

3.8.3 Empathy Think-Pair-Share

Brief description, and rules of the implementation of the learning activity

This Think-Pair-Share adaptation focuses on seeing situations from someone else’s perspective, helping children practice stepping outside their own point of view. This variation of Think-Pair-Share centres empathy by asking students to respond to emotionally charged scenarios. First, they think individually about how they or another person might feel, then share with a partner, and finally with the group. This activity works well at different moments of the school day, especially after a story, a conflict, or a collaborative task. It encourages children to reflect not only on their own point of view but also on others.

Skill focus

Primary Skill Focus

- Empathy

Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus

- Curiosity, sense of wonder and openness

Age group	Student number	Duration
8-10 years old	10-25	30 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

The teacher introduces a short, age-appropriate social situation or dilemma related to empathy, such as: “A new student joins your class but doesn’t speak your language.”

This scenario sets the stage for perspective-taking and emotional reflection.

Step 1 – Think (Individual reflection): Each child takes a moment to quietly imagine how the student might feel—perhaps nervous, confused, or left out—and what that student might need (e.g., a smile, a buddy, or a picture-based explanation). They can jot down a few thoughts or draw a simple image to express their idea.

Step 2 – Pair (Partner discussion): Children form pairs to share their interpretations. They compare feelings and ideas, noticing where they agree or differ. The teacher encourages active listening and prompts them to ask each other:

- “What would you do if you were in their shoes?”
- “How could we help them feel welcome?”

Step 3 – Share (Class-wide sharing): Each pair presents one key insight or idea to the class. The teacher writes these on the board or a poster. As students hear a range of answers, they begin to recognize that people experience the same situation differently—and that empathy grows when we listen to those perspectives.

Optional extension: The class brainstorms an "Empathy Action Plan" with simple actions they could take to support someone in a similar real-life situation.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Indoor: Students sit at their desks in pairs or move to sit face-to-face in pairs on the carpet. Arrange the classroom so that each pair has enough privacy to talk without distractions. Leave space at the front for whole-class sharing.

Outdoor (optional): If done outside, students can sit in pairs on picnic blankets or benches in a shaded area, with enough space between groups to allow concentration.

How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

This variation of Think-Pair-Share centres empathy by asking students to respond to emotionally charged scenarios. First, they think individually about how they or another person might feel, then share with a partner, and finally with the group.

The activity:

- Encourages emotional reasoning and reflection,
- Provides space for multiple viewpoints and validation,
- Builds courage to share personal or sensitive thoughts in a safe setting.

As students listen to each other's reflections, they deepen their understanding of emotional diversity and become more open to different reactions and coping strategies.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

As a result of this activity, students will:

- understand cognitive empathy
- be able to use perspective-switching
- be aware that different perspectives are valid

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

This activity works well at different moments of the school day, especially after a story, a conflict, or a collaborative task. It encourages children to reflect not only on their own point of view but also on others'. For example, after reading a story where a character feels excluded, the teacher might ask:

"What do you think the character felt? Can you think of a moment when you felt like that?"

In a Think phase, each student reflects quietly and individually. During Pair, they share with a partner, often discovering different emotional reactions to the same situation. In the Share phase, children hear the range of experiences and feelings in the class, realising that emotions are varied and valid.

This routine can also be used reactively — after a disagreement on the playground, the teacher can guide students to explore what each person might have felt, creating a bridge between emotional recognition and conflict resolution. Repetition of this method strengthens perspective-taking and emotional vocabulary over time.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- Scenario cards
- Optional whiteboard for brainstorming

Guiding questions

- Was it hard to imagine someone else's feelings?
- Did your partner see the situation differently?
- Why is it important to consider different perspectives?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Some children may insist that there's only one correct answer or emotion for the situation.
Tip: To guide them toward more flexible thinking, the teacher can emphasize that empathy is about understanding different perspectives, not finding the "right" response.
 - A helpful reminder might be:
 - "Different people feel differently—even in the same situation. That's what makes empathy so important."
- **Challenge:** If pairs struggle to take another person's point of view.
Tip: The teacher can model the process by thinking aloud or asking open-ended guiding questions such as:
 - "How would you feel if no one understood your words?"
 - "What might help you feel more at ease in a new place?"
 - It can also help to encourage role-play or drawing as alternative ways to explore emotions for children who find verbal discussion difficult.
- **Challenge:** Finally, if one child dominates the conversation in a pair.
Tip: The teacher can gently encourage turn-taking, saying:
 - "Let's hear from your partner too—everyone has valuable ideas."
 - These strategies help ensure that all children feel heard, respected, and engaged in building empathy together.

Difficulty level tailoring

- **Beginner learner (6-7 years old):** focus on broad, easily recognised emotions.
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** include more nuanced feelings like embarrassment.
- **Expert learners (9-10 years old):** introduce emotion combinations (nervous-excited).

Debriefing and Reflection questions

- What did you learn by listening to someone else's idea?
- Did someone else's perspective surprise you?
- How does thinking like someone else help us work better as a group?
- Can you remember a time when you misunderstood someone's feelings? What helped you understand them better?
- Why is it important to know that more than one feeling can be "right" in the same situation?