

Bead #7 In Your Shoes

"Don't judge a person until you've
walked a mile in his moccasins."

— Native American Proverb



Bead #7

Think about a time when something unfortunate or sad happened. For example, after an audition, your friend learned she did not receive a role in the school play. How do you think she is feeling? How do you know that? The ability to be aware of how someone is feeling, to understand it, to feel it yourself and respond with a sense of caring and compassion — is known as empathy.

Unlike sympathy, which is to feel sorry for someone's situation, empathy is like standing in that person's shoes and actually feeling what they feel. You may not feel bad for what they are going through but you are able to recognize that they feel bad and to know how that feels.

Empathy is a really important skill to develop. Studies show that kids who have high levels of empathy tend to be less aggressive, are liked by others, do better in school and have better social skills. Kids who don't have empathy often resort to aggressive behavior like bullying to get their way, and may even end up in serious trouble because they don't stop to consider how their actions affect the other person. Having empathy will help you your whole life – in school, and later in your career and in relationships.

You are born with the ability to be empathic but you have to observe it and practice it frequently if you want to fully develop it. One of the requirements for developing empathy is being able to pick up on the non-verbal signals others give and to understand their social meaning. As we discussed in the last section, non-verbal signals or cues are ways people express themselves or communicate things to us without using words. Examples include gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice. When people are angry they tend to talk louder with a sharp tone of voice, put their hands on their hips and get red in the face. Or, if your friend is hurt, she might look sad, become quiet and look downward. You can probably think of many more examples.

Compared to boys, girls generally have a stronger ability to tell what others are feeling because of differences in their brains. So, don't get mad when the boys in your life can't tell right away what you are feeling!


BE KIND
whenever possible
it is always
POSSIBLE
- **DALAI LAMA**


Here's what I think ...

Use these pages to record your reflections on the following incidents/scenarios:

Your best friend's dad just learned he earned a promotion at work and has to move the family across the country to take the job. She came over to your house in tears and said she doesn't want to go.

What factors make this a tough situation?



How is that person feeling? If you are not sure, ask yourself how you would feel if you were in her shoes.

Have you ever been in a similar situation? If not, can you imagine yourself in that situation?



What are at least two ways you could respond to the situation with empathy?

Does how you feel about the person in the story affect your empathy for her?





More to think about ...


You are in class when a girl gets caught cheating on the math test. The teacher takes away her test and says she gets a zero. Everyone in the class sees it happen.

What factors make this a tough situation?



How is that person feeling? If you are not sure, ask yourself how you would feel if you were in her shoes.

Have you ever been in a similar situation? If not, can you imagine yourself in that situation?



What are at least two ways you could respond to the situation with empathy?

Does how you feel about the person in the story affect your empathy for her?





Our thoughts become us ...

You are sitting in the lunchroom eating your sandwich, when a boy who has his arm in a cast drops his lunch tray while walking to the table. All the boys at a nearby table laugh at him.

What factors make this a tough situation?

★ _____

How is that person feeling? If you are not sure, ask yourself how you would feel if you were in his shoes.

Have you ever been in a similar situation? If not, can you imagine yourself in that situation?

_____ ★

What are at least two ways you could respond to the situation with empathy?

Does how you feel about the person in the story affect your empathy for him?

★ _____



Sometimes it's hard to be friendly, kind or empathic toward someone who is very different from us. Think of someone who ...

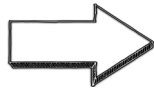


- ⇒ Has opinions that you strongly disagree with
- ⇒ Has a different background or race
- ⇒ Has an opposite personality from you (either outgoing or quiet and shy)
- ⇒ Teases or excludes you

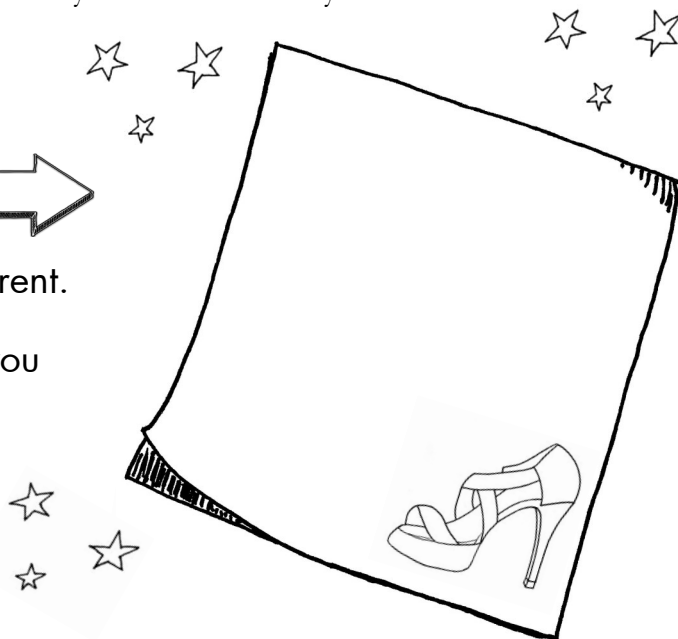
It's normal to want to be around people who are most like us. That's usually where we feel most comfortable and accepted. But, it's important to learn how to get to know people who are different, understand where they're coming from and accept them. To do this, you need to **keep an open mind** and **be non-judgmental**. You may know what it feels like to be judged or criticized. Not so good. We can be quick to criticize and draw conclusions about someone based on their outward appearance including clothes, hairstyle, weight and even accessories.

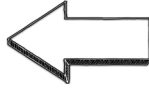
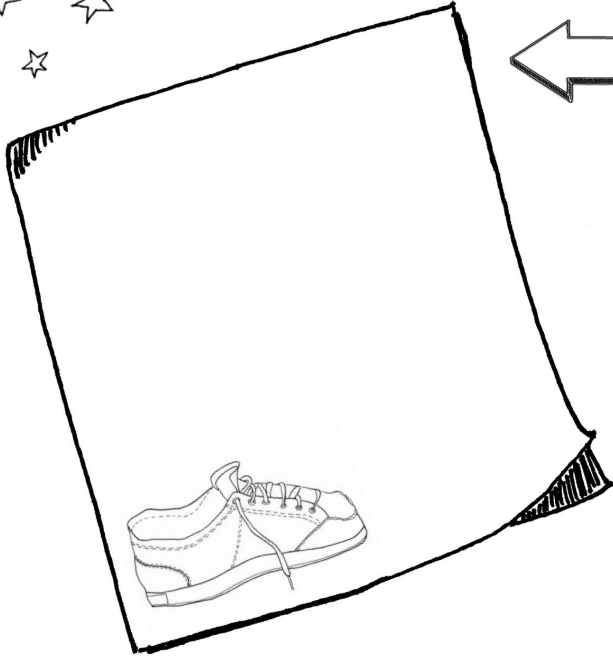
Accepting someone doesn't require you to become friends with them or change your opinions or feelings. It simply requires that you resist the temptation to judge, ridicule, tease, bully or exclude a person because they are different from you.

Think about someone in your school who is made fun of for being different.



Write down all the things you know about this person.



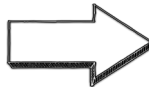


Now, think about the word "accept" for a minute. According to an online dictionary it means: To tolerate or receive approval. It's a coincidence that it sounds similar to "except" which means the opposite – to exclude.

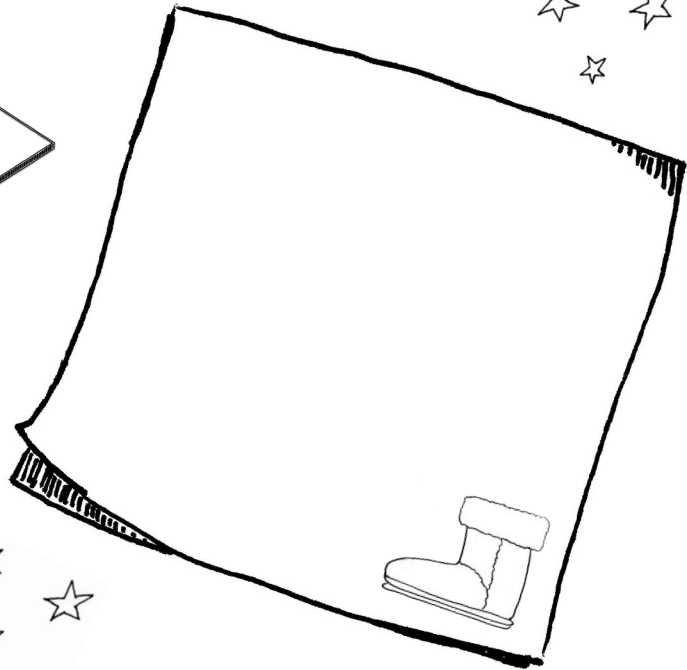
How is this person accepted or excepted at your school?



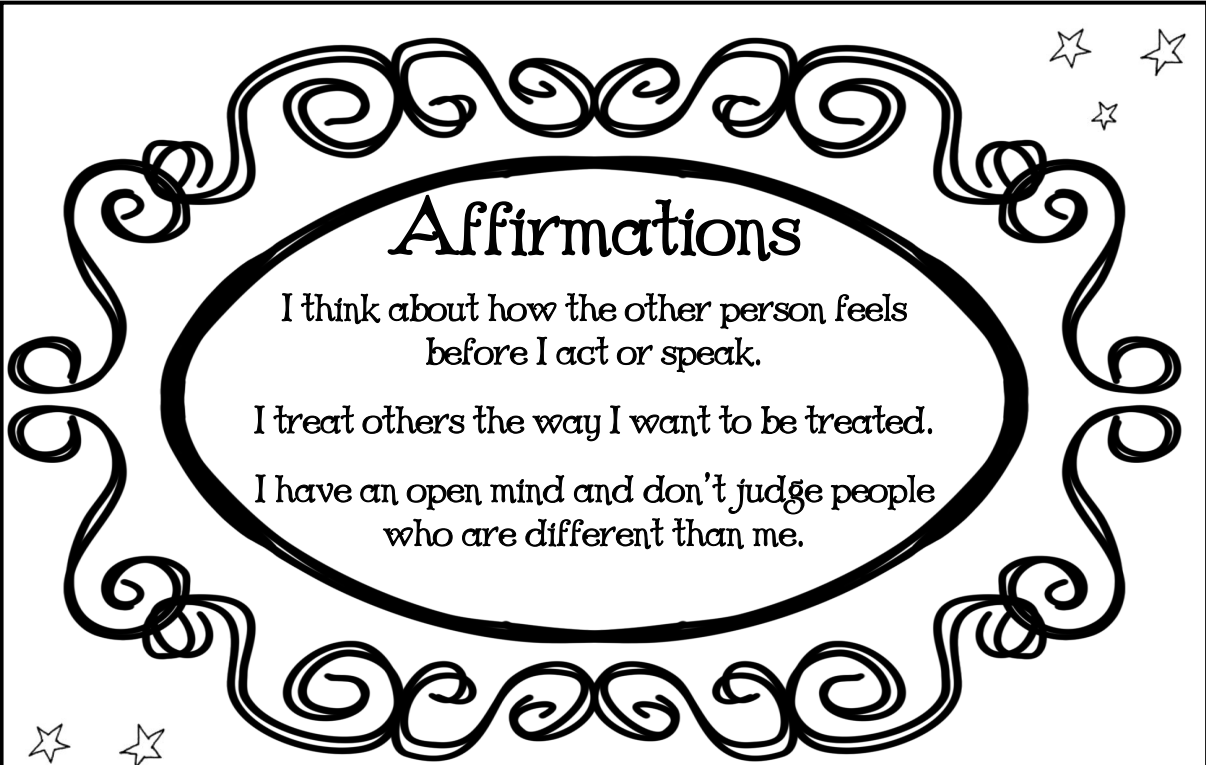
In what ways could you show empathy toward this person and be more accepting?



Think of two ways that are comfortable to you and two ways that would challenge you to step outside your comfort zone.



Accepting someone who is very different can be scary or difficult. It may require you to stand up to others or stretch outside your comfort zone. It will definitely take courage and empathy. If you can learn to do this, you are well on your way to becoming an Authentic You!

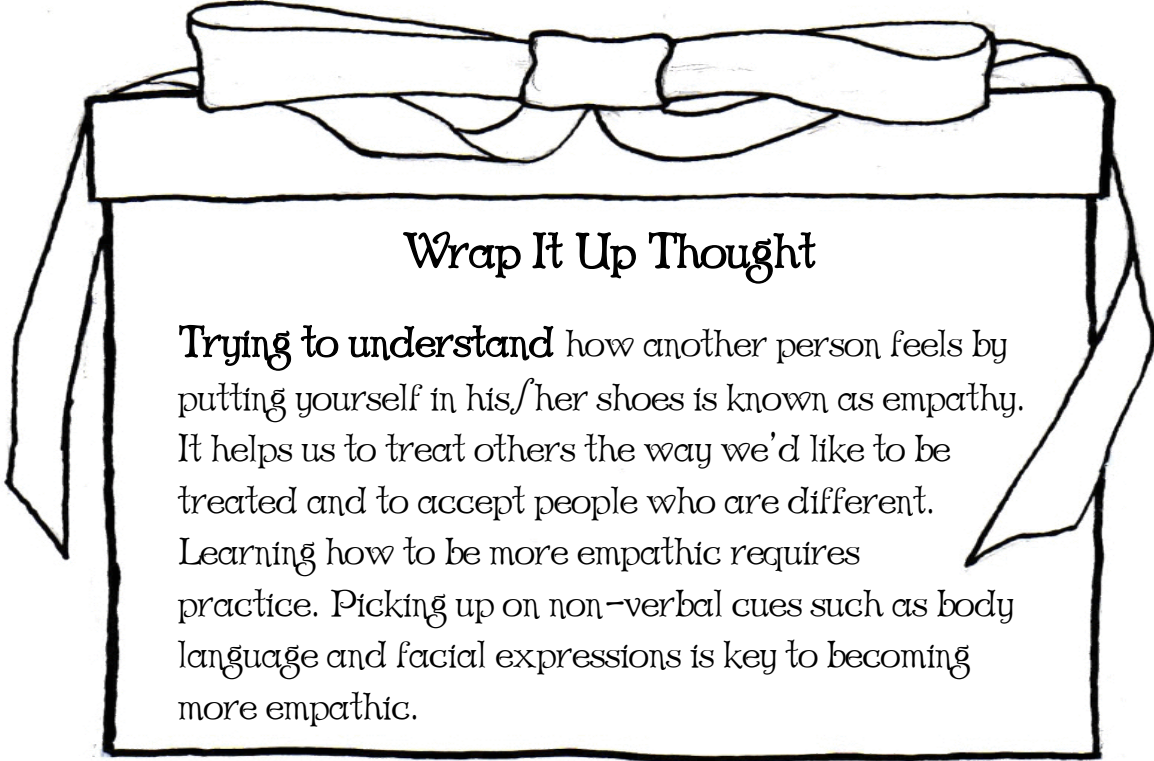


Affirmations

I think about how the other person feels before I act or speak.

I treat others the way I want to be treated.

I have an open mind and don't judge people who are different than me.



Wrap It Up Thought

Trying to understand how another person feels by putting yourself in his/her shoes is known as empathy. It helps us to treat others the way we'd like to be treated and to accept people who are different. Learning how to be more empathic requires practice. Picking up on non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions is key to becoming more empathic.

Bead #7

There is an old Indian proverb that says “Don’t judge a person until you’ve walked a mile in his moccasins.” It’s easy to judge someone based on outside appearances or what we think we know about the person. But this proverb reminds us to pause and put ourself in the person’s shoes. If possible, try to view life through his/her lens to be more kind, empathic and understanding.

Next time you meet someone who seems very different from you, take the time to think about what might be going on in his/her life ...

- ⇒ **That girl** who wears dirty or worn out clothes to school — maybe her parents are without work or battling a major illness.
- ⇒ **That boy** who is struggling in school and never does his homework — maybe his mom works nights and he cares for his younger siblings.
- ⇒ **That girl** who is loud and bossy — maybe she has a hard time making friends and is using control to get people to like her.

In the meaning of colors, pink represents kindness and compassion. The bead for this section on empathy is a round pink bead. When you look at the pink bead on your bracelet, consider the proverb and remember to stop judging people. Instead, try to get to know others (especially those who are “excepted”), and be kind, understanding and empathic. This is a huge step in your journey to becoming an **AUTHENTIC YOU!**



explore, embrace, empower

