



Activity 1: Circle of Compassion

Overview: Students will identify that which they care deeply about, while also examining the terms “empathy” and “compassion.” Students will do so by creating their very own “Circle of Compassion.”

Procedure:

Introduction

Introduce the topic of the activity, explaining to the students that in order to solve the world’s problems we must first care about them.

Empathy and Compassion

1. Write down on the whiteboard/chalkboard the word “empathy” and ask the students if they are familiar with this term. If so, ask for a definition. (Answer: “The capacity to identify with another’s feelings or putting yourself in someone else’s shoes.”)
2. Erase the word “empathy” and then write down the word “compassion” and ask the students if they are familiar with this term. If so, ask for a definition. (Answer: “Having concern for the needs of others AND wanting to do something to help.”)

Circle of Compassion

1. Draw a very large circle around the word “compassion.” Explain to the students that this is a “Circle of Compassion” and each person has one. A person’s “Circle of Compassion” is filled with those individuals whom s/he would be willing, or at least has a desire, to help to ease their suffering.
2. Fill in the names of a few individuals in your life who fit into your “Circle of Compassion” and explain why you included each one. (Possible individuals: mothers; fathers; sisters; brothers; friends; pets; extended relatives.)
3. Ask students to suggest additional individuals. As students brainstorm, encourage them to include people, animals, and parts of nature.
4. Do you need to know someone personally to include that individual in your circle of compassion? Share an example of hearing about a natural disaster, such as an earthquake or a hurricane, in another country. Ask them if they would have compassion for the people and animals who were hurt. Ask them what people sometimes can do to help those in need (e.g., donate money, send supplies to help).
5. Pass out construction paper and markers/colored pencils/crayons and instruct students to make their own “Circle of Compassion.”

Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Define and give examples of the words *empathy* and *compassion*.
- Examine the issues surrounding individuals deserving of empathy and compassion.

Time Needed

20–45 minutes

Materials

- Whiteboard / chalkboard
- Dry erase markers / chalk
- Construction paper
- Markers / colored pencils / crayons

Insider Tips

- Instead of circles, students can cut out heart shapes for the activity.

Classroom Teachers

- As an extension activity, have students write a paragraph about who they included in their circles of compassion and why.
- As an extension activity, have students write a paragraph response to the question, “Are there any individuals who do not deserve to be in your circle of compassion?”
- As an extension activity, have students write a paragraph response to the question, “Do you have to know individuals to include them in your circle of compassion?”

Outside Humane Educators

- If you do not have access to a whiteboard or chalkboard, come prepared with the words “Empathy” and “Compassion” written on poster board. Also, have an already completed “Circle of Compassion” to use as a model.

Activity 1: Circle of Compassion (continued)

Wrap Up:

1. Once students have completed their “Circle of Compassion,” have them share out loud some of the individuals they have included.
2. Ask students if they believe their “Circle of Compassion” will grow or shrink as they get older.
 - Answer: Their circles should grow because the more people in their lives they meet and the more they learn about the world the more they should expand their compassion to others.
 - Facilitate discussion. Some students will say everyone should be in the circle of compassion, but others may disagree giving the examples of bullies or people who hurt others. Be prepared to discuss these examples.
 - Ask the students if they agree and why or why not. Discuss whether we can have compassion for people who have done something wrong or harmful. Ask them if we can have empathy for a bully.

