

3.8.2 Empathy Role-Play Trail (outdoor)

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

In an outdoor role-play trail, children encounter stations with scenarios where someone needs empathy. They take turns acting out the role of helper, learning how to recognize emotions and offer support. This activity develops empathy by placing children in simulated real-life situations where they are required to recognize emotions and respond in supportive ways. As they walk through the trail and encounter different scenarios, children are encouraged to step into someone else's shoes — both literally and figuratively.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
 - Empathy
- **Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus**
 - Emotional awareness, regulation and communication
 - Curiosity, sense wonder and openness

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-10 years old	10-25	40 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

1. **Preparing the activity:** The teacher sets up 4 or 5 stations along a safe route (in the courtyard, garden, or gym). At each station, there is a card with a simple and age-appropriate scenario.

Each card includes:

- a short description of the situation
- the name of the character involved
- an emotion to identify
- a prompt question such as: “What could you say or do to help?”

Optionally, you can place small props (like a ball, a backpack, a chair) at each station to make the situation more immersive.

2. **Instructions to give the children:** The teacher introduces the activity by saying: “Today we’re going on an Empathy Trail. Along the way, you’ll meet characters who are going through something difficult. Your job is to figure out how they feel and think of a way to help them.”

“At each station, one of you will play the character. The others will watch closely, try to guess how the character feels, and say or do something to help.”

“There’s no single right answer. We’re practicing how to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes and be caring and attentive friends.”

3. Running the activity – what happens at each station

1. Children divide into small groups (ideally 3–5 per group) and move from one station to the next.
2. At each station, one child takes the role of the **character in the scenario**. They read the scenario card aloud (or the teacher reads it for younger children).
3. The “character” expresses the emotion through body language and facial expression, without speaking.
4. The other children observe and take turns saying:
 - what emotion they think the character is feeling
 - what they would do or say to offer help or support

Example:

- Station 1 – “Luca is sitting alone because no one picked him for their team.”
 - The child playing Luca sits down and pretends to look sad.
 - The others say things like:
 - “I think he feels left out. I would ask him if he wants to play with me.”
 - “I would sit next to him and tell him he’s my friend.”
 - After everyone has participated, the group moves on to the next station, taking turns playing the different roles at each stop.
4. **Closing the activity:** At the end of the trail, the class gathers together for a brief reflection. The teacher leads the conversation with questions such as:
- “Which emotions were easiest to recognize?”
 - “What helped you understand how the character felt?”
 - “Was there a moment when you felt especially connected to the character?”

This final moment is essential to consolidate what was learned and to help children reflect on how they can bring empathy into their everyday lives.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Arrange 4–5 clearly marked stations along a safe and quiet path (school yard, garden, gym courtyard). Each station should be distanced enough to allow a small group to gather and act without being distracted by others. Use cones or natural elements (trees, benches) as fixed points. Ensure visual signage and props are visible to draw children's attention and maintain immersion.

How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

This activity develops empathy by placing children in simulated real-life situations where they are required to recognize emotions and respond in supportive ways. As they walk through the trail and encounter different scenarios, children are encouraged to step into someone else's shoes — both literally and figuratively.

The structure of the role-play fosters emotional perspective-taking by:

- Encouraging observation of non-verbal emotional cues (posture, expression),
- Practicing verbal or physical responses that show care and understanding,
- Promoting group discussion where children hear different interpretations and emotional reactions.

By cycling through multiple stations and switching roles, each child has repeated opportunities to explore how emotions manifest and how supportive behaviour can look different depending on context. The post-activity reflection reinforces learning by making space to talk about emotional cues, empathetic responses, and how to carry these experiences into real-life peer relationships. This experiential, movement-based format supports not only the development of empathy but also emotional awareness and social bonding within the group.

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

As a result of this activity, students will:

- able to recognize emotions in peers
- able to offer comfort and support
- has confidence in helping others
- be aware of how support feels

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

Scenario 1

“Sara is standing quietly near the classroom door, holding a drawing she made.”

She looks down and seems unsure whether to show it.

The child playing Sara holds the drawing close and avoids eye contact.

The others might say:

“She might feel shy or scared that others won’t like her picture.”

“I would tell her I’d love to see it and that it’s okay to feel nervous.”

Scenario 2

“Leo is pacing before the school play, holding his costume.”

He breathes fast and wrings his hands.

The child playing Leo mimics nervous energy.

The others might say:

“He’s probably worried about performing. I’d remind him how well he practiced.”

“I’d offer to help him practice his lines one more time or do a breathing exercise with him.”

Scenario 3

“Amina just came back from lunch and finds her favourite pencil broken.”

She looks upset and holds the pencil sadly.

The child playing Amina might frown and look disappointed.

The others say things like:

“She might feel sad or frustrated. I’d help her find some tape or offer to share mine.”

“I’d ask if she wants to talk about it.”

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- Scenario cards for each station
- Emotion cards for younger children
- Cones or markers to define the trail

Guiding questions

- How did you know how your partner was feeling?
- What kind of help felt the best?
- When was a time you needed a friend's help?
- Why is it important to notice how others feel?
- How can we become more aware of our friends' feelings every day?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Some children might focus on solutions instead of feelings.
Tip: The teacher should guide them back to naming the emotion first before problem-solving.
- **Challenge:** Some children might find it hard to comfort others verbally.
Tip: The teacher can suggest non-verbal actions, like sitting close or offering a hand to hold.

Difficulty level tailoring

- **Beginner learner (6-7 years old):** keep scenarios simple (losing a toy) and model empathetic responses before the activity starts.
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** include more social scenarios (feeling left out). Ask them to reflect on a time they needed empathy.
- **Experts (9-10 years old):** challenge them to identify subtle emotions (disappointment vs. frustration) and practice asking open-ended questions to show empathy.

Debriefing and Reflection questions

- What did you feel while watching your friends act out emotions?
- Was it easier to understand some emotions more than others? Why?
- What helped you choose how to support the character?
- Did anything remind you of something you've felt before?
- How can we use what we learned today in our class or with friends?