



7. BEING OPEN-MINDED DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE NOTHING IN YOUR HEAD!

Fighting judgment with empathy and compassion

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Showing empathy Adopting prosocial behaviours
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along Sheet 15 : Responsibilities, rules of conduct, the virtual world, and consequences Sheet 16 : Being a role model for others
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Achieving their potential Exercising critical judgment Cooperating with others
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand the impact of prejudice and judgments on themselves and others • Adopt an attitude of openness, attentiveness, understanding and respect toward others. • Use more strategies to develop empathy and compassion for themselves and for others.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the clock icon

40-MINUTE version: DO NOT follow the steps marked with the clock icon



Materials and preparation

- Print the supplementary *Kindness Meditation Script* (1 copy for yourself).
- Print the *Be kind to yourself* poster, available on the [website](#) under the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Have sticky notes available (1 per student).
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

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A. Get labelling! (10 minutes)

1. Draw a large stick person on the board. Introduce this stick figure to students as “Lou.”
2. Read the following scenario: “Lou often looks unhappy. At school, he doesn’t talk to anyone. You’d almost think Lou doesn’t like people all that much.”
3. Give one sticky note to each student and ask them to write down the first idea that comes to mind when they read the following question (this step should be done quickly without too much thought):
 - Why does Lou act this way?
4. Once the students have written their answers, they will paste their sticky notes onto the stick figure on the board (so that the stick figure is completely covered).
5. Read a few of the answers written on the sticky notes, then ask the following question:
 - “What if I told you that, since the beginning of the year, Lou has been getting bullied at school? How would that change your perception of the situation, or your answer to my question?”
6. Listen to a few answers, then conclude by explaining that this activity is intended to make people aware of their tendency to express **prejudice**.



A prejudice is when you make **assumptions: judging** a person or a situation **too quickly** based on your own **perceptions** or on **incomplete or unfounded information**. It’s like sticking a label on someone without really knowing them or their experience. These labels cover up and hide the person’s true nature, just like these sticky notes covering up and hiding Lou. Prejudices prevent us from seeing a person as they really are (Eberhardt, 2019; Fiske & Macrae, 2012).

7. Finish up the activity by saying:



It’s normal and natural to judge people. As humans, we do it all the time! It’s a way of seeing where we stand in comparison to others. For example, each time you walk into a room, you scan the room and the people in it, what they look like, how they’re acting, and so on. This gives you cues as to how you should behave in that situation. Without really realizing it, you’re placing labels on people, lumping them into categories. “He’s like this,” “She’s such-and-such kind of person.” Those labels become your benchmarks. But **things are rarely what they seem at first glance**. Our **prejudices can play tricks on us and mislead us about others**. It’s important to remember that you don’t know everything, and that if you take the time to get to know someone, they might surprise you!

“Judging is sometimes a pleasure; understanding is always one!”

- HENRI DE RÉGNIER (1864-1936)

B. Educational clip—Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Being open-minded doesn't mean you have nothing in your head! —Part 1* for your students.

[Video clip—Part 1](#)



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C. Be kind to yourself (5 minutes)

1. Go back to the points brought up in the educational clip: even though judging others and being judged is “normal,” saying things that are prejudiced often reveals a **lack of empathy**.

2. Ask the students to define **empathy**:
 - What does empathy mean to you?

3. Listen to a few answers, then complete them with the following:



Empathy is **the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes: to understand and be sensitive to someone's experience, feelings and needs** (Naître et grandir, 2022).

4. Continue by explaining that developing empathy can help encourage compassion.

5. Ask the students another question, this time requesting they define **compassion**:
 - What does compassion mean to you?

6. Listen to a few answers, then complete them with the following:



Compassion is a **sincere desire to help, understand and care about the well-being of others** (American Psychological Association, 2015). Compassion also means being able to see the good and beauty in everyone, and **being open to those who are different from you**. You can show compassion by having a **positive and respectful attitude** toward others, even when you don't expect to get anything in return (Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Strauss et al., 2016). Being compassionate doesn't mean you have to be friends with everyone, or just accept everything that someone else does. It's about being able to assert yourself respectfully, sincerely and with positive intentions (Masson, 2018).

7. Conclude by saying that to be empathetic and compassionate toward others, first you need to “be kind to yourself!” This is important for developing and maintaining healthy, harmonious relationships!

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

1. Go back to the scenario about Lou (the stick person from activity A.). Based on the principles of empathy and compassion that you just discussed, ask students the following questions:
 - Now that you know that Lou is being bullied at school, what might you say to him?
 - What could you do to help lessen the judgments weighing Lou down?



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2. For each empathetic or compassionate answer the students give you, remove one of the sticky notes covering Lou.
3. Once all the sticky notes are gone, have the students look at Lou on the board. Point out to them that Lou is no longer hidden behind labels. However, his outline is faded and smudged in places.
4. Raise students' awareness of **the negative impacts of prejudices:**



The way we judge others, and the labels we place on them—often too quickly and without really knowing them—can **leave a mark**. This can **damage or weaken** that person's **self-esteem** (Brito & Oliveira, 2013; Dou et al., 2022). It may also **harm our relationships with others**. So, it's better to take the time to get to know the other person, to take a genuine and sincere interest in them, or simply to refrain from making judgments, in order to avoid negative consequences for yourself and others (Tyler et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2019). You may not be able to prevent others from judging (or judging you!), but you yourself can stop judging others **by cultivating empathy and compassion** (Marshall et al., 2020).



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E. Kindness Meditation (5 minutes)

1. Next, invite the students to take part in a kindness meditation to help them develop acceptance, kindness, and compassion toward themselves and others.
2. Remind them that meditation is a way for them to pause for a moment, settle themselves, open their minds, and tune in to things within and around them, just as they did in previous workshops (André, 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).
3. Use the [audio file](#) available in the slideshow to help bring the meditation to life for your students, or read it aloud yourself. *Please note that the audio file takes a few seconds to start.



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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 the experience enjoyable, positive and meaningful for everyone.
2. Explain how the activity will work:
 - When I say so, you'll close your eyes and be quiet.
 - Then I'll say different statements that you might relate to. For each statement I read, if you think that statement might apply to you, raise your hand. Everyone should keep their eyes closed.
 - I'll then ask the students who raised their hands for that statement to open their eyes for a few seconds and look at each other, quietly and compassionately, and then close their eyes again.
 - If you don't think that statement applies to you, then you must keep your eyes closed.
 - We'll repeat this for each statement.



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3. Now ask the students to sit comfortably, in silence, with their eyes closed.
4. Remind the students of the importance of being respectful to each other. Then, begin the exercise by reading the following statements out loud, in order:
 - I go to school;
 - I'm mostly into salty foods (chips, popcorn, etc.);
 - I'm mostly into sweet foods (candy, cake, chocolate, etc.);
 - I like playing video games;
 - I'm an only child (no brothers or sisters);
 - I hate doing oral presentations;
 - My parents are separated;
 - I've been through a breakup before;
 - I've seen someone get bullied at school;
 - I have a hard time accepting criticism or 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 (such as the loss or death of a loved one);
 - I've previously faced one of my biggest fears;
 - I sometimes feel proud of myself.
5. After the exercise, ask the students the following questions:
 - Did you find this exercise easy or difficult? Why?
 - What did you feel when you saw other students in the same boat as you? Did that put you at ease or make you more uncomfortable?
 - What did you find out about your classmates? What did you find out about yourself?



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Tip for this exercise

Try to take the time to look each student in the eye in a compassionate manner. Doing so sets an example and acknowledges their experience. Students are not required to open their eyes if they don't want to, but you should strongly encourage them to do so! If you don't have time to cover all the statements, select the ones you think will be most beneficial to the students while still following the suggested order. Remember that the goal of this exercise is to help them build bridges with each other by focusing on the ties that bind them. The goal is to for them to develop their sensitivity, their openness, and their empathy.

6. Listen to a few answers, then conclude by explaining the purpose of this activity:



The goal of this activity was to help make you aware of the things you have **in common** with other people—the things that **bring you closer together** rather than those that push you apart—in order to **better handle judgments**. Unfortunately, in our day-to-day lives, we rarely take the time to really get to know others and to appreciate the similarities that unite us. **Let's learn to focus our attention on the bridges that connect us, rather than on the differences that divide us...** Because deep down, we're more alike than we think!



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G. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. Share a list of **strategies** with your students **for developing empathy and compassion toward others**, in order to better handle judgment (inspired by Lambert et al., 2009; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Sitbon et al., 2019):

- Avoid making assumptions or holding prejudices;
- Describe behaviours and facts, without judgment;
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes—be sensitive to their needs and emotions;
- Take an interest in truly getting to know the other person;
- Have an attitude of openness, attentiveness, understanding and respect toward others;
- Accept others without trying to change them;
- Recognize the other person's strengths and qualities;
- Focus on what you have in common with the other person, rather than on the differences;
- Appreciate your similarities;
- Think of difference as a positive asset;
- Be grateful toward others and recognize the good that they can bring;
- Be generous, do good deeds and help others.

2. Also share a list of **strategies for self-kindness and self-compassion** (inspired by Krefft, 2019; Neff and Germer, 2018):

- Talk to yourself as you would talk to a loved one;
- When you're overwhelmed by emotions (perhaps those caused by the judgment of others), take a minute to breathe;
- Listen to yourself and be attentive to what you're feeling (such as your emotions and needs);
- Be aware of and respect your own limitations;
- When facing judgment from others, assert yourself in a way that encourages respect;
- Write down your feelings in a journal;
- Practise self-care by doing the things that are good for you;
- Ask for help if needed.

3. Encourage students to supplement these strategies with the *Strategies for building and strengthening your self-esteem* from Workshop 6 if they feel the need.

4. Conclude with these words:



Remember... **Building and strengthening your self-esteem helps you better handle judgments.** The more you feel that you're valuable and worthy of love, the less you'll fear others' judgment and the less likely you are to judge others for trivial reasons (Brito & Oliveira, 2013; Dou et al., 2022).



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H. Educational clip—Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Being open-minded doesn't mean you have nothing in your head!* —Part 2 for your students.

[Video clip—Part 2](#)



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I. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, encourage students to practise empathy and compassion toward others. Invite students to: 1) identify a person or group of people they tend to judge without really knowing them, 2) find at least two strengths or positive qualities in that person or group, or two things they have in common with them, and 3) observe how this influences the way they feel or act toward that person or group.



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Kindness Meditation Script



The meditation you are about to practice is called the kindness meditation. Kindness is the openness, cheerfulness and love we show to others, not the love we imagine in romantic movies. Loving-kindness. It's a love that allows you to accept people as they are, without judging them, by giving them the best of yourself. It's this love for others and for yourself that also allows you not to worry and to forgive when you feel judged.

I invite you to think that everyone is a bit like you, deep down. Everyone looks alike in some ways, wants the same things and sometimes worries about the same things. You can try to keep this in mind when you're with others and especially when you feel judged.

Make yourself comfortable. Remember that you can move gently to reposition yourself if you feel the need, along the way. I invite you to start by observing your breathing. Turn your attention to your inhaling. Feel the movement of the air entering your body and swelling your belly. Then, as you exhale, observe as the air reverses direction and exits through your nose or mouth. Don't try to change your breathing. It's perfect as it is right now. It doesn't need you to give it qualities or faults. Simply give it your attention by becoming aware of your sensations as you inhale and exhale.

Now, with your eyes closed, think of someone who loves you very much. Imagine that this person is at your side, giving you a big hug. They wish you safety, health and happiness. Take the time to feel all the love, all the positive wishes that come from the person you imagine at your side.

Take a deep breath and exhale through your nose.

Now that you've spent a moment receiving kindness, I invite you to change roles and pass on this loving-kindness in turn. Think of someone in the class you know less about or have less of a connection with. Turn all your attention toward them and start sending them a big wave of love and kindness. You and this person are similar, even if you don't know each other very well. Like you, they too want to be well, be happy, be healthy and safe. Take a moment to silently send them your kindness and good thoughts. For example, you can wish them a life filled with love, good health and well-being.

Take a deep breath in and relax your body completely as you exhale. You can repeat a few more deep breaths at your own pace. For a moment, try to observe how you feel in your body and what's going on in your head. And when you want to, gently open your eyes. Look around you to return quietly to the rest of the class and stretch, if you feel like it, to return to a more active position.