



California Social Emotional  
Learning Modules

# Professional Learning Toolkit

7.7 EMPATHY for Educators  
8.7 EMPATHY for Students



# Topic and Module Overview


Caring for Ourselves: The Science of Emotional Resilience	MOD 1.1	Understanding Your Emotions
	MOD 1.2	Navigating Your Emotions
	MOD 1.3	How to Be Kind to Yourself
	MOD 1.4	How to Be Compassionate Without Suffering So Much
	MOD 1.5	Self-Awareness, Emotional Resilience, and Equity
Safety & Belonging in Classrooms and Schools	MOD 2.1	Why Belonging Matters
	MOD 2.2	Knowing Ourselves First: Surfacing Our Beliefs About Social and Emotional Well-Being and Belonging in Schools
	MOD 2.3	The Questions of Belonging: Interventions to Help Students Feel Like They Belong
	MOD 2.4	Meeting Students' Psychological Needs to Help Them Feel Like They Belong
	MOD 2.5	Cultivating Belonging Through Teacher-Student and Peer Relationships
	MOD 2.6	Building a Belonging School Through Trust and Psychological Safety
Teaching for Social, Emotional, and Academic Development	MOD 3.1	Preparing to Support SEL in Classrooms
	MOD 3.2	Explicit SEL Instruction
	MOD 3.3	Planning for Social-Emotional-Academic Development
	MOD 3.4	Integrating SEL into Leading
Committing to Racial Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	MOD 4.1	Unpacking Our Identities: Addressing Identity, Power, and Privilege
	MOD 4.2	Engaging in Meaningful Conversations about Race and Equity
	MOD 4.3	SEL Instruction Through a Culturally Responsive Lens
	MOD 4.4	Elevating Student Voices
	MOD 4.5	Evaluating Our Systems, Policies, and Procedures
Addressing Trauma and Adversity: Supporting Student Mental Health	MOD 5.1	Defining and Understanding Trauma and Adversity
	MOD 5.2	Recognizing the Signs of Childhood Trauma and Adversity
	MOD 5.3	Creating Healing-Centered Environments
	MOD 5.4	Developmental and Other Strategies for Healing
	MOD 5.5	Mental Health Crisis Intervention: Steps and Strategies
Supporting SEL through Family and Community Engagement	MOD 6.1	Exploring Family and Community Engagement with an SEL Lens
	MOD 6.2	Building Partnerships with and Honoring the Contributions of Diverse Families
	MOD 6.3	Listening and Communicating Effectively with Families
	MOD 6.4	Expanded Learning and SEL: Collaborating Across In-School and OST Contexts
	MOD 6.5	Aligning around SEL Through Community Partnerships

# Topic and Module Overview

Mindfulness and Well-Being for Educators	MOD 7.1	Purpose for Educators
	MOD 7.2	Self-Compassion for Educators
	MOD 7.3	Kindness and Compassion for Educators
	MOD 7.4	Gratitude for Educators
	MOD 7.5	Awe for Educators
	MOD 7.6	Courage for Educators
	<b>MOD 7.7</b>	<b>Empathy for Educators</b>
	MOD 7.8	Mindfulness for Educators
	MOD 7.9	Humility for Educators
	MOD 7.10	Forgiveness for Educators
	MOD 7.11	Hope for Educators
Mindfulness and Well-Being for Students	MOD 8.1	Purpose for Students
	MOD 8.2	Self-Compassion for Students
	MOD 8.3	Kindness and Compassion for Students
	MOD 8.4	Gratitude for Students
	MOD 8.5	Awe for Students
	MOD 8.6	Courage for Students
	<b>MOD 8.7</b>	<b>Empathy for Students</b>
	MOD 8.8	Mindfulness for Students
	MOD 8.9	Humility for Students
	MOD 8.10	Forgiveness for Students
	MOD 8.11	Hope for Students

# Learning Objectives

## TOPICS 7.7 and 8.7: **EMPATHY** for Educators and Students

Module	7.7 Empathy for Educators	8.7 Empathy for Students
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the definition and components of empathy and how it differs from sympathy and compassion</li> <li>• Recognize the benefits of empathy for social, emotional, and professional lives</li> <li>• Reflect on the pitfalls and vulnerabilities of empathy and how to overcome them</li> <li>• Explore how to harness empathy for prosocial behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the definition and components of empathy and how it differs from sympathy and compassion</li> <li>• Explore the development of empathy in young people and the factors that contribute to it</li> <li>• Recognize the impact of empathy on student learning, well-being, and academic performance</li> <li>• Explore practical strategies and techniques for cultivating empathy in the classroom</li> </ul>
<b>California Standards for Teaching Profession (CSTPs)</b> <a href="#">2024 CSTPs (full pdf)</a> 	<p><b>CSTP 1: Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning</b>            1A: Focus on Students <b>(1A-1)</b>; 1B: Knowledge of Students <b>(1B-5)</b>; 1C: Student Backgrounds and Family Engagement <b>(1C-3)</b>; 1D: Diversity and Equity <b>(1D-1)</b></p> <p><b>CSTP 2: Creating and Maintaining Effective Environments for Student Learning</b>            2A: Learning Environment <b>(2A-1)</b>; 2B: Student Behavior <b>(2B-3)</b>; 2D: Inclusive Environment <b>(2D-1)</b></p> <p><b>CSTP 3: Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Students</b>            3E: Curriculum Materials and Resources <b>(3E-5)</b></p> <p><b>CSTP 6: Developing as a Professional Educator</b>            6A: Reflection on Practice <b>(6A-2)</b>; 6B: Focused Professional Learning <b>(6B-5)</b>; 6C: Collaboration with Colleague <b>(6C-5)</b>; 6D: Collaboration with Families, Guardians, and the Community <b>(6D-1)</b>; 6E: Ethical Conduct and Professional <b>(6E-2)</b>; 6F: Activating Access and Equity <b>(6F-2)</b>; 6G: Personal Growth and Well-Being <b>(6G-1)</b></p>	
<b>CA TSEL Guidelines</b> Sourced from CDE (July 2023)	Link Objectives to Developmental Indicators in <a href="#">California Transformative SEL Competencies</a> . The <a href="#">California Department of Education (CDE)</a> aims to support and advance the efforts of educators across California who are working to fully integrate systemic SEL and equity by building on the promise of T-SEL as a concept.	

## Additional Resources

### 7.7 and 8.7: **EMPATHY** for Educators and Students

#### Articles (Adult-Oriented)

[Can Empathy Bridge Political Divides?](#) Yes, says sociologist Robb Willer—but the effort needs to be respectful and mutual.

[Can Empathy Help Stop Climate Change?](#) What would make you more likely to reduce your carbon footprint: Knowing that climate change is a threat to people—or to birds? New research has some surprising implications.

[Can Self-Awareness Help You Be More Empathic?](#) Two new studies suggest a link between understanding our own emotions and relating to other people's.

[Can You Run Out of Empathy?](#) An essay in this week's *New Yorker* argues that we don't have enough empathy to go around. But new research says we can keep renewing and expanding our feeling for others.

[Does Your View of Happiness Shape Your Empathy?](#) Do you see happiness as within your control to improve? A new study has linked this belief to empathy

[Five Ways Museums Can Increase Empathy in the World](#) Museums are a safe place to explore other points of view, cultures, and histories.

[For a More Empathic World, People Have to Choose Empathy](#) Most people know how to feel others' pain. But they have to be motivated to do it.

[How a Bad Mood Affects Empathy in Your Brain](#) According to a new study, we're less able to resonate with other people's pain when we're feeling down.

[How Small Moments of Empathy Affect Your Life](#) A new study suggests that everyday experiences of empathy contribute to our well-being and kind behavior toward others.

[How to Avoid the Empathy Trap](#) Do you prioritize other people's feelings over your own? You might be falling into the "empathy trap."

[How to Fight Stress with Empathy](#) Psychologist Arthur Ciaramicoli argues that empathic listening may be the key to reducing stress in our lives.

[How to Stay Empathic Without Suffering So Much](#) Four steps to a healthier, more helpful, and more sustainable form of empathy.

[In a Divided World, We Need to Choose Empathy](#) It's gotten harder to empathize; that's why it's so important we work at it. Luckily, we can.

[Is Your Empathy Biased?](#) A new book argues that our perspectives are always limited, but we can understand other people better if we learn to use empathy wisely.

[Is Your Empathy Determined by Your Genes?](#) A new study of twins explores where empathy comes from: nature or nurture?

[Six Habits of Highly Empathic People](#) We can cultivate empathy throughout our lives, says Roman Krznaric—and use it as a radical force for social transformation.

[What is the Relationship Between Stress and Empathy?](#) A recent *Greater Good* article about anxiety and empathy triggered controversy among readers. But what does the science say?

[What's the Matter with Empathy?](#) At a time when "empathy" is more controversial than ever, a researcher explains what it is, what it isn't, and when it fosters kindness and compassion.



## Additional Resources

### 7.7 and 8.7: **EMPATHY for Educators and Students**

#### Articles (Adult-Oriented)

[When Empathy Fails](#) Humans brains are very attuned to what others are thinking, feeling, and planning—but a new book explores when our “mindreading” powers can lead us astray.

[When Empathy Hurts, Compassion Can Heal](#) At a time when “empathy” is more controversial than ever, a researcher explains what it is, what it isn't, and when it fosters kindness and compassion.

[Where Music and Empathy Converge in the Brain](#) A new study suggests that people who are highly empathic process music differently in their brains.

[Which Factors Shape Our Empathy?](#) We analyzed answers to our empathy quiz—and discovered some interesting correlations.

[Why Empathy Matters](#) A new book argues that empathy can be a radical force for social change.

[Why the World Needs an Empathy Revolution](#) A new book explains how we can learn empathy and have better social interactions.

#### Articles (Student-Oriented)

[Can a Video Game Boost Empathy in Kids?](#) Research suggests that a video game can change the brain and help adolescents recognize emotions.

[Do Bullies Feel Your Pain?](#) Summaries of new research on empathy among bullies, dads' effects on mental health, and a cause of insomnia.

[For a More Empathic World, People Have to Choose Empathy](#) Most people know how to feel others' pain. But they have to be motivated to do it.

[How One School is Teaching Empathy After the Election](#) The story of a group of sixth graders learning to bridge political divides after the U.S. election.

[How Children Can Bridge Differences Through Virtual Exchange](#) The Empathy Across the USA program connects diverse classrooms to help students build understanding and take action on local issues.

[One Skill That Can Help Students Bridge Political Divides](#) Here's how one teacher has tried to help students envision better outcomes for everyone, a skill researchers call “moral imagination.”

[Seven Ways to Cultivate Joy and Empathy in Math Class](#) One educator shares tales of teaching life lessons to her students, alongside integrals and exponentials.

[Seven Ways to Foster Empathy in Kids](#) In our age of narcissism, a new book offers research-based tips for encouraging children to be empathic.

[Why the World Needs an Empathy Revolution](#) A new book explains how we can learn empathy and have better social interactions.

[Why We Should Teach Empathy to Preschoolers](#) One Berkeley preschool is baking empathy into its curriculum—and for good reason.

## Additional Resources

### 7.7 and 8.7: **EMPATHY** for Educators and Students

#### Podcasts and Happiness Breaks

[How to Let In New Perspectives](#) (24:44) With the U.S. election swiftly approaching, the political divide can feel overwhelming. But what happens when we recognize the limits of our knowledge?

[Take a Break With Our Loving-Kindness Meditation](#) (6:00) Loving-kindness meditation, or “metta,” has its roots in Buddhist traditions that date back thousands of years. Studies show it can help nourish your capacity to express love, feel more satisfied in life, and enhance brain areas involved in emotional processing and empathy.

#### Quiz

How empathic are you? Take this [Empathy Quiz](#)

#### Videos

[How to Keep Your Empathy Switched On](#) (20:20) Emiliana Simon-Thomas explains how empathy works in the brain and why we should resist the urge to turn away from suffering.

[How to Shift from Hostility to Empathy in Political Conversations](#) (2:29) In tough conversations, science suggests a way to bridge divides and foster understanding—by appealing to other people’s values.

[Empathy, Education, Inclusion: A Guide to Real Friendship | TEDxYouth@GrandviewHeights](#) (11:50) Fourth-grader Emma Liu’s heartwarming talk focuses on establishing connections and creating bonds, emphasizing the mutual benefit and transformative power of genuine friendships.

[We’re Experiencing an Empathy Shortage, but We Can Fix It Together | TEDxMarin](#) (13:19) Researcher Jamil Zaki says that empathy is a skill that can be built, and he explains how he — and others—are doing just that.

[The Power of Empathy | TEDxYouth@SHC](#) (9:19) High school student Audrey Moore is excited to share her views on empathy’s power to change the world.



## Additional Resources

### 7.7 and 8.7: **EMPATHY** for Educators and Students

#### Customizable Slides for Students

[What is Empathy?](#)

Download and customize these slides to teach students about empathy.

#### Practices

##### Lower Elementary/Upper Elementary

[Feelings Circle: An SEL Kernels Practice](#) (for [K](#), [1st](#), [2nd](#), [3rd](#), [4th](#), and [5th](#) grade) In a group meeting, students share their feelings while also building their feelings vocabulary and emotion knowledge. (less than 15 minutes)

[Fostering Empathy Through Literature](#) A list of discussion questions to help cultivate students' empathy. (less than 30 minutes)

[Flow and Tell](#) (adaptable for all ages) In this circle activity, students practice mindful speaking and mindful listening. (less than 15 minutes)

[Norm Co-creation](#) Students collaborate on the development of classroom norms while exploring the role of norms from multiple perspectives. (less than 1 hour)

[Promoting Perspective-Taking Through the Use of Literature](#) Review and expand your classroom or school library with books that represent diverse backgrounds. (less than 30 minutes)

[Superstar](#) Student play a game where they learn more about each other and celebrate what they have in common (less than 15 minutes)

[Using Art to Build Bridges](#) Students identify, reflect, and create art that depicts a time when they settled a disagreement with someone else, practicing perspective-giving and taking skills. (less than 30 minutes)

[What's the Tint of Your Glasses?](#) Students learn how our different backgrounds give us different perspectives. (1 hour)





## Additional Resources

### 7.7 and 8.7: **EMPATHY** for Educators and Students

#### Practices

##### Middle and High School

[Building Collaborative Classroom Norms](#) Students co-create norms that foster a welcoming class environment and ensure safe discussions among peers— and develop a personal goal to help implement the norms. (less than 1 hour)

[Feelings Circle: An SEL Kernels Practice for Sixth Grade](#) In a group meeting, students share their feelings while also building their feelings vocabulary and emotion knowledge. (less than 15 minutes)

[Fostering Empathy Through Literature](#) A list of discussion questions to help cultivate students' empathy. (less than 30 minutes)

[From Sympathy to Action](#) Students reflect on readings and engage in discussions about the responsibilities they have to address suffering and injustice in larger society. (less than 30 minutes)

[I See You. Everyone Matters.](#) Members of the classroom or meeting stand and respectfully acknowledge each person in the group. (less than 15 minutes)

[Listening with Compassion](#) Students practice five listening skills and reflect on their experience. (multiple sessions)

[Norm Co-creation](#) Students collaborate on the development of classroom norms while exploring the role of norms from multiple perspectives. (less than 1 hour)

[Promoting Perspective-Taking Through the Use of Literature](#) Review and expand your classroom or school library with books that represent diverse backgrounds. (less than 30 minutes)

[Superstar](#) Student play a game where they learn more about each other and celebrate what they have in common. (less than 15 minutes)

[Through the Looking Glass](#) Students cultivate courage, empathy, and compassion by sharing and listening to others comment on how others see them versus who they really are. (less than 15 minutes)

[Using Art to Build Bridges](#) Students identify, reflect, and create art that depicts a time when they settled a disagreement with someone else, practicing perspective-giving and taking skills. (less than 30 minutes)

[What's the Tint of Your Glasses?](#) Students learn how our different backgrounds give us different perspectives. (less than 1 hour)

##### Adult Practices to Nurture Empathy at School

[2 x 10: Getting to Know A Student](#) Teachers spend two minutes a day for ten days getting to know a student with whom they wish to foster a positive relationship. (less than 15 minutes)

[36 Questions to Increase Connectedness at School](#) Ask and respond to two questions with a colleague to build a sense of connection at school. (less than 15 minutes)

[Active Listening for School Staff](#) Staff members connect with each other through empathy and understanding. (less than 15 minutes)

## Additional Resources

### 7.7 and 8.7: **EMPATHY** for Educators and Students

#### **Adult Practices to Nurture Empathy at School**

[Assessing Your School Climate](#) Teachers identify and reflect on the attitudes and behaviors that members of the school community are exposed to every day at school, potential impacts on these members, and actions they can engage in to mitigate any harm. (less than 30 minutes)

[Capitalizing on Positive Events](#) Use good news to strengthen your bonds with friends or family. (less than 5 minutes)

[Courageous Connections that Challenge Your Biases](#) Honestly assess your personal biases and their impact, and create a plan to face the anxieties you experience about people you dislike or avoid. Next, practice courage and openness while interacting with those individuals, and reflect on what you learned. (less than 30 minutes)

[Feeling Connected for Adults](#) To help cultivate a sense of belonging at school, write about a time when you felt connected to a colleague and consider why you experienced that sense of connection. (less than 15 minutes)

[I See You. Everyone Matters.](#) Members of the classroom or meeting stand and respectfully acknowledge each person in the group. (less than 15 minutes)

[Overcoming Obstacles to an Open Heart](#) School staff build their capacity to create relationship-centered classrooms by discussing with each other what opens and closes their hearts in the classroom. The session closes with participants making their own plan for cultivating an open heart. (less than 1 hour)

[Shared Identity](#) How to encourage generosity by finding commonalities between people. (less than 10 minutes)

[What's New?](#) Participants divide into pairs, take turns sharing “what's new” with each other, and reflect on the process. (less than 15 minutes)

*Practices to Decrease Empathic Distress + Increase Empathic Concern (Compassion)*

[Brief Body Scan](#) A mindfulness practice that relaxes each body part, helping you to release tension and calm the mind. (less than 15 minutes)

[Challenging Your Thoughts and Beliefs](#) Teachers use a list of questions to explore their thoughts, beliefs, and emotions about a difficult experience in order to gain a more positive perspective. (less than 15 minutes)

[Common Humanity Meditation](#) Build compassion and interconnection by seeing your similarities with others. (less than 10 minutes)

[Imagining Flourishing and Kindness: A Mindfulness Practice for Adults](#) A mindfulness practice that helps you to envision a sense of deep well-being, extend loving-kindness to yourself, and imagine how you might “show up” in the world—with greater compassion and openness. (less than 15 minutes)

[Loving-Kindness for Adults](#) Send good wishes, warmth, and kindness to others by silently repeating key phrases. (less than 15 minutes)

[Mindful Breathing for Adults](#) Practice quietly and calmly redirecting your attention to your breath each time your mind wanders. (less than 15 minutes)

[Mindful Self-Compassion for Adults](#) A mindfulness practice to help you experience the self-compassion that naturally exists within you, and consider the simple ways that you care for yourself each day. (less than 15 minutes)





## TAKE IT DEEPER: Writing to Build Bridges 1 of 2

Sometimes it is hard to notice when our perceptions of others are inaccurate. We might feel like we are doing a good job empathizing and seeing from their perspectives, but then we might still end up in a conflict or misunderstanding. This may be because we are doing more perspective-taking than perspective-receiving.

As a brief exercise to explore the differences in perspective, think of a conflict or even a positive situation you had recently with with a colleague, student, family member, or friend. Pick someone you would feel comfortable approaching to talk to about this situation now.

**1. Write about the situation from YOUR perspective.** Include as much detail as you can, about how you felt, and the thoughts you had. If it was a conflict, you can describe the things you were worried about, how you wanted it to resolve, etc. You can describe how the conflict concluded (if it did).

**2. Next, write about this same situation from the other person's perspective.** Try to “put yourself in their shoes” as much as you can. Imagine how they were feeling, the thoughts they may have had, their concerns, and how they may have wanted the situation to turn out.



## TAKE IT DEEPER: Writing to Build Bridges 2 of 2

3. Finally, ask this person to write a brief paragraph for you about this same situation, describing how it felt for them, the thoughts they had, their concerns, and their understanding of how it was resolved.

A large, empty gray rectangular area intended for the student to write their paragraph.

When you have these three accounts, come back and review them.

- Highlight in one color how they are similar.
- Highlight in another color how they are different.
  
- How "good" were you at putting yourself in this other person's shoes?
- What new pieces of information did you learn by asking the person directly about their perspective? What pieces did you miss by projecting your assumptions or perspective-taking?

You can try this practice with students as well. To keep it light, but still demonstrate the differences between perspectives, you can invite students to think of a positive interaction.

## Module 8.7

### Empathy for Students



### TAKE IT DEEPER:

## Times When Empathy is Valuable

**Group Discussion:** Divide students into small groups and ask them to discuss a scenario where empathy is helpful or crucial. Prompt them to share their thoughts about the importance of empathy in that situation.

If they are struggling to come up with their own scenarios, you can brainstorm together or provide some ideas:

- Two students are arguing over a misunderstanding during a group project.
- A student witnesses or experiences bullying.
- A classmate is struggling with their schoolwork.
- A new student, who moved from a different country, joins the class. A classmate lost a family member or pet.

After they share why empathy is important, invite some more conversation:

- What might make it challenging to show empathy in this situation?
- Have you ever been in this scenario—either the giver or receiver of empathy? How did you feel?
- What might help us feel and show more empathy in these situations?