

# UNDERSTANDING EMPATHY

Empathy is a critical skill for young people to develop, and it is also one of the hallmarks of emotional healing. Additionally, it is a great way to get young people thinking about and understanding empathy for others. Here is how you can use it in your classroom, youth club & home to help young people develop empathy.

## Lets start with the opposite of empathy:

Learning about common “empathy busters” first are important so we can avoid them in the future. First, introduce your group to the empathy busters using the mnemonic device S.U.D.S. below:

### SOLVING THE PROBLEM

Examples: “I’ll fix it.” “I’ll talk to her.” “I’ll get you a new one.”

Many people make this mistake when trying to comfort a friend. It’s common to think everything would be fine if we could just solve the problem! Problem solving is a useful skill, but the timing must be right. What is helpful initially when another person is upset is simply expressing empathy, validating the other person’s feelings, and inviting him or her to talk about his or her feelings. Rushing to solve the other person’s problems often makes the person feel as if his or her feelings are being dismissed or invalidated.

### UNSOLICITED ADVICE

Examples: “Well, if I were you. . . .” “I think you should. . . .” “Why don’t you just. . . .?”

Again, offering advice right off the bat is not usually helpful or welcomed by a friend who is hurting. Instead, wait for advice to be sought. In the meantime, express empathy and actively listen. Just be there.

### DISMISSING FEELINGS

Examples: “It’s not that big a deal.” “You shouldn’t feel that way.” “Get over it.” “That’s no reason to be upset.”

This response makes it seem as though the person is wrong for feeling a certain way. Feelings aren’t right or wrong—they just are.

### SARCASM

Examples: “That’s just such a tragedy!” “Oh, it’s just the end of the world...” “Boo hoo, what a shame.”

Sarcasm will make an upset friend feel put down and/or misunderstood.

## EMPATHY MAPPING

Start by determining the situation or issue. Write it on a post-it note and stick it next to the word “issue” on the 'Empathy Map Handout'. The issue can be something the young person is currently going through or a hypothetical situation. E.g. “My best friend yelled at me and called me an idiot!”

Next identify what we might hear, think, see, say, and do when faced with this issue. In this example, we heard “mean words,” “rumours” and a bad tone. We felt “anger”, “resentment” and “jealousy.” We could react by saying things like “Go away” or “I hate you.” In this part of the exercise, the point is to identify actual thoughts, actions, and feelings (expressed or unexpressed). There are no right answers and we are not searching for how we should respond.

Once this is done, work through the other sections focusing on what the person identified in the issue might be hearing, thinking, seeing, saying, doing, and feeling. In our example maybe our friend is hearing their “Dad yell at her” and taking that out on us. Maybe they are feeling “emptiness” or “hurt.” Maybe they are trying to say “Can someone listen to me?” “Please talk to me” or “Please love me.”

As you talk through the items ask the group how thinking about what the person is going through or experiencing changes their outlook on the situation and how it might change how they react.

1

Create an environment of honesty, respect, & encouragement, where everyone can think critically, share & develop.

Emphasise the importance of respecting differences in opinion, listening to one another, not putting each other down & being open to new ideas.

Agree group rules together

Make time to come back to them at regular intervals

Explain Confidentiality

Be Respectful

Non - Judgemental

Have fun!

2

Use deep discussion & reflection to create 'Lightbulb Moments'



3

Your organisation’s safeguarding protocols pertain at all times.



4

End on high if you can & be sure to signpost young people to appropriate sources of support, within & or outside your organisation



# EMPATHY MAPPING EXAMPLE

## THINK & FEEL

What do they think?  
How do they feel?  
What really counts?  
Major aspirations/plans?  
Worries?



## HEAR

What do they hear?  
What friends say?  
What family members say?  
What influencers say?

## SEE

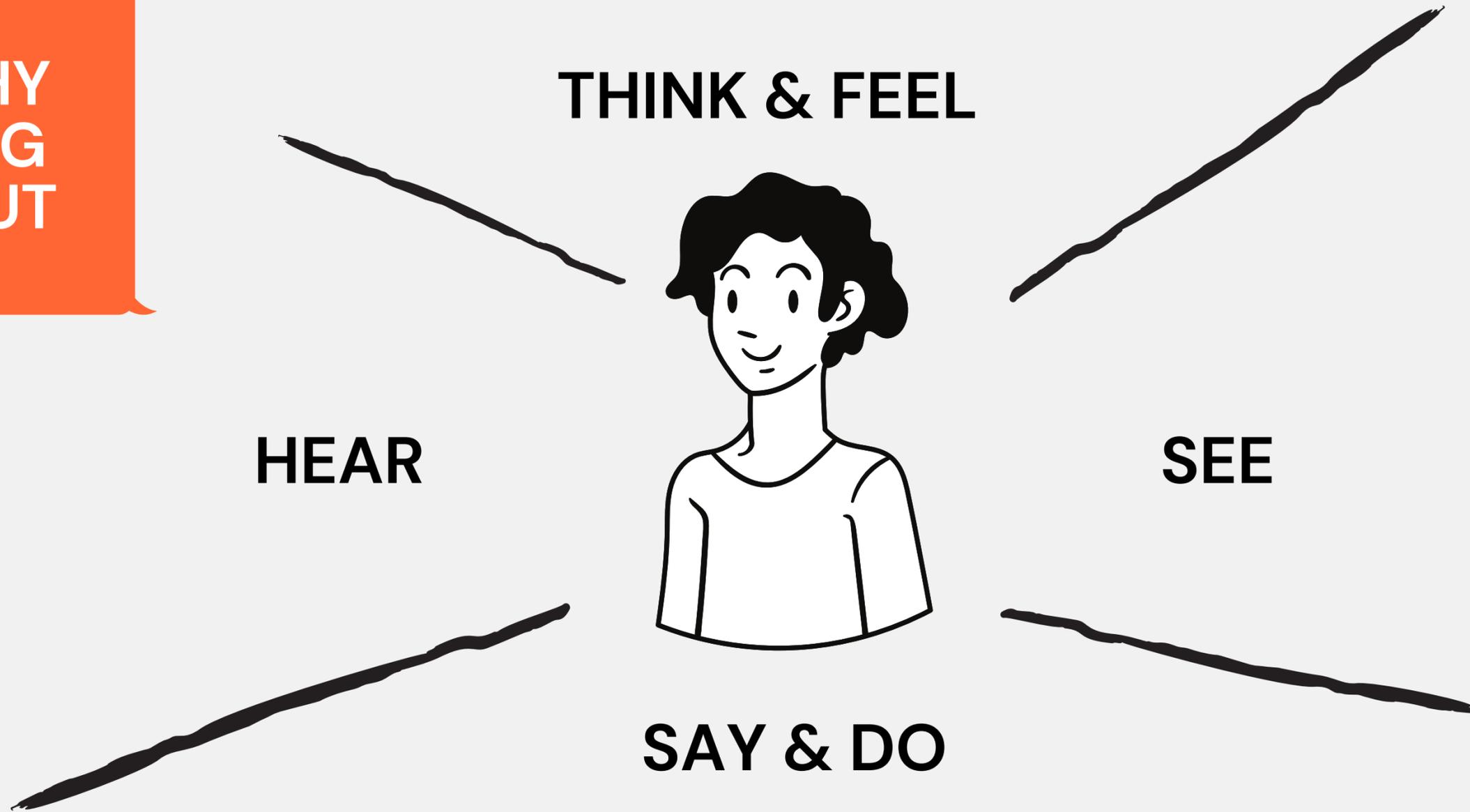
What do they see?  
Environment?  
Friends?

## SAY & DO

What do they say?  
What do they do?  
Attitude in public?  
Appearance?



**EMPATHY  
MAPPING  
HANDOUT**



**ISSUE**

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