Explanation

Many young people participating in *What’s the Buzz?* struggle to keep their own emotions in check, so reaching out to meet the emotional needs of others can be quite a stretch. Living with social blindness or clumsiness places children at a great disadvantage compared to their more socially accomplished peers. Responding with empathy and compassion are two highly prized qualities in the social and emotional worlds. They are prerequisites for starting, building and preserving relationships. So, let us subscribe to the idea that when an individual can show empathy – give the right look, provide the right words and show a truly compassionate response – they should in fact pass one of the key criteria of friendship with flying colours.

Higher levels of empathy in children are a positive predictor of wellbeing and better academic achievement. (Carnicer, et al., 2013). When a child can ‘mind-read’ how other people are feeling and knows how to care for them, they are less likely to bully, more likely to build friendships, handle conflict constructively and feel better about themselves (Grühn, et al., 2008). The research tells us that for girls, cognitive empathy rises from the age of thirteen years and emotional empathy remains relatively high and stable through adolescence. In boys it is different. Cognitive empathy begins rising from the age of fifteen years, and there is a brief decline in emotional empathy between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years of age. It does, of course, improve later. The assumption is that the decline in emotional empathy among young adolescent males likely relates to a sharp increase in testosterone levels during this time. The intense rise in testosterone often inspires dominant behaviours in young males which oppose compassion, tolerance and understanding others. As well, adolescent males are influenced by social pressures telling them to ‘act like a man,’ be tough, suck it up and never show weakness by displaying emotions (Van der Graaff, 2014).

1. What's the Buzz?

Actively greet students as they enter. Provide chairs in a social circle for them to sit on and have a brief lesson plan on the whiteboard/ butcher's paper/ screen for students to see. As students are settling, draw attention to the GROUP VALUES and deliver 'thumbs up' feedback cards to students to immediately highlight their thoughtful behaviour.

Let's begin

What's the Buzz? introduces students to the lesson's topic and the new set of skills to be learned. To do this, explain that for one to show empathy to another two things must occur. Ask the group what these two things might be? They are;

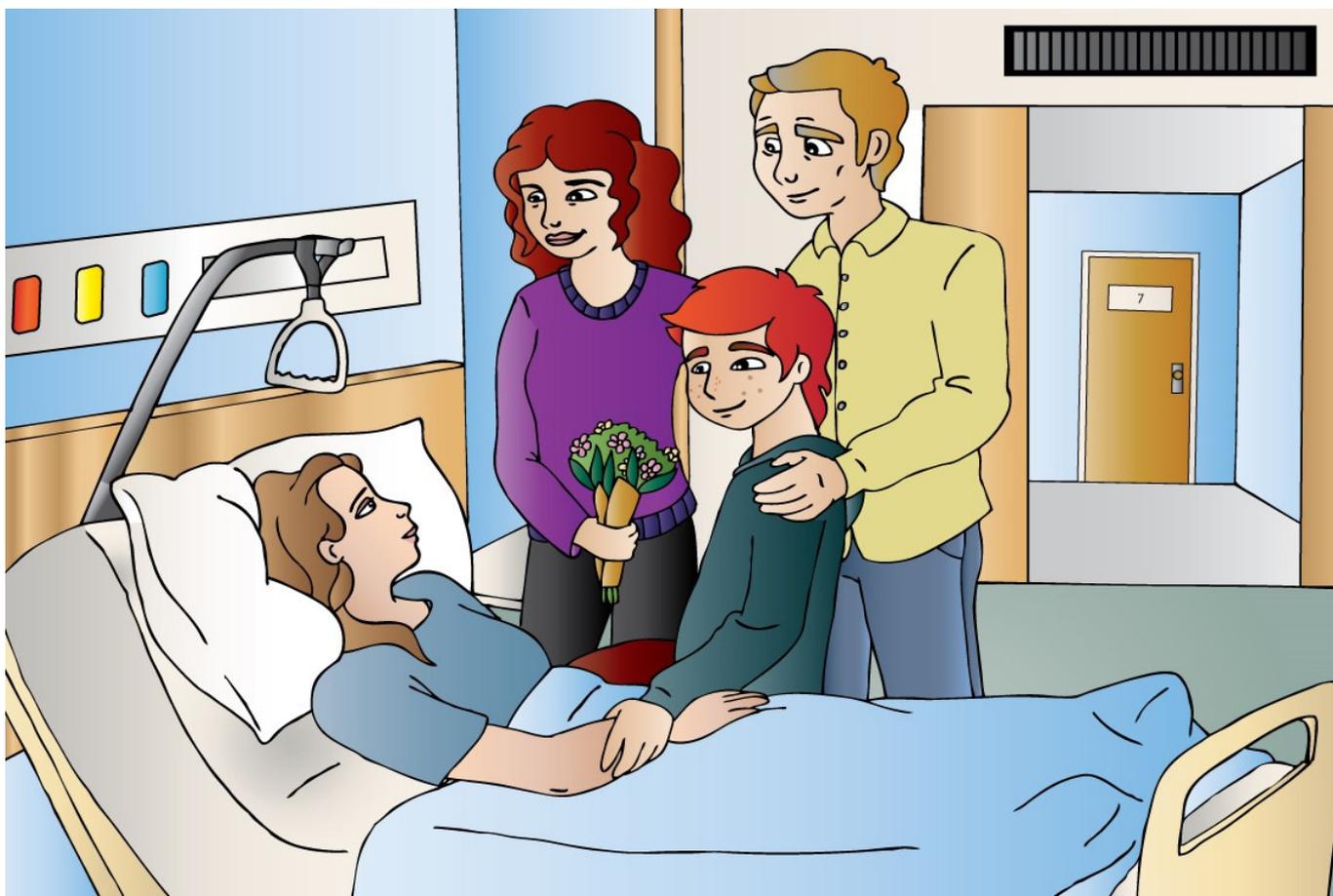
1. Say something that shows you understand how they must be feeling. What could be said?
2. Do or say something to comfort them or gives hope. What could you do or say to give hope?

Example; A friend says to you, 'I'm really worried about mum. She's been sick for so long and I think she's getting worse.' You know their mother has been very sick. It is serious and you're as worried as they are. But, you don't say that. Instead you say, 'I'm so sorry for your mum and I know it's been tough on you. I think your mum is lucky to have you! What can I do to help?'

Before reading Archie's story, pose these questions; Afterwards, I want you to tell me who showed empathy and who didn't? What stopped one of the characters from being empathic? There is a saying that empathy is beyond sympathy – what does this mean? Begin reading.

Archie's story; "Did you think about us?"

Archie hadn't slept much, and nor had his mum and dad. It had been a rough Saturday night for everyone. The doctor came late yesterday and thought Jacinta, Archie's older sister, had a grumbly appendix. The doctor had hoped it would get better, but the pain steadily got worse throughout the night. Archie's mum was comforting Jacinta who had a high temperature and was doubled over with terrible tummy pain. Dad was on the phone calling an ambulance because it was time to get her to hospital. This grumbly appendix had decided to turn into appendicitis! The two whippets, Maxi and Luca, hadn't left Jacinta's side. They'd spent the night resting quietly next to Jacinta offering her their enduring friendship.



This large coloured image, drawn by Lauren Eldridge-Murray may be downloaded from

<http://whatsthebuzz.net.au/main-menu/content-whats-the-buzz-for-older-students> to fill your screen. As you can see, 2 illustrations accompany each story. There is also the option to have the authors read the story to students.

Once the ambulance arrived things happened very quickly, and by lunch time Jacinta was in the operating theatre with two doctors and a nurse having her appendix removed before they burst and caused complications. Mum, dad and Archie sat in the waiting area anxiously awaiting news. Mum flicked through magazines at super-fast speed not reading a word, dad paced, and Archie used dad's phone to google appendicitis. He wished he hadn't because that information made him feel more scared for Jacinta.

By late afternoon surgery was finished, and Jacinta was able to leave recovery. She was wheeled into her own room where Archie and his parents were eagerly waiting for her. All had gone well, and she smile with relief as she saw them. She remained sleepy throughout the evening, but best of all was that the pain had stopped. Archie and his parents stayed by her side, although dad slipped away for a while to feed the whippets at home. Around 10pm Archie and mum kissed Jacinta goodnight and went home to sleep. Dad was able to stay and keep Jacinta company.

The next morning Archie and mum checked in. All was going brilliantly, and dad had been told he could bring Jacinta home later in the day. That was the best news! Mum had to get to work and Archie to school.

As Archie arrived at school he saw Tobias, Joanna and Oliver waiting for him. Then it hit him. He'd organised to go to the movies with them, plus Joanna, Millie and Marco yesterday afternoon. With all that had happened to Jacinta it had completely slipped his mind. He picked up his stride because he had so much to share with them.

"So, where were you yesterday, Archie?" Oliver called before Archie reached them.

"I'm so sorry," replied Archie, "I totally forgot. We had a rough weekend. You see, Jacinta ..."



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<http://whatsthebuzz.net.au/main-menu/content-whats-the-buzz-for-older-students> to fill your screen. As you can see, 2 illustrations accompany each story. There is also the option to have the authors read the story to students.

Oliver cut across Archie and hotly said, “Did you think about us? Did you think we’d be worried? Did you think about contacting us? Did you think you might have spoilt the movie for us?”

“I was in hospital. Jacinta had appendicitis and was rushed to emergency. Sorry. Everything happened so fast. I was caught up in it,” Archie responded.

“Well you wrecked the movie for us because we had no idea why you weren’t there,” continued Oliver.

“Take it easy, Oliver. This isn’t all about you,” Joanna stated.

“Archie, are you okay. Is Jacinta alright?” asked Tobias.

“She’ll be fine and will be home later today,” explained Archie.

“Well, she can’t have been too sick if she’ll be back home today,” quipped Oliver.

“So, you’re a doctor now, are you Oliver? teased Tobias.

“I’m really happy Jacinta will be okay, Archie. And, I’m happy you are too. Would it be okay if I dropped by to see her later? asked Joanna.

Pose your questions to the group;

Who showed empathy? Name them. How did they show it?

Who did not show empathy? Give reasons why Oliver couldn’t.

How did Archie probably feel about Oliver afterwards?

There is a saying that empathy is beyond sympathy – what does this mean?

2. Show me the Buzz

Show me the Buzz provides students with an opportunity to create role-plays, process the emotional ideas at play and receive feedback from the group. We have learned that this approach heightens understandings and the transference of skills.

Role-plays - ‘Empathy, responding to others’

The role-plays are in the photocopiable section at the end of this lesson. They are also available online -

<http://www.whatsthebuzz.net.au/main-menu/content-whats-the-buzz-for-primary-students> - you may either read them to students, or print them and hand each group a role-play. Help students to form small groups. Each role-play card states the number of students required. It does not matter if the same role-play is given to several groups. Give students a few minutes to rehearse and move between groups to provide plenty of coaching and enthusiasm.

Next, ask each group to perform their role-play. If a student does not wish to perform allow them to pass. So much can be learned through observing. Always perform role-plays in the middle of the social circle. Consider capturing the action on video or photo by using your iPad, camera or smartphone. Encourage others to give constructive feedback after each role-play.

3. Do you know the Buzz?

Do you know the Buzz? is a fast-moving quiz. Its purpose is to consolidate the essence of the lesson. Arrange the group into a social circle. Ask them to listen carefully as they hear a series of rapid-fire statements. Their challenge is to decide which statements are empathic. Ask students to put their thumbs up if they hear a caring response, and thumbs down to indicate unkind or poor responses. If they believe it is too hard to tell they are to put their thumbs to the side. When challenged they must be prepared to explain their decision. Let’s play!

Quiz

Your brother comes home upset because his soccer team lost again. You stop what you are doing, face him and say, "Hey, Brett, you can't win them all. I know you would have done your best."

Your sister comes home upset because her netball team lost again. You continue to play on your tablet. You don't move or look at her and say, "Oh?"

Your 4-year-old sister can't find her favourite doll. You say don't worry because it's time you stopped playing with dolls.

Your dad comes home from work stressed and fed up. He says, "I feel way too tired to cook dinner, so I've ordered pizza. You say, "But, dad you said we'd have the pasta I like. You promised. You go on and on saying, I want the pasta! I want the pasta! I want the pasta!"

Your dad is home sick from work with a bad cold. You want him to fix your bike, but he can hardly move. You tell him how keen you are to have your bike fixed but say the most important thing is for him to get better.

Your mum arrives home and tells everyone she's got a big problem at work and doesn't know what to do. You say, "Cheer up mum. You're good at what you do. You'll think of something. Take it easy for now and have some fun with us?"

A new kid in your class keeps hanging around you and your friends. He's okay and you can tell he wants to join in. You turn to him and say, "Look, I'm sorry, but we've got enough people in our group."

Your friend spills their drink all over the desk. You jump up, get paper towel and wipe it up with them and share the rest of your drink.

4. The Buzz

The Buzz is an opportunity for the group to play games that strengthen their relationship and the skills central to the lesson. The more group members are encouraged to play these, and similar games, the more opportunity they have to generalise their social thinking and skills into their day-to-day interactions. Choose a game that matches the maturity and interest of your group.

Game, Would you rather (mildly exciting)

Arrange students on chairs in a social circle. Your task is to read out one question at a time. Students listen, think about it and stand up if they agree with the first suggestion in the question. If they prefer the second suggestion in the question, they stay seated. Sometimes, give students the opportunity to explain their choices.

Would you rather questions;

Keep a pet dragon or always be able to swim with mermaids?

Save all endangered animal species, or create world peace for all humans?

Discover a small, amazing living dinosaur or a friendly alien with incredible powers and technology?

Be the smartest or most popular in your school?

Be guaranteed fabulous health or amazing wealth for the rest of your life?

Have your skin or your eyes continuously change colour?

Not be able to see colours or taste?

Lick a frog, or lick your best friend's big toe?

Predict the future or be able to change the past?

Find \$100 and keep it or find \$500 and give it away to charity?

Have amazing luck for the rest of your life or have any super power for a week?

Bring an end to hatred or hunger?

Have a group of good friends or one great friend?

Fly or read minds?

Be invisible or be able to read minds?

Be the richest person or immortal?
Give up the video games or lose your friends?
Live 300 years ago or 300 years in the future?
Have several wonderful friends or one amazing best friend for life?
Continue with your life or restart your life?

Game, Switch (exciting)

Have each student sitting on a chair in a social circle, except one who stands in the middle of the circle. This person is 'it' and no one wants to be 'it'. 'It's' job is to get back and be part of the group. To do this 'it' needs a chair to sit on. The game starts when 'it' calls out – "Switch if you have black hair". Suddenly those with black hair must get up and find a new chair to sit on, but 'it' will cunningly try to reenter the game by sitting on a seat. If 'it' is successful, the game continues with a new 'it' and if 'it' is not successful they try again! Here are a few switching ideas to start with;

- "Switch if you have sneakers on"
- "Switch if you tell lies sometimes"
- "Switch if you're wearing buttons"
- "Switch if you're wearing a school uniform"
- "Switch if you're wearing shorts"
- "Switch if you've ever kissed your cat or dog"
- "Switch if you have shoelaces"
- "Switch if you're wearing jewelry"

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

Lesson 10 of 16: Empathy, responding to others

Key social and emotional principles (*learning intention*)

This lesson examines how to respond to the emotional needs of others with empathy. To do this, two vital components must occur. The first is to find a way to acknowledge how the other person is feeling. This validates what they are experiencing and reassures them they are cared for. Second, something should be said or done that eases that person's difficulty or gives them hope. The definitive goal is to be emotionally available for another.

After the Buzz presents further ideas for parents, guardians and educators to encourage the generalisation of the social and emotional thinking students have touched on during the lesson. All children rely on us to consolidate these skills by positively modelling them, and emphasising the language and ideas used in the lesson. In this lesson students learned that to show empathy they need to display two behaviours:

- 1 Say something that shows they understand how the other person must be feeling.
- 2 Do or say something to comfort the person or give them hope.

Empathy is a highly valued quality in the social world, it can make, repair and strengthen friendships. Here are a few ideas to support your child's or students growing empathic abilities.

Teach by example

A natural way to teach empathy to our children is for us to show empathy and compassion at every opportunity that presents itself. Our children never stop watching and learning from us!

The art of managing our children's emotions empathetically

There truly is an art to managing our children's emotions empathetically. It begins with accepting that from time to time they must experience being upset, too excited, angry or moody. These are real and normal feelings. The most helpful approach is to acknowledge how your child is feeling by recognising the emotion they are displaying. They need to know that you are there to listen, empathise, understand and suggest, but you are not responsible for creating their happiness or solutions to their upsets.

Teach your child how to think and live compassionately

An easy way to do this is to watch a movie together. Many movies and sitcoms are wonderful as a springboard to observe the behaviours of others. Together, play with questions such as:

- Why a character was liked?
- Why another was disliked? Did you dislike them?
- What could have they said or done to help others like them more?
- Was there a reason for them to behave like this?
- Who was their favourite character? Why? What qualities did they show that you liked?
- Who was their least favourite character? Why? – Who was the hero? What made them a hero?
- Who was the victim? How could you tell? Was it their fault? Was it anyone's fault?
- What reasons do you have to make this judgement?
- If you had been 'so and so' what would have you done to make things better?

Observing behaviour and emotion in this way guides children to see the complexities behind human interactions. An extraordinary display of frustration, where the character expresses his emotions with overt anger and aggression, albeit humorously, is seen in Basil Fawlty in *Fawlty Towers*. Even after thirty years this series makes for wonderful discussion. Basil's bad temper in combination with having to be right and showing poor empathy to others causes him so much trouble.

Learning to say 'sorry' matters!

Some find it difficult to say, and others throw 'sorry' about nonchalantly to excuse anything they do. Used genuinely, 'sorry' can repair so many situations. Explore what 'sorry' is about, when to use it and how it can be said sincerely. Have fun with your children role-playing situations where 'sorry' might be helpful. Try 'sorry' with a smile, a touch, a wink, a handshake, a rub on someone's arm or a hug. Coach your child to understand that saying 'sorry' isn't an admission of wrongdoing and it may not always be accepted by another. However, it is a powerful gesture to reduce resentment and allow relationships to heal and grow.

Helping others

A practical way for your child to give pleasure to others, and see it returned, is to arrange for them to prepare a meal for the family each week or fortnight. Sure, some support may be required, but with a little help and supervision most seven-year-olds are capable of preparing a simple meal for their family.

As well, give your kids a chance to contribute so they have some influence in the world. They need to know that the world is a better place because they are in it. So, find ways for them to display concern, compassion and a social conscience outside of the family. The idea of giving back and doing thoughtful things for others instantly immerses them in an emotionally broader and richer world. Ask yourself, how long is it since your child sent a thank-you card, a small present, a warm email, a friendly note, a hand-made card, or made a phone call to someone who has been helpful or needs their spirits raised? Start by setting them up to deliver kindnesses. Teaching children how to care underpins that they themselves are cared for.

References

Carnicer, J., Calderón, Caterina., 2013, Empathy and coping strategies as predictors of well-being in Spanish university students. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 12(1), 129-146.
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Photocopiable and Online Resources

Lesson 10 of 16: Empathy, responding to others

00; Archie's story; "Did you think about us?" - first image in lesson

00; Archie's story; "Did you think about us?" - second image in lesson

00; Role-play cards - 'Empathy, responding to others'

Role-play 1

You say to your friend, "I feel horrible. A lot of kids don't like me you know."

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A pair – you and your friend)

Role-play 2

"Oh no!" you say to a friend, "I failed my maths test, again. Mum will go crazy at me."

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A pair – you and your friend)

Role-play 3

You walk into a hospital room to see your sick friend while playing a game.

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A pair – you and your friend)

Role-play 4

"Arrrgh. Look at my hair", you say in disgust to a friend, "my parents made me get it cut and it looks stupid."

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A pair – you and your friend)

Role-play 5

"It's hopeless. I can't find it," you say to your closest two friends. "I've searched everywhere. I'm dead?"

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A group of 3 – you and your friends)

Role-play 6

"Why do they stare at me?" You ask your friends. "Is it me or them? It weirds me out."

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A group of 3 – you and your friends)

Role-play 7

You show your friend your new iPad and say, "I dropped my iPad and the screen's cracked. Dad will go nuts!"

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A pair – you and your friend)

Role-play 8

You're at the vet clinic with dad. The vet says your dog isn't going to make it. Your dad bursts into tears.

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A group of 3 – you, dad and the vet)

Role-play 9

You quietly share with your best friend, "I didn't get an invitation to (state a name)'s party. Everyone else did. What's going on?"

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A pair – you and your friend)

Role-play 10

Your friend is upset and shares that their mum and dad are splitting up.

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A pair – you and your friend)

Role-play 11

You're feeling anxious and desperate. You say to a friend, "I hate sports day. Everyone gets to see how hopeless I am? I hope it rains!"

To respond with empathy;

1. Something needs to be said that shows you understand how they must be feeling
2. Do or say something to comfort or give them hope.

(A pair – you and your friend)