




7. BEING OPEN-MINDED DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE A HOLE IN YOUR HEAD!

Fighting judgment with empathy

Targeted competency(ies) (ÉKIP, WHO)	SHOWING EMPATHY
Cross-curricular competencies (QEP)	ACHIEVING THEIR POTENTIAL EXERCISING THEIR CRITICAL JUDGMENT COOPERATING
General workshop objectives	AT THE END OF THE WORKSHOP, THE STUDENT WILL BE ABLE TO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • realize the impact of passing judgment on themselves and others • adopt an attitude of openness and compassion toward others • experiment with various strategies for self-compassion, inclusion, and amicable relationships

Total duration

60-MINUTE version, follow all steps

40-MINUTE version, DO NOT do the activities marked with the  icon

Materials and preparation

Print the *Script for compassion meditation* worksheet (1 per student)

Materials required

- *Sticky notes (e.g., Post-it Notes)*
- *Chalkboard and chalk or interactive digital board (IDB)*

A. Get labelling! (15 minutes)

1. Draw a large stick person on the board; tell the students his name is Lou.
2. Read the following scenario: "Lou often looks unhappy. At school, he doesn't talk to anyone and keeps to himself. You'd almost think Lou doesn't like people all that much."
3. Give each student a sticky note; ask them to write their answer to the following question on the Post-it:
 - Why do you think Lou acts this way?
4. Have each student stick their Post-it Note onto the stick person.
5. Read a few answers. Pick out an especially original answer or use this one: "If I told you that Lou's dad is dying, would that change your perception of him or the answer you wrote down?"
6. Explain that the exercise was about creating a **prejudice**.



Being prejudiced means making assumptions or hasty judgments about people or situations based on partial or incomplete information. It's like labelling someone before even getting to know them. These labels obscure and cover up the person's true nature, just like the sticky notes are hiding Lou. They prevent us from seeing the person as they really are (Eberhardt, 2019; Fiske and McCrae, 2012).

7. Ask the students the following questions:
 - In your opinion, what consequences can prejudices have?
 - Why do we judge people? Do you think it's helpful?
8. Wrap up the discussion with the following information:



It's natural to judge people. We do it all the time. For example, each time we walk into a room, we scan the room and the people in it, what they look like, and how they're acting. This lets us know how we should behave. Without realizing it, we place labels on people, we lump them into categories. "He's such-and-such a way," "She's such-and-such a person." These become our benchmarks. But it's important to remember that we don't know everything, we don't understand everything, and that people can surprise us if we take the time to get to know them.

While judging is sometimes a pleasure, understanding always is!

- HENRI DE RÉGNIER (1864-1936)

B. Video: Nadège and judgment – Part 1

C. Be kind to yourself (10 minutes)

1. Go back to what Nadège said in the video: Even though judging others and being judged is “normal,” saying things that are prejudiced often reveals our ignorance and lack of understanding—and even our **lack of empathy**—for others.
2. Ask the students:
 - What do you think empathy is?



Empathy is the ability to put yourself in the other person’s shoes, to acknowledge their feelings and imagine how they feel (Naître et grandir, 2016).

3. Continue by explaining that one of the ways to develop empathy is to be **open-minded** and **compassionate** with others.
4. Ask the students again:
 - ▣ What do you think compassion is?



Compassion is wanting what’s best for others and being able to see the good in people. It also means accepting people the way they are, without wanting to change them. In other words, it’s being willing to act for the common good (Singer and Klimecki, 2014; Strauss *et al.*, 2016). You don’t have to be friends with everyone, but it’s much nicer if you can get along with people, by being patient and tolerant.

5. Conclude by saying that to be open-minded, compassionate, and empathetic toward others, first you need to *be kind to yourself!*

D. Labels that leave their mark... (10 minutes)

1. Go back to the scenario about Lou, the stick person in activity A. Ask the students the following questions:
 - Now that you know what Lou’s going through, what would you like to say to him?
 - What could you do to lessen the burden of people’s judgements for Lou?
2. For each empathetic or compassionate answer the students give you, remove a Post-it Note from Lou.
3. Once all the Post-it Notes are gone, have the students look at Lou on the board. Point out to them that Lou is no longer covered in sticky notes. However, his outline is faded and smudged in places. Address the following elements to make students aware of the negative impacts of prejudices and the benefits of being empathetic and compassionate.



Our prejudices about people, and the labels we place on them—often too quickly and without really knowing them—can leave their mark. It’s better to take the time to get to know the other person, to take a real interest in them, in order to avoid the harmful consequences of unfounded judgments.



E. Compassion meditation (5 minutes)

1. Invite the students to take part in a meditation to help them develop their self-compassion and compassion for others. Also remind them that meditation is a way to take a pause, centre themselves, open up their minds, and tune in to certain elements (André, 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 1990), as they did in previous workshops.
2. Hand out the *Script for compassion meditation* worksheet. Guide the meditation using the worksheet or the audio file in the PowerPoint presentation. *Attention: The audio file takes a few seconds to load.

Tip for facilitators

For each scenario, try to take the time to look each student in the eyes with kindness; this sets an example and acknowledges their experience.

The students are not required to open their eyes, but you should strongly encourage them to do so!

If you don't have time to cover all the scenarios, select the ones you think will be most beneficial to the students, while following the suggested order.

Remember that the goal of this exercise is to let them build bridges between themselves, by focusing on the ties that bind them, as a way of creating empathy.

F. Because we're a lot alike... (15 minutes)

1. Tell the students that for the next activity, you need them to be honest, respectful, and mature, in order to make it an enjoyable, positive, and meaningful experience for everyone.
2. Explain how the activity will work:
 - On my signal, you'll close your eyes and stay quiet.
 - Then I'll name different everyday scenarios. For each one, the students who think the scenario applies to them will raise their hand, keeping their eyes closed.
 - Then I'll ask those students to open their eyes for a few seconds and look at each other, still without saying anything, and then close their eyes again. The students who don't think the scenario applies to them must keep their eyes closed.
 - We'll repeat this for each scenario.
3. Remind the students of the importance of being honest and respectful during this exercise. Before starting, ask the class to stop talking and take a deep breath. Then, begin the exercise by reading the following scenarios out loud, in order:
 - I go to school
 - I'm more of a "salty" person (salt, chips, popcorn, etc.)
 - I'm more of a "sweet" person (sugar, candy, chocolate, cake, etc.)
 - I like playing video games
 - I'm an only child (no brothers or sisters)
 - I hate oral presentations
 - My parents are separated
 - I've been through a breakup
 - I've seen someone being bullied at school
 - I have a hard time admitting when I'm wrong
 - I'm afraid of being judged negatively for who I am
 - I've experienced a major loss in my life (e.g., loss or death of a loved one)
 - I've faced one of my biggest fears
 - I sometimes feel proud of myself

4. After the exercise, ask the students to answer the following questions:
 - Did you find this exercise easy? Hard? Why?
 - How did you feel when you saw other students in the same boat as you? Did you feel better or worse?
 - What things did you find out about the others? And about yourself?
5. Conclude by explaining that the goal of the exercise was to make them aware of the things they have in common with others—the things that bring us closer together rather than push us apart. Despite our differences and the things that divide us, we have a lot of similarities and things in common, often without even realizing it. However, in our day-to-day lives, we rarely take the time to get to know others and to see the *bridges that connect us!*
6. In fact, we rarely take the time to appreciate who we are and what we're going through... Ask the students to accept their feelings about the exercise with kindness and self-compassion.

F. Hands on! (5 minutes)

1. Ask the students if they have any tips or examples of how to be compassionate and self-compassionate on a daily basis, in order to better cope with judgments. Complete their answers with the following list of strategies, which also appear in the PowerPoint presentation:

Strategies for being compassionate (toward others)

- Be present and listen attentively
- Try to understand emotions and needs
- Avoid making assumptions and judgments
- Describe a behaviour instead of judging it
- Be open-minded and kind to others, see their good side
- Practise gratitude (thank others for what they bring you)
- Do good deeds, help someone in need

(Lambert *et al.*, 2009; Lyubomirsky and Layous, 2013; Sitbon *et al.*, 2019)

Strategies for being self-compassionate (with yourself)

- Talk to yourself like you would talk to your best friend
- When you're overwhelmed by negative thoughts, take a deep breath and focus on what you're feeling
- Write down what you're feeling
- Identify your needs and goals
- Practise self-care by doing things you enjoy and that make you feel good

(Neff and Germer, 2018)



G. Video: Nadège and judgment – Part 2 and REMINDER HORS-PISTE challenge (5 minutes)

This week, ask the students to think about a person (or a group of people) they tend to judge without really knowing them. Over the next week, ask them to think of at least one good quality about that person (or group of people) and two things they have in common. Ask them to think about how this affects the way they act with that person (or group of people).



Worksheet Script for *compassion meditation*



To begin this compassion meditation, find a comfortable position—somewhere you feel good and won't be disturbed. If, at any time, you start to feel uncomfortable, don't hesitate to change positions. If you want, you can close your eyes to help you get centered. Remember that the goal of meditating isn't to gain or achieve anything. Just try to figure out what's going on inside you, here and now, without judging or deciding it's good or bad.

Compassion is synonymous with kindness and tolerance. Above all, I encourage you to be compassionate with yourself. All thoughts are welcome. If they start to wander, that's perfectly normal. Just refocus them on your next breath. So, start by paying attention to your breathing, without forcing it or trying to change it.

Now, think of someone you really love and who loves you; someone very close to you. Imagine this person is next to you and you're telling them how much you love and respect them. Imagine yourself wishing them love, happiness, and security. Tell them in your head:

"I wish you love, happiness, and security."

Now, think of someone you recently had an argument with. Maybe you're angry at this person, or maybe you don't always get along well. Despite your differences, this person also deserves to have love, happiness, and security. As you try to be tolerant and keep an open mind, tell them this:

"I wish you love, happiness, and security."

Now, begin to notice your surroundings. You can simply look at the people around you or imagine a whole community for yourself. To all these people, who are just like you and who need your compassion, you can say:

"I wish you love, happiness, and security."

Now, imagine several people who love you very much and whom you love in return. Take the time to identify them one by one. Like them, you need love, happiness, and security. Imagine all these people around you, telling you what they wish for you. Quietly, they say to you:

"I wish you love, happiness, and security."

Finish this compassion meditation by filling your lungs with air. Take a deep breath and let it out. Try to notice your feelings, thoughts, sensations, and emotions, without judging or criticizing them.

At your own pace, when you feel ready, open your eyes, stretch if you need to, and come back to your surroundings, taking as much time as you need.