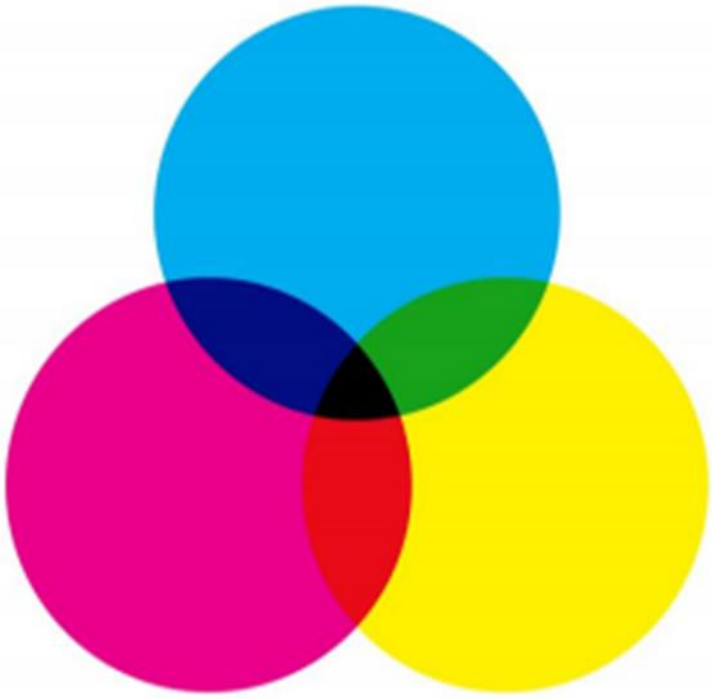
ACTIVATING SOCIAL EMPATHY

Student Workbook

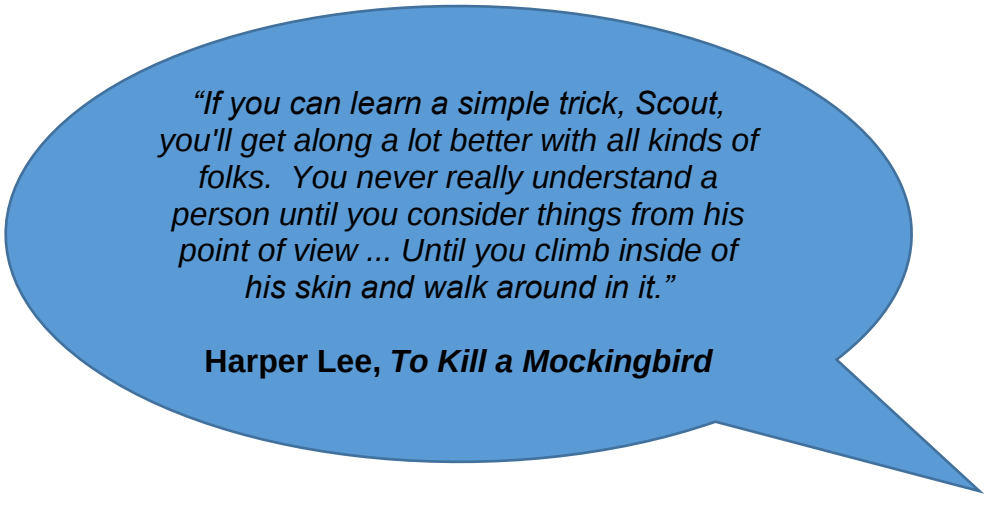


UNESCO CHILD & FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE

Session 1

Activity 1 Class Contract

Our Class Contract



Reflection

Write down three ‘take home’ lessons or things you learned from the session

1.

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Learning outside the classroom

Make a note of any example of empathy you come across during the week. This could include

- Times you show empathy or somebody shows empathy to you
- Examples of empathy you witnessed in your family or amongst your friends.
- Examples of empathy from television programmes, social media or in books.

Session 2

Activity 2 Empathic Listening

Guide to Empathic Listening

1. Give your full attention.
- Give the speaker your undivided attention.
- Put away phones and get rid of other distractions if possible.
- If your attention wanders while the other person is speaking, gently bring it back to them.

2. Maintain eye contact.
- Maintain good eye contact with the speaker without staring.

3. Remove barriers.
- Don't use physical barriers such as tables or crossed arms when you are listening.

4. Use encouraging body language.
- Use appropriate and encouraging body language signs like nodding and smiling.

5. Let them speak.
- Don't interrupt the other person unnecessarily.
- If you need to clarify what the person is saying, wait for a natural break in the conversation.
- Allow for silence.

6. Understand.
- Listen to the other person's words and read their body language; really try to understand the emotions the other person is feeling and the thoughts they are thinking.

7. Show that you understand.
- Let the other person know that you understand them by using words and gestures.
- E.g. Reflect back to the person what you have heard e.g. 'I understand from what you are saying that…'; 'What I am hearing is…'; 'You sound…'; Share examples from your own experience if you have any (but be careful not to make the conversation about you!).

8. Don't judge.
- Don't judge or criticize what the other person is saying.

Reflection

Write down three ‘take home’ lessons or things you learned from the session

1.

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Learning outside the classroom

Try out empathic listening with somebody during the week.

Session 3

Activity 1 Character Identification

Character Questionnaire

Where is this character from? _____

What age are they? _____

What do they look like? _____

What do they do e.g. pupil in school, doctor, business owner?

_____

What else do we know about them e.g. their religion, ethnicity, family?

_____

What is the world they live in like? Is it like our own or different? In what ways?

_____

What has been the most important event or events in their life?

_____

What three words would you use to describe this character?

_____

Character Narrative

Activity 2 Perspective-taking role play

1.

Charlie and Cameron have been best friends since primary school. Charlie really likes Jesse and told Cameron about this last month. Cameron also likes Jesse but couldn't say anything since Charlie had said it first. At the weekend Charlie got together with Jesse. Cameron found out through social media and is very upset. Imagine the scene where Cameron confronts Charlie about this.

2.

Jamie and Alex have just finished football training. During the practice match, Jamie made some joking comments about a few mistakes Alex made on the pitch. Alex was hurt by these comments and felt humiliated. Jamie meant the comments as a joke to lighten the mood. Imagine the scene when Alex confronts Jamie after training.

3.

Jordan's elderly grandmother Mary is living on her own. Jordan is the only grandchild who lives in the town, the rest live much farther away. Mary feels that Jordan hasn't been coming to visit as often as he/she should. She feels increasingly isolated without regular visitors, and misses her grandchild. Jordan is in Leaving Cert, has a part-time job at the weekend and has been especially busy these last few months and hasn't been able to visit his/her grandmother as often as he/she used to. Imagine the scene when Mary confronts Jordan about the lack of visits.

4.

Kai and Omid are over at Kai's house messing around filming dance videos on TikTok. Kai and Omid both agreed that this would be for their eyes only and saved it in drafts. The next day Omid wakes up to the dance video they filmed being shared by different people in school. Omid felt embarrassed by this and was hurt Kai lied about keeping the videos in draft. Imagine the scene of Omid confronting Kai about this.

Reflection

Write down three ‘take home’ lessons or things you learned from the session

1.

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Learning outside the classroom

1. *First Person Stories*

Practice telling other people’s stories in the first person. For example, if you are looking at a news story, reading about a character in a book, watching a character in a TV programme or film, practice adopting their perspective and telling their story in your head and see how you find it.

2. *Perspective-taking in situations of conflict*

Practice perspective-taking when you are interacting with other people, particularly if a situation of disagreement or conflict arises. Could you put yourself in their shoes? Did it change how the situation unfolded?

Session 4

Activity 1 Walking Debate

Role Cards

SORCHA, 17 You live in Galway in a large house overlooking the sea with your two sisters. Your mother is a solicitor and your father is a doctor. You are thinking about studying medicine so have asked for a laptop for your birthday to help with your studies. You've also asked for grinds in English and Maths. This summer you are hoping to go to Irish College and French College to improve your languages. You went on the school tour to Paris this year and loved it and are hoping to do some more travelling with your family this summer. **Overview: *Plans to study medicine; Plans to go to Irish & French Summer Colleges; Went to Paris; Hopes to do more travelling***
JOHN, 15 You live in Athlone, Co. Westmeath with your two older brothers. Your father and mother run a café in the town, but this year it was flooded for the second time in four years. The family lost lots of money as a result and things are stressful at home and money is tight. One of your older brothers is already in college and the other is hoping to start a degree next year. Your parents would also like you to go to college but they are not sure where they will get the money. You have offered to start a weekend job in a shop from next September to start saving. **Overview: *Parents' café was flooded; Money is tight at home; Plans to get a weekend job***
CAMERON, 16 You live with your three younger siblings in social housing in Dublin City. Your mother is at home minding your little brothers and sister and your Dad isn't around. You have just finished your Junior Cert and have left school to get a job. You don't mind what kind of work it is, as long as it brings in some money for your family. Sometimes there isn't enough food in the house and you worry about the little ones getting enough to eat. You try to hide all of this from people outside the family and pretend everything is fine. **Overview: *Lives in social housing; Dad is not around; Left school to find a job; Sometimes not enough food at home; Tries to hide worries***
JAMES, 13 You live on a halting site with your mother, father and four brothers and sisters. You like it but it can be difficult sometimes as the facilities aren't great. You go to the local school but you find it hard because there aren't many other children from the Travelling Community and you get verbally abused all the time and you can only hang out with other children from your community. You've stopped going to school some days and you're not sure how much longer you will bother with it. Your father says there's no point staying on in school as it won't help you get a job because employers all hold being a Traveller against you anyway. **Overview: *Lives on a halting site; Part of the Traveller community; Gets verbally abused at school; Stopped going to school some days***

SARAH, 12
Your father lost his job and the landlord raised the rent a year ago. As a result you, your parents and two younger brothers were made homeless and were placed in a hotel room while the council try to find you all a place to live. It takes three buses to cross the city from the hotel to your school, and you are exhausted by the time you arrive. It's really hard to do homework on a hotel bed with your brothers jumping around and you have no space of your own. You are tired and upset so much of the time and are losing focus at school. You're also cut off from your friends now that you live so far away.
Overview: ***Family made homeless; Lives in a hotel room; Takes 3 buses to get to school; Tired & upset a lot; Feels Cut off from friends***

ELAINE, 15
You have been in a wheelchair since birth. You live at home with your parents and older sister, who are all really helpful and supportive. Your parents are well off and they have been able to make the house very wheelchair-friendly and can afford to bring you places and buy you what you need so you don't feel different. You are going to the local secondary school and have plenty of friends. You miss out on some things like sport, and it's not always as easy for you to get around which can make socialising a problem depending on where your friends want to go. You want to go to college but worry about your ability to live on your own away from the support of your family.
Overview: ***In a wheelchair since birth; Parents are well-off; Plenty of friends; Misses out on some things; Worries about ability to live alone***

SHANE, 18
You live with your sister, brother and parents in County Limerick. You realised you were gay two years ago but so far you have only come out to your two best friends, who were very supportive. You love cooking and Home Economics and want to be a chef when you're older. You have a hard time in school, with people calling you homophobic slur words. You can't wait to leave school and get as far away from home as possible.
Overview: ***Came out as gay to best friends; Loves cooking; Has a hard time in school; Can't wait to leave school and get away***

ALI, 15
You live in a Direct Provision Centre with your mother and 10-year-old sister. You came to Ireland a year ago after fleeing from Syria where your father was killed in the war. You are all waiting to see if the government will let you stay in Ireland as a refugee. You are all still grieving and very worried about family back home. You get your meals at set times and there is a curfew meaning that you have to be back in the Centre by a certain time. You go to school but speak little English so it is very hard to understand what is happening. You get English lessons every week and are improving very slowly. Your mother can't work and only gets a small amount of money each week.
Overview: ***Lives in a Direct Provision Centre; Came to Ireland fleeing Syria; Doesn't speak English; Mother can't work***

MERCY, 17

You were born in Nigeria but moved to Ireland when you were 8 and have been attending the local secondary school. Most of the students at school treat you well and are friendly, but you have also experienced a lot of racism. You've been subjected to nasty comments at school and in the street and have had people telling you to 'go home to your own country'. You feel that teachers don't ask for your contribution as often as they do with other students and you sometimes feel that your teachers assume you don't have any ambitions to go to university. You've tended to end up being friends with other kids from Africa or whose parents are African.

Overview: ***Born in Nigeria; Most students are friendly; Subject to nasty comments; Feels left out by teachers; Mainly has African friends***

AMIRA, 12

You are from Syria but had to leave your home months ago because of war. You are now in Europe, living in a huge migrant camp in France. You, your parents and your four siblings live in a tent with no heat or running water. You line up for food and toilets during the day. If you get sick there is a doctor's station with long queues. The authorities are worried about infectious diseases breaking out in the camp. Your schooling has been put on hold. You want to be a doctor when you are older, but first you want your family to be settled somewhere safe to start a new life.

Overview: ***Lives in a tent in a migrant camp in France; Schooling put on hold; Wants to be a doctor & for family to be settled***

ARIFA, 17

You are from Bangladesh and work in a clothes factory. You started there when you were 10 years old cutting extra threads from clothes and now work on the sewing machines making clothes. You work 12 hour shifts, from 9 AM until 9 PM, six days a week. You get paid the minimum wage of 3,000 taka per month but the 'living wage' is 5,000 per month. The work is exhausting and hard on your body, causing frequent back pain because of the long hours hunched over the machine. You are worried about the safety of the building and are scared of the risk of fire or collapse. You will marry next year but will continue working in the factory.

Overview: ***Works in clothes factory; Has frequent back pain; Scared of the risk of fire/building collapse; Getting married***

PETER, 12

You are from Kenya and are one of eight children. Your family lives in a small mud-walled hut with no electricity or running water. You live on one meal a day of maize and beans, but most of the beans are kept for the younger children in the family. You go to school on an empty stomach where you share one textbook between five of your classmates. During class breaks you rush to the nearby baobab tree to see if there are any fruits to pick, but you rarely find any as it is only in season once a year. Your father is planning to leave soon to find work and talks about taking you with him.

Overview: ***Lives in a small mud-walled hut; Lives on one meal a day; Shares school textbook with five others***

MALIKA, 17 You are from Afghanistan. You were lucky that you were allowed to attend a local girls' school but it was burned down after you had been there for 2 years by extremists who don't believe in female education. At the age of 12 your parents told you that you were going to be engaged and married. You married your husband when you were 14 and he was 30 years old. You now have a 1-year-old daughter and live with your husband's family, and spend your day cleaning and cooking in the home and looking after your child. **Overview: *School was burned down; Engaged at Age 12; Married at Age 14 to 30 year old man; Has a daughter; Spends day cleaning & cooking***
DINARA, 14 You are one of the 'street children' of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. You are part of a group of about 50 children who survives on the street together. You sleep in a park that is locked at night, so at least you feel safe there. Your mother also grew up on the streets and although you once had a home, you were kicked out because you couldn't pay the rent. You try to attend school but only make it from time to time. You go to a drop-in centre to get food, wash and play football. The authorities want to place you in accommodation for homeless children, but you don't like the restrictions and escape to the street at night. **Overview: *Sleeps in a park; Kicked out of home; Only makes it to school sometimes; Goes to a drop-in centre for food***

Reflection

Write down three 'take home' lessons or things you learned from the session

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3.

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Learning outside the classroom

Putting yourself in someone else's shoes

Practice putting yourself in other people's shoes when watching the news or reading news stories.

Session 5

Activity 2 Responding with Empathy: Scenarios

Situation Cards

A new girl/boy arrives to join your sports club or youth club and seems shy. They hang back by the door and seem afraid to come into the room.
You and your friends see that an elderly man is struggling with his heavy shopping bags while walking down the street.
In the hallway at school, you see that some pupils have grabbed another student's phone and are looking through their social media, laughing and making comments. You see that he or she is upset and fighting back tears.
You and your friends have just seen your friend lose an important match, where he or she did not perform their best. You meet them leaving the venue afterwards.
You get along really well with your science partner at school and find them funny. One day you are invited to a Snapchat Group chat and find out the person who made the group said they are not inviting your science partner into the chat because everyone thinks they are weird.
Your older sister/brother arrives home very upset and tells you that she/he has just broken up with their boyfriend/girlfriend.

Reflection

Write down three 'take home' lessons or things you learned from the session

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Learning outside the classroom

Keep a note of how you responded with empathy before the next session.

Session 6

Reflection

Write down three ‘take home’ lessons or things you learned from the session

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Learning outside the classroom

1. *Finding common ground with others around us*

Put your learning into practice by trying to find common ground with people during the week, especially when you find yourself feeling negatively towards somebody. Can you think of common experiences and feelings? Did this help to ease your frustration and negative feelings?

2. *Finding common ground with those who are different*

Try to find common ground with people who are very different from yourself. Can you source any videos, news reports, films or stories that give the perspective of marginalised groups? Could they find any commonalities with them and did this change your view of those people?

Session 7

Activity 2 - The human face

My name is…

Reflection

Write down three ‘take home’ lessons or things you learned from the session

1.

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Learning outside the classroom

Can you become aware when you use stereotyped thinking about people? Do you think you use stereotypes? Do you think you are aware enough of your own thinking to notice?

Make a note of any time you see people displaying prejudice about groups in society. What was the context? What group was being targeted? How can we combat this kind of thinking?

Session 8

Activity 1 - The bystander effect

On a Sale of 1 – 5, how likely are you to intervene in each situation?

Scenarios	
The final bell has gone and you are walking out of school with your friends. Everyone is around, heading home. You see another student drop their schoolbag and the contents fall out all over the path.	
You are in a busy supermarket. A foreign woman is carrying a heavy shopping bag, which splits, spilling everything on the floor.	
You are walking through the park to get home. It's quiet and there is no one else around. You see a man looking everywhere for his dog, calling the dog's name, looking really worried.	
You are chatting on social media with a group of your friends when some of them begin to gang up on another member of the group and criticise their behaviour and appearance.	
You are walking down an empty hallway to go to the toilets during class. You see two people physically fighting right outside the toilets and see one is getting badly hurt	
You are on your own and about to walk into the student disco to meet your friends, when you see another student from your year sitting alone on the ground outside. They do not seem well and look like they need to go home.	
You are at school and see another student from your class break something in the school on purpose.	

Reflection

Write down three 'take home' lessons or things you learning from the session

1.

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2.

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Learning outside the classroom

Can you intervene and show empathy during the week, even it means pushing yourself beyond your comfort zones?

Empathy in Action Project

Activity 2 - Planning your project

1. What issues are we going to cover?

Ask yourselves:

1. **What issues are most important to us?**

2. **What do we feel strongly about?**

3. **What things affect our lives?**

4. **What would we like to bring awareness to?**

Example Social Issues:

Bullying	**Mental health**	**Disability**	**Poverty**
Older people	**Animal rights**	**Climate Change**	**Asylum Seekers / Refugees**
Homelessness	**Body image**	**Discrimination / Racism**	**Illness**
Drugs / Alcohol	**Loneliness**	**LGBTQI issues**	**Crime**
Unemployment	**Peer Pressure**	**Human rights**	**Sexism**

2. What are we going to do?

Examples and ideas for projects:

- ✓ https://www.dosomething.org/us
- ✓ http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au/organise-an-activity/ideas-for-activities/
- ✓ https://www.svp.ie/what-we-do/young-svp/svp-in-schools.aspx
- ✓ https://www.youngsocialinnovators.ie/

Examples of projects include:

Poster campaign in school / community	Holding a public reading
Letter writing campaign to politicians	Writing and staging a play
Creating a website, blog, or social media account to raise awareness	Writing a recording a song
Making a video	Joining or taking part in an existing campaign
Writing articles for newspapers or websites	Setting up a reading group
Organising a workshop in the school	Organising fund-raising event in school
Organising an exhibition of art / photographs to raise awareness	Organising a film festival

3. How will we record and present our project?

Ways to present your project include:

Exhibition Scrapbook Poster Create a web page Photographs

PowerPoint/Prezi presentation Create a Facebook page Videos

Instagram/Snapchat account Artwork YouTube

4. Project Details

The members of our project team are…

Our project will be on…

We will do the following…

To Do List

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Session 12

Activity 1 Review

What did you learn from participating in the *Activating Social Empathy* programme? (Think about what you learned about yourself or about others, about empathy, its place in our lives, or any other issues).

Do you think that any of your attitudes or behaviours have changed as a result of taking part?

What actions will you take as a result of what you have learned in the programme?

Activity 2 Creating Empathy Goals

My Personal Empathy Goals:

Guide to Increasing Your Empathy

This guide was prepared by the Youth Empathy and Social Values (YES) Project Team: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway
http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/cfrc/empa

We know from studies that certain things influence the development of empathy and what psychologists call "prosocial behaviours". These are behaviours like helping, sharing, comforting others, and defending others. This guide is based on studies from around the world that looked at teenagers, empathy and prosocial behaviour.[1]

Sports & Group Membership

Sports participation and sports team membership are linked to empathy and prosocial behaviour.

Involvement in activities like music, volunteering, or extra-curricular groups (e.g. girl guides, after school clubs) promote greater prosocial behaviour.

What can you do?

- ✓ **Take part in team sports. Join a local sports club, get involved in school sports, check if there are any informal leagues for less competitive sport (Get your friends to join with you!)**
- ✓ **Join a youth group. For local groups see Foróige and Youth Work Ireland**
- ✓ **Look for opportunities to volunteer in your community**
- ✓ **Play music with others: join an orchestra or a choir, start a band**
- ✓ **Go to concerts or gigs, anywhere that music is played live for an audience**

Peer Relationships

If your friends and peers think prosocial responding is a positive thing, then you are more likely to show higher levels of prosocial behaviour yourself. The reverse is also true (teenagers whose friends or peers think aggressive behaviour is normal show lower levels of prosocial behaviour). Positive, supportive connections with peers promote higher levels of prosocial behaviour.

What can you do?

- ✓ **Are you comfortable with the kind of behaviour your friends take part in? Do you find yourself being led along with behaviours you don't thing are right? You might want to rethink your friend group, but this isn't always possible. Can you trying to encourage different behaviour?**
- ✓ **Support your friends and classmates, encourage them in positive ways. You'll be helping them to show empathy and kindness to others (including you if you need it!). If they do the same back, you might see your own empathy increase without even realising it.**

[1] Silke, C., Brady, B., Boylan, C., Dolan, P. (2018) Factors influencing the development of empathy and pro-social behaviour among adolescents: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*

School Climate

Positive school environments where students are involved in decision-making and feel valued by other staff and students help promote empathy. Positive classroom environments, including teacher support and positive peer connection are also important.

What can you do?

- ✓ **Approach your Principal or Year Head about creating a more positive environment in school and offer suggestions.**
- ✓ **Get involved in the Student Council or talk to members of the Council about issues that you think can be improved.**
- ✓ **Start a campaign or organise an activity to help make school a more positive environment.**
- ✓ **Ask your teachers to let you have more of a say in class e.g. all students get a chance to share their perspectives on different topics.**
- ✓ **Create classroom charters where you agree to respect each other in class, including different opinions.**

Neighbourhoods & Culture

How connected your neighbourhood and community is and your own sense of connection to your community are important influencers of prosocial responding.

What can you do?

- ✓ **Get involved in your community by volunteering or join a local youth group.**
- ✓ **Is there a library, a community centre, a sports club, a community garden, or a church in your area? These places are often the heart of the community. Can you attend and get involved?**
- ✓ **If you live in a housing estate, organise a neighbourhood event.**

Media

The length of time spend watching TV or playing video games is linked with lower levels of prosocial behaviour and exposure to media violence is associated with a reduction in empathy. BUT exposure to prosocial media content may increase prosocial behaviours. Reading literature has been shown to improve empathy.

What can you do?

- ✓ **Try to spend less time playing video games or watching TV.**
- ✓ **Try to avoid watching violent programmes, videos or playing violent games and focus on prosocial media with a positive message**
- ✓ **Get reading. Join a book club, start a reading journal, join the library.**

Other People

There are differences in the type of prosocial behaviour we direct toward different groups like family, friends and strangers. We tend to be more likely to help and empathise with people who are 'similar' to us, or those we like or are close with.

What can you do?

- ✓ **Challenge yourself to show empathy and kindness to people you don't know very well or to people who are different to you e.g. strangers, people from different social backgrounds, religions and cultures.**
- ✓ **Strike up conversations with strangers**
- ✓ **Keep an eye out for people in your class or year, even those you don't know well**
- ✓ **Make an effort to get to know people who are different to you**