



Activity 3 –

It's important to note that there are vast differences in how empathic people are. Sometimes, people aren't able to be empathic, or are less empathic than others. One barrier to empathy is in-group vs. out-group bias, which has led to truly horrible things in our history. Using certain in-group and out-group language can act as an empathy reducer, such as the language about refugees 'swarming' over to our country, or language that was used in Nazi Germany to degrade Jewish people.

Think now about some other examples that might be barriers to empathy and write them here:

On the other hand, there are people who overcome these barriers. Consider the example of Pfc. Desmond T. Doss (whose life story is portrayed in the film Hacksaw Ridge). In the midst of World War II, Pfc. Doss refused to bear arms and acted in an incredibly compassionate way, even as a soldier who participated in training designed to convince soldiers to kill for the cause. You can probably think of other examples of people who overcame fear and ignored propaganda messages during WWII to protect Jewish people and other minorities, even risking their lives to do so.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, parents, teachers, and caregivers are all able to help foster empathic responding. This training and shaping is called socialization.

When parents and caregivers talk about other people's emotions, when they model how to respond to someone in distress or someone who is excited, when they tell you what to do when you encounter someone in distress or who is excited, and when they praise you for helping, they are socializing prosocial behaviour.

Celia Brownell (2016) says: "prosociality arises in and through uniquely human social engagement and social experiences beginning at birth, emerging out of infants' shared activities and relationships with others, in interaction with other co-developing systems" (p 2).

Usually, our social environments help us develop our prosocial responding, because we live in a society that values empathy and empathic responding. However, sometimes we do need a bit of help!



One programme that is trying to help foster empathy is the Roots of Empathy Programme. Learn about it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwX7AUNy91c>.

Now that you know about empathy and empathic responding, and you've learned a little bit about how people socialize empathy, take some time and write your own parent advice column about how to best foster empathy:

Additional Links:

The APA's dictionary entry for empathy: <https://dictionary.apa.org/empathy>

Short articles about current research:

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2016/07/empathy-gut.aspx>

<https://blog.apaonline.org/tag/empathy/>

<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-30/january-2017/limits-empathy>

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