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# Empathy for Children

**ERASMUS + TRAINERS TRAINING TEACHERS**

BY IBEN DISSING SANDAHL



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A toolkit on implementing empathy in schools

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# Introduction for Trainers

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There are some essential features for the implementation of the Empathy for Children programme. 'Implementation' here is defined as the way the programme is put into practice. We should not think of the programme itself as being effective. It is the well implemented programme that is effective. Therefore, it is important in the Empathy for Children programme to carefully consider how to support the implementation regarding a number of factors that are crucial to ensure the implementation is of the highest quality. Adherence, dosage, delivery, participant responsiveness, programme differentiation, monitoring of control, programme reach, and adaptation are all very important. Here I would like to emphasise two key points: **adherence and adaptation**. Adherence to the program requires thoroughly working with the core components and activities in the programme. The various elements that the programme is comprised of are crucial to producing the intended effects. Adaptation to the local context is also necessary. Changes made in the programme to fit the school's capacity and resources, to students' and teachers' cultural values and former experiences should also be of crucial consideration.

This toolkit is aimed at trainers who guide and coordinate the work of several teachers at one

time. I recommend that trainers follow this manual closely, but at the same time I must emphasise that the trainers' sensitivity to the teachers, and the specific needs of the group, and the teachers' adaptation and sensitivity to a specific school context and learning situation are crucial factors for the success of the Empathy for Children programme. The trainers' willingness to dive into dialogue with the teachers is absolutely imperative.

Since the focus is primarily on developing teachers' empathic abilities, there are many exercises that are only designed for this purpose. However, there are also exercises that can be used in the teaching context with the students. The dialogue exercises, the physical exercises and the inner exercises are all vital for the process, but the trainer can switch some of the exercises presented in the programme with the 'additional exercises', which can be found at the end of this manual. This allows for the possibility of fine-tuning the balance between the various types of exercises. Bear in mind that the teachers have to become familiar with the dialogue as well as the physical and inner exercises. Trainers should be mindful of the fact that it is important to repeat the same exercises several times to support awareness.



# Trainers' Introduction for Teachers

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It is important that everyone participates of their own free will without feeling coerced. Nevertheless, I hope that all the participants will take an active part while showing appreciation for their own, and their colleagues' wellbeing. It goes without saying that confidentiality is expected.

First of all, I would like to introduce you to some of the theories, and ideas that underpin the programme and the work we are going to do together. In your capacity as teachers you play the most important role in implementing this programme. It is you who has the strongest ability to influence the learning environment in the classroom. This is true not only of the subject matter but also how you teach, and how you teach is no less important when it comes to empathy competencies.

Most teachers almost always focus on their students. How they react and how best they can learn. This is understandable but let us take the time to consider something a little more unusual. Since I know that your well-being and your awareness of your professional qualities have a positive influence on the learning environment, I would like to focus on you. I want to give you the opportunity to look at your own competencies and your own ways of dealing with challenges in the classroom. Teaching empathy begins with you. You have to be fully empathic yourself to teach empathy authentically. So, let us start with some simple exercises as we get to know each other. These exercises can be seen as part of the training in empathy competences and of course function as icebreakers.

# Chain Greetings

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### RATIONALE

The first exercise has several rationales. First of all, it is an icebreaker the trainer can use to help teachers get to know each other a bit better. Secondly, the exercise is good to get them to loosen up and create a relaxed atmosphere.

### OBJECTIVE

The exercise creates dynamism, energy, and laughter in the room.

### MATERIALS

Paper and pen.

### PROCEDURE

The trainer asks each teacher to write three questions that come to their mind. The questions must be easily accessible and arouse positive thoughts.

These questions might include;

- What is the best thing that has happened to you since you got up this morning?
- When did you last laugh until you cried?
- When did you last do something that you regretted?
- The trainer designates a time-keeper from the teachers who may still be part of the exercise.
- The teachers now line up in two rows to form pairs with members of each pair facing each other.
- The teachers now give each other a hand or some other greeting, and each gets 1 minute to ask each other the first of the three questions.
- After the 2 minutes are up, one row moves one step to the right, giving everyone a new partner. The excess person at the top of the row moves down to the excess person at the bottom of the row.
- The new pairs give greet and have 1 minute to ask each other the second of the three questions.
- The exercise is repeated one more time so that all three questions have been used.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- How was it to take part in the exercise?
- How do you feel right now?
- Was there anything that you became particularly aware of?

# Groups Standing in a Line

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<b>RATIONALE</b>	This exercise has several rationales. It is an icebreaker, letting the teachers in the group know each other. It brings awareness to similarities and differences that they will meet in the group. Some aspects of life are shared by most of the group members and, in some parts, can be quite unique.
<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	This exercise makes the teachers reflect on and show who they are and what they stand for in the group.
<b>MATERIALS</b>	(No materials needed).
<b>PROCEDURE</b>	<p>The trainer uses a couple of minutes on each of the following divisions while asking the teachers to divide into groups based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eye colour – Brown, blue, green, grey</li><li>• Those who once were good at playing football</li><li>• Those who drink a cup of coffee first thing in the morning</li><li>• Those who live in a country where they were born</li><li>• Those who go skiing in the winter</li><li>• Those who have become more sociable during the years</li><li>• Those who had a difficult time going to school</li><li>• Those who do not want to talk to anybody when they wake up in the morning</li><li>• Those who enjoy working in the garden</li><li>• Those who bring their work home with them</li><li>• Those who have grown prettier with age</li><li>• Those who like to cook</li><li>• Those who think that other people speak too much</li><li>• Those who do not always know what to say</li><li>• Those who like to make other people laugh</li></ul>

## INTRODUCTION / EXERCISE 2

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### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- How was it to participate in the exercise?
- Did something surprise you?
- Was it sometimes hard to decide which group to go into?
- Why?
- How did you feel about the exercise?

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

Suppose some teachers feel uncomfortable in taking part in the open dialogue, it is often helpful to let them reflect in pairs instead.

# The Story

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Iben Sandahl was born in Denmark and grew up in Aarhus. She moved to Copenhagen, where she became a teacher and licensed psychotherapist with her own private consultation. She is known for her Danish parenting philosophy – The Danish Way of Parenting – and her insistence on equipping parents, educators, and leaders with a fundamentally new vision of what is possible in the world. Beliefs and values encompass children's right to be their authentic selves with a safe childhood that allows them to grow at their own pace. She is a strong believer in living authentically with the capacity to change negative beliefs into more constructive and caring narratives. Her foundation is rooted in the Enlightenment and European values such as democracy, the rule of law, and equality. Her perspective is rounded by quintessential Danish traits like 'HYGGE' and the Danish way of parenting, both of which have played a role in why Denmark has been ranked the happiest country in the world for more than 40 years. Her main objectives are to inspire, help and support parents and professionals to ensure that new generations of children can grow up with a highest degree of social- and mental health by offering alternatives to the downward spiral in happiness that is seen everywhere today. She believes that empathy is the hidden gem that can make this happen, and with practice, change the world into a safer and better place for



everyone. Her methods have been followed by thousands of families, schools, colleges, universities, and organisations worldwide. When she is not working, she is first and foremost a mother of two beautiful daughters; Ida and Julie.

She states that to connect deeply to students, teachers need to connect to a deeper level **within themselves**. Empathy is the bridge between people. The more contact teachers have to themselves, the better they connect to their students, who will, in turn, learn, grow and mature in a far better and more harmonious way.



# What the Toolkit Has to Offer

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Many children and young people today live hectic zapping lives. They not only zap on the TV screen and the computer, but they also zap in and out of friendships without ever forming deeper and more meaningful relationships as such relationships often take place online. Simultaneously, contact with the parents within the modern, dual-income family is reduced to practicalities, with less togetherness and sense of presence. Although this is a roughly drawn picture of today's dilemma, it helps to illustrate that things could be so much better and need to change.

With this toolkit, school teachers will be equipped to meet students with empathy to understand that emotional intelligence is a set of essential skills for effective learning and effective performance for all students in their school, family, community, home life, and all areas involving human interaction. More specifically, it means that teachers and students can benefit greatly as measured in the following way:

- **Joy** - when everyone feels welcome
- **Compassion** - when everyone shows care and kindness to each other
- **Participation** - when everyone contributes and takes part in the community
- **Cohesion** - when fewer conflicts arise
- **Tranquillity** - when everyone can better find an inner and outer balance.
- **Patience** - when everyone understands the motivations of others' actions
- **Concentration** - when not everyone has to struggle with insecurity and unrest
- **Independence** - when everyone contributes and participates in the teaching
- **Self-regulation** - when everyone recognises emotional signals
- **Respect** - when everyone understands that everyone is equal
- **Greater academic benefit** - when the focus is only on learning
- **Happiness** - when professionalism and well-being go hand in hand

# Facts

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### THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL:

According to World Health Organization, 2018, there is within the WHO European Region a high and increasing rate of mental and behavioural health problems in adolescents at population level. The latest Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey states that, 29% of 15-year-old girls and 13% of 15-year-old boys in European countries reported 'feeling low' more than once a week; also, more than one in ten adolescents were regular weekly drinkers by the age of 15 (9% of girls and 16% of boys).

Half of all mental health problems in adulthood have their onset during or before adolescence.

Depression and anxiety disorders are among the top five causes of the overall disease burden (measured in terms of disability-adjusted life years).

Suicide is the leading cause of death among adolescents (10–19 years old) in low- and middle-income communities and the second leading cause in high-income communities in the European Region. In 2015, there were over 4000 deaths from suicide among 10–19-year olds in the region, principally among boys.

Young people who are disadvantaged – including minorities and migrants – are particularly affected.

Looking outside Europe, a 2016 survey by Pew Research Centre found that nearly one-third of American adults (as mirrored in other developed countries) never turn off their smartphones. However, the degree of empathy is six times weaker for online connections than it is for real-world interactions.

Social media has led to a tripling of self-harm among pre-teens in the US and a 150 per cent rise in suicides. There are studies that show that the frequency of a teen's use of social media has a clear correlation to their mental health. For teenagers 14- to 17-year-olds who use social media seven hours per day are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression, treated by a mental health professional, or taken medication for a psychological or behavioural issue.

There is an alarming spike in the number of children in the US being admitted to hospital after cutting themselves or otherwise self-harming. For girls aged 15 to 19, there has been a 62 per cent increase since 2009, and among pre-teens aged ten to 14, the increase is 189, and it is the same pattern with suicide. Deaths by suicide in the US are up 70 per cent in older teenage girls compared with the first decade of the century. In pre-teen girls, suicide has risen by 151 per cent.

### THE PRIMARY SCHOOL ACT OF DENMARK 1993

In 1993, the law implemented rules on educational differentiation. It appears from this that the organisation of teaching, including the choice of teaching and working methods, teaching aids, and substance selection, must, in all subjects, live up to the primary school's purpose and goals for subjects and be varied so that it corresponds to the individual student's needs and prerequisites.

Cyberbullying is said to be partly behind the rise of a desperation for approval through 'addictive platforms'. It has left them afraid to take normal risks like learning to drive or asking a boy or girl out on a date. As children and young people try to navigate their way through the challenges associated with living through a pandemic and the resulting social lockdowns, the pressure for them to resort to social media has never been greater.

A study published in 2011 suggests that empathy is declining sharply. The results, based on a survey of nearly 14,000 students, show that the average level of 'empathic concern', declined by 48 per cent between 1979 and 2009. There was a particularly steep decline between 2000 and 2009. This is part of the reason why a growing number of young people feel lonely, confused, frustrated and even angry. Lonely, confused, frustrated and angry students will not grow up to be happy, resilient, and robust adults.

Something has to change! Education in empathy can be an essential tool for teaching future generations the skills necessary for personal and

societal advancement, based on compassionate and empathetic understanding.

#### THE BENEFITS OF EMPATHY

Denmark is one of the happiest countries in the world. The fact that teaching empathy has been mandatory since 1993 in schools in Denmark is a factor that contributes to the happiness of the country.

Thus, the teaching in all subjects must be based on the individual student's prerequisites and current developmental stage with an aim to what the individual student is able to achieve.

Helping students develop a strong sense of empathy is beneficial because it helps them to build a sense of security and stronger relationships with other students and teachers. It promotes social harmony and reduces the likelihood of bullying, all of which positions them successful learning. Many frameworks, approaches and interventions for promoting and protecting the mental health of adolescents have been proposed, and their effectiveness was reviewed in a report commissioned by the WHO

## EMPATHY – A WAY OF BEING

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Regional Office for Europe. Over 300 research articles were found in a search of the literature on interventions in schools and communities and digital interventions, and there is especially strong evidence that high-quality preschool programmes which develop children's social and emotional skills can have positive, enduring benefits for their development, including their emotional and social well-being, cognitive skills, readiness for school and academic achievement, especially for those who are the most vulnerable.

Furthermore, a substantial body of evidence indicates that effective implementation of interventions to teach social and emotional skills at school has a significant positive effect on such skills, on students' attitudes to themselves, others and school, on the commitment of children from a diverse range of backgrounds to school and on their academic performance.

Empathetic behaviour also benefits students later in life. They are better equipped to deal with conflict and have more satisfying relationships. They have lower levels of stress and higher levels of overall happiness. Empathetic adults have greater success personally and professionally. In Denmark, for example, the health system is characterized by busy weekdays, making it difficult for doctors to have sufficient focus on showing empathy towards patients. International research shows that education, in itself, is not enough. Therefore, empathy is put on the school schedule, where 'Man First' has become a compulsory part of education. This is to ensure that the future doctors can meet the patients with an understanding of their situation and thereby be able to better see the person behind the diagnosis.

### TO CARRY THE RESPONSIBILITY TOGETHER

All close relationships around student are essential for empathic development. Robust international evidence shows that parental interventions which incorporate social and emotional skills development (empathy) have significant positive outcomes. This important process of socialisation, which parents are responsible for, continues when the student begins school. Here, however, it becomes a merger or collaboration between parents and teachers around common tasks and goals. Neither parents nor school staff can be separated when it comes to influencing students. Therefore, it is a task that must be solved jointly, with the resources that each brings into the student's life.

Empathic teachers contribute to students' capacity and motivation to learn. Empathic teachers strengthen their students' sense of belonging to their schools and their relationships with teachers and classmates. Various international documents have stressed the importance of such 'soft' skills. According to the Council Recommendation by European Commission, 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, 'soft skills' like cognitive (critical thinking and responsible decision-making), personal (awareness, drive, self-management), and interpersonal skills (communication, negotiation, cooperation and teamwork, inclusion, empathy, and advocacy) are essential for a good and healthy life.

A meta-analysis of over 18 empathy training programmes found that empathy training is effective. The findings suggest that empathy training programmes are significant overall, and indicated that 4 factors showed statistically

## EMPATHY – A WAY OF BEING

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significant correlations with higher effect rates:

1. Training health professionals and university students rather than other types of individuals.
2. Compensating trainees for their participation.
3. Using empathy measures that focus exclusively on assessing understanding the emotions of others, feeling those emotions or commenting accurately on the emotions.
4. Using objective measures rather than subjective, self-report measures.

The findings indicate that; (a) empathy training tends to be effective, and (b) experimental research is warranted on the impact of different types of trainees, training conditions, and types of assessment.

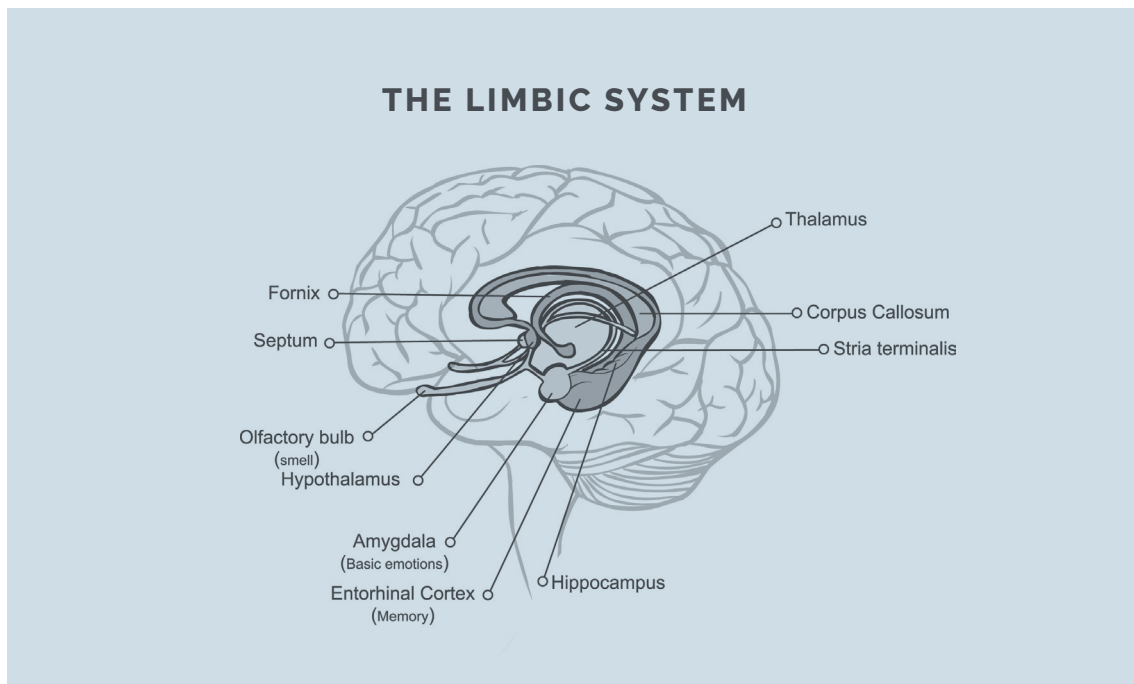
Looking only at the teacher's role in this toolkit, five prerequisites are crucial for students' optimal empathic outcomes. These are:

- Their feeling of self-accord and motivation
- Their ability to build good relationships with students
- How they deal with challenging situations
- Their awareness of building a safe classroom atmosphere
- Having a strong support system around

Teachers must know what **motivates** them to have authority and inner anchoring to build self-accord and create **healthy relationships**. These preconditions are necessary for a practical, empathic approach to positively impact the relationship and the student's learning. This is to ensure an excellent **classroom atmosphere** so that empathy can take place, even in difficult and **challenging situations**. This can only be done with a good **support system** around both students and teachers.



# Theoretical Foundations



People used to think that babies were born without empathy. But that is simply not true. We are all wired for empathy; we just have to learn how to connect the wires to make it work. Empathy sits in the brain's limbic system. This controls memory, emotions, and instinct. It is a complicated neurological system involving mirror neurons and the small region of the cerebral cortex called the insula. What many do not realise is that we are biologically predisposed to connect to others. This is made possible through many neuronal systems that are embedded in the right hemisphere of the brain, the mirror neurons being an important aspect of this. The

self is not an individual entity but a relational construct. There is a new field in brain science, social neuroscience that has found the circuitry in two people's brains activates while they interact. The latest thinking about empathy from social neuroscience is that our default wiring is there to help this. That is to say, if we attend to the other person, we automatically empathise, we automatically feel with them. These newly identified neurons, mirror neurons, act as a neuro Wi-Fi, activating in our brain exactly those areas activated in theirs. So, if that person is in need, if that person is suffering, we are automatically prepared to help.

## EMPATHY – A WAY OF BEING

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A mirror neuron is a neuron that fires both when an animal acts and when the animal observes the same action performed by another. Thus, the neuron 'mirrors' the behaviour of the other, as though the observer were itself acting.

Daniel Siegel, a clinical professor of psychology at UCLA, says,

*'Empathy is not a luxury for human beings, it is a necessity. We survive not because we have claws and not because we have big fangs. We survive because we can communicate and collaborate.'*

In other words, empathy facilitates our connection to others. It develops in infancy through the relationship with the attachment figure. A child first learns to tune in to his or her mother's emotions and moods, and later to those of other people.

This is why the role of teachers is tremendously important in the social development of empathy in students. In particular, it plays an important role in the development of the teaching staff by encouraging future teachers to strengthen their own emotional skills. Thus, support can be given to empathy development and to the emotional regulation of their students. It is clear that teachers' empathy contributes to their ability to meet students' overall educational needs, and boost students' confidence in the school environment.

A systematic review of 70 studies from Danish Clearinghouse lead by Svend Eric Nordenbo

from 2008 regarding *'which manifest teacher-competencies affect the academic performance of the students?'* shows that three competencies are crucial for teachers:

- Didactic abilities/competence – knowledge of one's subject and subject-specific didactics.
- Management-competence/classroom management—the ability to create clear structures, overview, clear rules, and a healthy climate.
- Relational competence.

He further formulates it in this way:

*'If we want to create a good learning environment it's important to teach teachers to create good relations: To show tolerance, respect, interest, empathy and compassion to each child and appeal to the children's understanding of a conflict instead of bullying them.'*

Danish psychologist and author Helle Jensen puts it this way:

*'It takes a lot of empathy to meet students in a way that meets them with respect and equality, while taking responsibility for developing their capacity for professional as well as emotional and social*

## EMPATHY – A WAY OF BEING

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*learning. It requires a lot of personal integrity of the professional to be able to maintain the respectful presence in relation to themselves and to others, especially in conflict-filled, challenging and stressful situations.' (Jensen, 2014)*

Students need, more than anything, support to maintain or develop their empathy skills and to this they need teachers who are motivated and master self-accord.

According to Jesper Juul et.a., 2016.

*'Self-accord means a person is at peace at the core of their being, which is the only place from where a person can relate deeply to other people and to a complex world undergoing extreme transformation, a world in which it is difficult to find role models.'*

In the end, it is all about teaching student's empathy, and the crucial factor for this is the teacher's natural ability to meet the students empathetically. An empathic approach does not take place for one hour a week, but at all times and in all subjects during a school day. It is for the teacher to make a difference for the students, create meaningful relationships, and be credible role models, to show the way through their actions, as **a way of being**.

Both empirical findings and philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical theory support that teachers' empathic competencies are of great importance for the students' possibilities to develop both social-emotionally and intellectually.

## INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE ACROSS CULTURES

Intercultural competence is about how to see things differently and how it is difficult to define a singular truth generally and within schools in particular. Reality is always seen from different perspectives, and the societal reality - and thus the reality of the primary school - is multicultural. This means that there is a risk of doing the students a severe disservice if the primary school does not incorporate and reflect diversity in its teaching, where students can practice getting in contact with their friendliness and compassion.

Intercultural competence supplements and expands empathy as a way of being for students and teachers. It gives a better understanding of cultural norms, binaries, the class, the teachers, and the school as a whole. Intercultural competences also help to adapt to new work environments and prevent culture shock while enhancing cultural awareness, knowledge, and practical skills.

Intercultural competences are not a subject that takes time and weight from other subjects. It is a pedagogical approach that considers the student-base in the primary school and incorporates the multicultural as a resource. Thus, the strengthening of knowledge and professionalism is still at the forefront. More importantly, the pedagogical approach is adjusted so that it further enhances professionalism and the acquisition of knowledge.

Teaching empathy in an intercultural environment requires a shift in the teaching approach, from a **didactic model** (teacher to student) to a **dialogic model**.

## EMPATHY – A WAY OF BEING

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The teacher must facilitate a classroom environment where students can engage with issues through **questions that demand discussion, curiosity, critical thinking, openness and tolerance**. Motivate students to engage in intercultural interactions to help them make sense of their environment and advance their understanding of intercultural interactions.

This kind of environment will give a better understanding of the students, break stereotypes and make it easier to act empathically. Intercultural competences complement empathic skills like self-awareness, self-management, and good communication skills. They also promote interpersonal and situational sensitivity. It is all about teachers accommodating perceived student differences while focusing on the similarities between students.

According to Jensen (2013), intercultural competencies are closely related to social-emotional-competencies. She lists three aspects of intercultural competencies:

1. Social-emotional competencies (**empathy**)
2. Knowledge about cultures (one's own and others)
3. Knowledge about discrimination and cultural conflicts

# Using the Toolkit

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To create the best conditions for students in school, they must feel that they are mastering something. They must feel that they belong to a meaningful community and that their opinions and attitudes are recognised. This toolkit focuses on empathy and how empathy can be implemented in a school context. Many Danish teachers will argue that empathy is not a concrete tool, but something they 'just do' – naturally. Nevertheless, a natural approach does not diminish the importance of empathy. When a method is tested and incorporated into school life the teaching establishment will often focus on what can be measured immediately while the long-term beneficial effects will not show themselves until much later.

It is, therefore, important to understand that empathy works like the roots of a tree. They shoot, spread and grow bigger and stronger than the crown of the tree. The crown can be admired, and the fruits counted, yet there would be no tree without the life-giving root system. Teachers carry their students in their hands (while they are in school) and they are like small young trees that need fertiliser and a good soil to grow in, so that the crown can grow and flourish and later be admired.

To connect openly and empathically with students, teachers must be self-aware and capable of self-reflection. They must acknowledge that student's experiences, perceptions,

and responses to the world might be different from their own, yet just as valid. Above all, they must be true to themselves in order to be perceived as authentic. This fine work takes place through the teacher and the effect should never be underestimated. It matters as feeling heard and understood is a human need. Everyone needs to feel understood. Empathy helps the students get in touch with their emotions and gives them an emotional understanding of themselves and others.

This toolkit is a concise practical guide for trainers helping teachers to improve their empathic skills to better teach students empathy. It is an empathic approach as a way of being and contains five essentials:



## EMPATHY – A WAY OF BEING

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**Motivation**

### THE FIRST ESSENTIAL, 'MOTIVATION',

describes the necessary basics to facilitate teaching in empathic inner and outer balance. The better teachers understand themselves, and know how to get balanced, the better they will understand and meet their students with empathy. Furthermore, it touches on the topic of how to motivate students and how to help them regain balance.

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**Relationship**

### THE SECOND ESSENTIAL, 'RELATIONSHIP',

deals with how important it is that teachers form good and strong relationships with the students. Good relationships are imperative for student's well-being and learning and subsequent empathy.

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**Chaos v. Harmony**

### THE THIRD ESSENTIAL, 'CHAOS VERSUS HARMONY',

deals with how teachers can handle troubled students, bullying and other conflicts in an empathetic and constructive way. It requires attention directed inwardly and outwardly while simultaneously meeting the students with care, curiosity, and respect.

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**Atmosphere**

### THE FOURTH ESSENTIAL, 'ATMOSPHERE',

deals with how the teacher can implement the best conditions for students to feel safe and relaxed. For optimal learning to occur the classroom, both physically and mentally, must be inclusive, instructive and caring.

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**Support System**

### THE FIFTH AND LAST ESSENTIAL, 'SUPPORT SYSTEM',

illustrates how a healthy support system is essential for both the student and the teacher to thrive. Unresolved conflicts, whether obvious or not, will always impede the emotional and learning competencies, and must therefore be handled in a positive way.

## EMPATHY – A WAY OF BEING

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There are exercises for every essential. Some aimed for teachers, and others that can be used in the teaching context with students. Additional exercises are to be found in the appendix section.

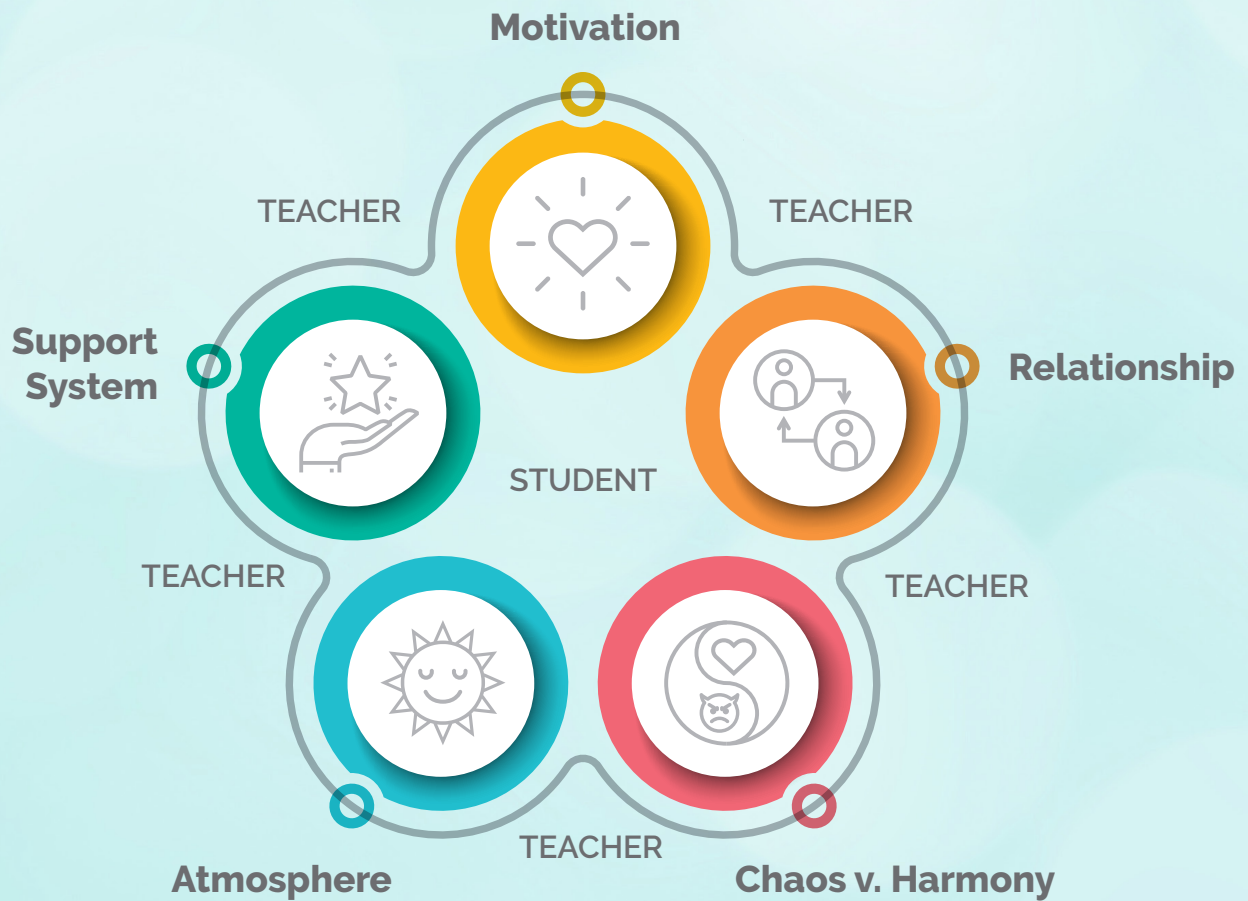
The exercises are all influenced by Iben Sandahl's teaching and the Danish philosophy of empathy. Nevertheless, some of them are not new, and not all the exercises have been fully created by her. Several have been developed independently by professionals who have explored what it takes to understand themselves and others on a deeper level for thousands of years. Some exercises have been recycled and adjusted countless times all over the world, depending on purpose. Therefore, those that have served as inspiration are credited in the resources.

The procedures for the exercises must be followed to get the optimal effect. However, over time, teachers should adjust them to suit the different classes and cultural norms and traditions. There is no progression in relation to the order. The exercises should be seen as an inspiration and concrete tools for teaching empathy and can be chosen freely according to focus and interest. All meditation exercises are to be used with teachers and students, no matter where they are placed in the toolkit.

Iben Sandahl's teaching method strives for a non-punitive but appreciative, inquisitive, friendly, and balanced approach, which should foster empathy and greater happiness.

# Empathy

## – A way of being



# Your Motivation Leads the Way

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Professional-personal development

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# Motivation

# Motivating the teachers

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Being a motivated teacher is crucial in keeping the best circumstances for empathy to unfold sustainably and to act independently, honestly, and through moral principles. It requires maintaining personal development because it contributes to stabilising pedagogical values and involving teachers' relational competence to appear authentic and trustworthy while keeping engaged with the integrity and self-accord that characterises empathy.

If teachers are not motivated when in their work, if they have lost any sense of purpose, or feel they are unvalued for the role they can play in their students' lives and learning, they might well have lost the sense of vocation, the spark of energy that led them to become teachers in the first place. Their students will sense that they are not entirely committed to the role of being a teacher and this, in turn, will be reflected in students' behaviour and learning.



# My Purpose

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## RATIONALE

Paying attention to what motivated the teacher to first enter the profession can be very important as it can help rekindle the original energy and desire to practise at a deeper, more meaningful and self-fulfilling level. It is quite common for motivation and good intentions to diminish in the fog of everyday pressures. So, becoming refreshed and reacquainted with what were the teacher's original motivations provides an important tool on the way to being able to meet students with an open heart, authenticity and empathy.

## OBJECTIVE

The focus in this exercise is self-accord and within.

## MATERIALS

Notebook, paper and pen.

## PROCEDURE

The trainer says:

Ask yourself these questions and write them down in your notebook:

- What is the teaching profession all about for me?
- Is it about my interest in children?
- Is it to convey and pass on something of importance?
- Is it because I want to make a difference?
- Is it because I can immerse myself in exciting projects that I find interesting or because it was the only profession I could get into?
- Does my motivation guide me every day? How? / Why not?
- What do I need to be able to hold on to the motivation?
- What does it take to get my motivation back?
- Why is motivation important to me?
- Why is motivation not vital to me?

The trainer continues: Examine your motivational reasons and remind yourself of them - preferably daily. Write a note to yourself and put it on the refrigerator or put your words in a frame and hang it in the classroom. Especially, if you sometimes lose the spark, remind yourself why you are essential to your students and why you are doing what you do.

## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 1

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### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- Did you observe anything unique about yourself during this exercise?
- Do you have a sense of what is important to you?
- Why do you believe that is important?
- Did you feel a connection to your heart and to your true self?

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

How the teachers felt while doing this exercise and if something new perspective arose.

### NOTE TO TRAINER

It should be more apparent to the teachers what motivates them and makes them happy. They can use this knowledge to help pursue personal/professional goals while also connecting with their inner balance.

# Opening the Heart

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## RATIONALE

The primary rationale for this exercise is to find the teacher's motivation as a fundamental part of self-awareness. This forms the basis for self-management and relational competences as well as intercultural competencies. Self-accord and mindfulness exercises help to relax and focus, and physical exercises improve mental health. Motivation gives energy and a desire to share what the teacher is passionate about. It makes them find their divine source of power. It opens them up to the side of themselves which shines with strength and purity - where empathy is found.

## OBJECTIVE

This technique helps the teacher connect with their deeper heart, increase mental clarity, regulate brain chemicals and hormones, and produce a natural high. When in contact with the heart, the teachers will experience more receptivity of grace, love, compassion, generosity, fulfilment, and peace. When the heart is closed, there can be feelings of resentment, fear, jealousy, hopelessness, judgment, and cynicism.

The exercise is about turning their attention inward and making contact with the heart to find their purpose in life.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

The trainer says:

- Put yourself in a comfortable position on the floor.
- Scan your body briefly.
- Take a deep breath in your nose out your mouth - some nice nurturing deep breaths, just tuning into where you are right now. Allowing everything that happened earlier today, or any thoughts just wash away. As you breathe, allow your breaths, to just anchor you.
- Feeling your shoulders meltdown, and your forehead relax. Dipping into a deeper and overall surrender.
- Lean back into an imaginary waterfall of light.
- Imagine the waterfall flowing down, as the back of your heart leans into the waterfall of light.
- Take a deep breath and allow the back of your heart to take in the light.

## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 2

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- So, while keeping your awareness in this area, just allowing whatever tasks that are at hand, whatever it is that you want to feel more motivated for, whatever there might be on your plate today, just taking some nice deep breathes - and allowing your WHY. Allowing your vision, your motivation to natural efforts back from this centre of your being.
- Imagine you are fuelling your Spirit and filling yourself up with love as you take in the light.
- Take a few deep breaths as you feel the light pouring in and let love fill into the whole centre of your heart.
- Each breath is connecting you within - deeper and deeper. Feeling the emotion, the power, connecting to the heart. Just take a few more breathed right here. Just allowing yourself to fully emerge in it.
- Take a deep breath in and hold it – really anchoring every cell of your being – and exhale, and you can slowly move your fingers and toes and eyes.
- Once the centre is full of the light of love, the heart will naturally open.
- When we feel more grace and ease while putting in the work, while doing what we want to do, what we feel called to do, this is when we can really connect to that divine motivation.
- Stay a minute in silence before coming back to the class.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- Where did the exercise take you? (Does anyone want to share their experience?)
- Did you feel safe/good? (If no, say: why do you think so?)
- Who did you see in the light?
- Has it become more transparent for you what you need to pay more attention to?
- What is the first step for you to take, now your motivation has become clearer to you?
- Who will you tell about this?

### WHAT TO OBSERVE?

Where can the motivation can be found and expressed?

### NOTE TO TRAINER:

It should be more evident to the teachers just what motivates them and makes them happy. They can use this knowledge to set some goals and better pursue them. By taking light in through the rear of their heart and opening the heart from behind, they allow the light of love to radiate from the centre of the heart and tap into receiving love. During this exercise, the front side will also come into balance because it will naturally open with the sense of a glowing heart.

# Diaphragmatic Breathing

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**RATIONALE** When teachers consciously breathe, they become present with themselves instead of going from task to task with hundreds of distractions. Conscious breathing helps the teacher to feel and process emotions. It allows them to bring more oxygen into their cells and their organs so that any part of them can function better. It helps to think more clearly, digest food and have a stronger immunity to diseases as well as to meet students with empathy.

**OBJECTIVE** The primary purpose of this exercise is to train attention on breathing as a fundamental part of empathy. Physical and mindful practices play an important role in developing empathy, kindness, and compassion, focused on contact with the heart. This way of relating to breathing infects the teachers' way of relating to others. Breathing is necessary for life. But what many teachers do not consider is that breathing is also the quickest, easiest, and most rewarding solution to deal with stress.

**MATERIALS** (No materials needed).

**PROCEDURE** The trainer says:

- You can either sit or lie on your back for this breathing technique.
- Close your eyes.
- Place your hands above your diaphragm.
- Now, slowly inhale through your nose and feel your stomach start to expand.
- Exhale as if you're blowing out a candle.
- Pay attention to your breath and remember to breathe deeply and slowly.
- Continue breathing; inhale, exhale (repeat 4 or 5 times).
- Get ready to open your eyes in a moment and come back to the room.

**DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS**

- What does breathing do to your body?
- How does it make you feel?
- What do you want to do to hold on to that feeling?



## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 3

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**WHAT TO OBSERVE** How the teachers' bodies and minds felt ease and relaxation. When they approach life from a place of ease, they are more present and resilient in all situations. Higher choices and discernments are more attainable and sustainable, and their connections with students are deeper and more genuine.

**NOTE TO TRAINERS** Breathing at 6 breaths per minute is ideal for the teachers to practice. Simply inhale for 5 seconds, and then exhale for 5 seconds. Inhale gently and slowly through their nose as if slowly filling a balloon with air. Pause. Exhale slowly through their mouth, pursing their lips as though blowing through a straw to slow their breathing down. Pause and repeat.

# Lead by Example

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## RATIONALE

The most important tool to use in students' company is to see the student behind their actions. It requires the ability to remain calm with an open heart and not getting triggered. The moment this is mastered, the relationship is strengthened. It becomes possible to meet the student with care, kindness, support, and curiosity and to create the best conditions for a safe atmosphere to unfold.

## OBJECTIVES

The focus of this exercise is curiosity and having an eye on the absent but implicit. What is it the student reacts to, misses, longs for, feels pressured over, and, how can the teacher better meet the student at that level to feel seen and understood. The teacher must talk to the students about what is important in their lives to become more closely connected to just this and how it contributes to the class atmosphere.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

The trainer sets an example for the teacher:

You walk through the schoolyard, and Amber runs to meet you. She tells you as she cries that Sarah and Emily have been teasing and that she wasn't allowed to join their play. At the same moment, Sarah and Emily come running over, shouting, 'She is lying. It's just because she can't figure out what we are playing.' More students gather around, interfering with the conflict with their view about what they think has happened. Then things escalate. Three girls cry, and other students are shouting at each other. Hence, you realise that this will take up too much of everyone's attention and must, therefore, be appropriately handled. You cannot be triggered now or show that you really do not have energy to delve into this, as you had a bad night's sleep and a quarrel with your spouse. You need to lead the way.

You say that you will take care of it in the class when the break is over. You let Amber accompany you to the classroom making sure to listen to what she has to say about what took place (only the two of you).

## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 4

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

You can then start by asking her questions such as the following:

- What happened?
- What did you do?
- What did you say?

Amy might reply as follows:

- They said that...
- Then I said that...
- Then I did...

Such sentences are selected unconsciously by Amber to fit into the narrative and meaning of the situation from her point of view.

Acknowledge what she has to say ('I hear you, it doesn't sound fun') while letting her know that you also need to listen to how Sarah and Emily experienced it. When you are finish talking with Amber, ask them the same questions when all are gathered together (also, only the three of you, just outside the door).

Your job is to understand the thoughts, feelings, and moods that Amber has formed from the situation. Most often it is something like:

- I think the others are unfair
- I get upset and sad
- I will never play with them again
- They always stick together

It is the meanings that Amber attaches to the situation that pertain to the intentions and values that really explain the conflict.

Therefore, you can ask Amber about:

- What made you think in that moment?
- How did you feel?
- Where did that feeling sit in your body?
- What did you do?
- How would you rather have dealt with it?

## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 4

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

If the conflict is more complex, it might work well to gather the class instead together to resolve the conflict in the classroom. This is to ensure:

- That the students get to relate to the experience.
- Students are allowed to talk about their intentions and thus to better understand each other.
- That the students increase their empathic abilities by practicing understanding the situation from other students' perspectives.
- That the students create an appropriate way to be in community with each other.

The student (Amber) talks about her experience of what has happened, and she must not be interrupted or commented on. The rest of the class listens.

You can support her story by asking:

- Now Amber, can you tell the class what happened?
- What were you thinking?
- How did you feel?
- What did you do?

Let Sarah and Emily also explain, using the same questions. No others are allowed to comment during the process unless they are asked.

Choose two students from the class and let them retell what they have just heard. Amber, Sarah and Emily are told that they must now only listen to their classmates like the rest of the class.

Ask the two students one at a time and without interrupting each other:

- What did you particularly notice that the student (Amber) said? (Help the student to make it concrete and to use Amber's own words).
- What do you think is essential for Amber?
- If you were to describe a picture of what Amber thinks and believes, what would it be? (Make the children think about movies, books, characters, and heroes, etc.).
- Are there any experiences from your own life that come to mind? (Concrete examples and lived experiences).

## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 4

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Now that you have listened to Amber's story, what do you feel like doing in the future?
- Is there anything you would like to do more of?

Now it is once again the student (Amber) who has to describe her side of the story. The other students must now listen.

The teacher must now ask Amber the same questions that have just been asked of her two classmates:

- What did you particularly notice about what the other students said? (Help the student to make it concrete and to use their own words).
- Are there any pictures that the other students describe that fit well with how you experience it, or which images do you want to use? (Make the student think about the pictures the others have used).
- Now that you have listened to what the others have said about their own lives, do you think of anything from your life that could remind you of that? (Concrete examples and lived experiences).
- Now that you have listened to what the others have said, what do you feel like doing in the future? Is there anything you would like to do more of?

Now you end the conversation and thank the students for their stories and for the others for listening. Although the urge is to conclude who is right and who should do what may feel important, but let it go unsaid. This exercise is about nuance the understandings and helping students find their own answers and options. If the students want to talk more about this, agree that you will do it at another time.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Most students are affected by listening to the stories of others about something that hurts. By involving other students in the conversation with their own experiences, the teacher normalises the experience of being different and external.

## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 4

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### NOTE TO TRAINERS

When teachers are asking questions, it is essential for them to pay attention to their tone of voice, their pressure distribution, and their body language so that all of these elements examine the question they want to ask. In this way, they can make sure that the body and the spoken language actually ask the same question. This exercise is also extremely useful if there is a student who experiences sorrow in some way, as it is a respectful and very empathic approach.

The teachers define at what age and at what grade level the episode took place - although this most often occurs in the younger classes. The teacher can also consider whether other teachers are present in the yard and what can realistically be done in the immediate environment the teachers find themselves in.

# Motivating the students

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If students are motivated, they learn better and remember more of what they have learnt. The teacher has the great advantage of starting the day with breathing exercises or short meditations, so that the students find inner balance and become mentally motivated for learning. It can be difficult for many students to maintain a high level of motivation for an entire school day and they tend to shut down in their hearts and start disturbing others. Students need to become aware of their own state, as receiving teaching naturally fluctuates a great deal from student to student and subject to subject. Therefore, it can help the student identify how motivated/unmotivated they are by their concentration level. By noticing this, they can more easily draw attention to their need for a break, a quiet time, or to run around in the schoolyard to burn off some energy as a means to boost motivation once again. There is no assessment or pointing fingers in this self-awareness, only an intention that each student has the self-responsibility for noticing how motivated they are for learning and, as part of the class ethos, better equipped to communicate their needs to the teacher. The idea is to meet each student's needs with understanding and recognition so that no one feels they are in the wrong and empathy is able to take place.

# Sitting Body Scan

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## RATIONALE

Physical and mindfulness exercises play an important role in addressing empathy, friendliness, and compassion by focusing on simply paying attention and acceptance, not judgement or valuing-judging the experience. This allows for students to gently relate to themselves which, in turn, informs the student's way of connecting to their classmates through the heart.

## OBJECTIVE

The focus of this exercise is on the body and the sensations in the body. Many are disconnected from their bodies and need to get in contact with their physical element.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

Instructions:

- Place yourself comfortably in your chair.
- Close your eyes.
- Notice how the chair supports your body, the backside of your legs, your buttocks, and perhaps your back.
- Place your awareness in the pelvic area and notice the weight of your body.
- Follow your spinal cord with your awareness all the way from the tailbone to the uppermost cervical vertebrae.
- Notice the curvature of your spinal cord and notice how the spinal cord is keeping you in an upright position.
- Now shift your awareness to your head.
- Feel your face, forehead, and temples - the area around your eyes, jaws, lips, and neck.
- Notice how the head is placed like a ball on top of the spinal cord. You can move your head around a bit and find a good position on top of your spinal cord.
- Now, let your awareness wander down through your body to the pelvic area and, from here down through your legs and all the way to your feet.
- Notice the contact between your feet and the floor.



## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 5

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Notice how the floor meets your feet and how your feet are pressing against the floor.
- Now return to the area around your shoulders. Let your awareness flow through your arms all the way to your hands.
- Notice the contact between your hands and the place where they are resting.
- Feel the weight of your hands and notice how your hands are being met by something else.
- Now see if you can disperse your awareness and focus on the head, feet, hands, and spinal cord.
- This way, you will have a focus at the center of your body and at the periphery of your body at the same time.
- Pay attention to how your body feels, and if there were any parts of your body that especially needed this way of relaxation.
- Notice if your mind is clearer than before the exercise.
- Sit for a minute in silence.
- When you are ready, open your eyes and return to the class again.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Carry out this exercise regularly so that the students create a habit or a pattern that can be remembered when in stressful situations and they need to regain balance. Turning the awareness inwards provides a small pause and a little distance from the condition and can offer a possibility to find a better or more conscious reaction to any difficult situation.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

This exercise is a wonderful tool to use with students of all ages.

# Movement Sitting and Breathing

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## RATIONALE

The focus in this exercise is on the body and the sensations in the body. The extent of the awareness increases to contain the movement of the breath. Being aware of students' breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system and regulates the level of stress. That means that awareness of the breath is an important component in the training of self-management.

## OBJECTIVE

The focus in this exercise is on the body and the sensations in the body to contain the movement of breath and the sensations related to it.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

The teacher guides:

- Place yourself on the floor or on a chair
- Close your eyes
- Feel your sitting bones and the balance between your left and your right part of the body
- Place your hands on the floor or if sitting on a chair let your arms hang beside the chair
- Lift your arms to the level of your shoulders and breath in
- Gather your hands in front of your heart, breath out
- In the pause between inhaling and exhaling
- Move your chin to your chest and move your hands to your neck
- Stretch your arms to the ceiling, look at your hands and breath in
- Breathe out and move your hands back to the starting position
- Do this sequence for a couple of times
- Pay attention to the coordination between the breathing and the movement
- Finish the physical part of the exercise and sit for a moment and sense the impact of the exercise
- How do you sense your body?
- Are there parts that you sense differently from others?

## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 6

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- How is your breathing?
- Where in the body do you feel your breath?

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

This exercise can also be done in a standing position and works well for all ages.

## How Am I Doing?

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### How am I doing?



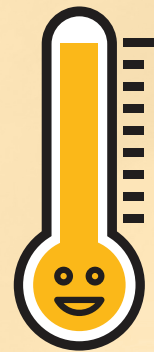
I am not motivated



I am a little motivated



I am motivated



I am top motivated

# How Am I Doing?

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**RATIONALE** 'How am I doing' is a graphic way of visualising students' motivation. Based on the teacher's judgment, they are made aware that they need to look at the graphic and think about how motivated they are. It will help them to ask for a break, a hug, or something that can help them get in touch with themselves, their motivation, and regain energy.

**OBJECTIVE** Students must feel inward to scale their emotional and sensational state.

**MATERIALS** The 'How Am I Doing' graphic should be visible to everyone in the class.

**PROCEDURE** The teacher introduces the graphic for the class:

- This is a graphic we are going to use in this class because you will improve your awareness of how motivated you are for learning. Can anyone tell the rest of the class what the four different states mean? Get four students to explain one state each.

In this way, the teacher involves the students to make them take ownership of the graphic, which they will feel a responsibility to adopt into the class. Make them give examples of how their bodies look, how they behave, or what they say when they are in one of the four states.

Explain further, but acknowledge first:

- That is correct – you have already understood the graphic and explained it very well. I can very well recognise your different states when you acted them out for us. Great job!
- Many things can affect your motivation, and in this class, it is okay to feel as you feel. We want to take care of each other here and give help if it is needed. Therefore, this graphic can be a helpful tool for me as a teacher because I can pause from the teaching or go talk with you alone if you need me. But it is also useful for you. Can anyone guess why it can also be a helpful tool for you?

## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 7

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

Let them think about it and acknowledge their suggestions.

- There are so many right answers, thank you. Yes, it is helpful for you too because you can support your classmates to regain their motivation. You can do it because you are good classmates and because we take care of each other in this class. Isn't that correct?
- Can any of you come up with some suggestions on regaining motivation when it is weakening?

Write their answers down on the board. Each answer will tell you what works for the student who says it. Students often know what works for them. Take your own notes or let all of the students come up with suggestions that work for them. In this way, the process becomes more inclusive and inviting for everyone.

- So, from now on, if I ask, you can look at the graphic you better explain how motivated you are for learning and concentrating. You also have the option of raising your hand to announce that you are not motivated and need a break. You can either use the information for your own awareness, share it with the rest of the class by raising your hand, or you can talk to me about why the motivation is at one level or another. We are here for each other.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

It feels good for students to be seen and acknowledged, no matter what emotional state they are in. Therefore, look for students who feel that they can take their guard down, who show care and kindness towards their classmates and feel better in themselves. It feels good to receive positive attention, but it also feels fantastic give attention back to others.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

This tool only makes sense if it is regularly used in the classroom. Make the wider class team support this approach and ensure consistency over time. Such approaches should be an integral part of the way the class functions. The raised awareness that students develop in their own motivation is priceless.

# Getting Energised

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## RATIONALE

This exercise can be used with the class when students are low on energy and need to regain motivation. Being thrown out of context, through a play that requires attention and coordination, raises students' energy levels and strengthening and unifying the learning community as a whole. Emitting energy optimises students' and teachers' engagement in teaching and learning.

## OBJECTIVE

This exercise focuses on creating trust by acknowledging each other and gaining new energy by laughing together.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

The teacher guides the class:

- Get together in pairs and face each other.  
If there are more than two in a pair, it is essential to count to an even number or one more than there are students in the group so as to make the numbers circulate between the participants (if three - count to four).
- Count to three by taking turns saying one number at a time. One starts by saying one. The second continues by saying two, and then the first says three.

After 2 minutes say:

- Now replace number one with a sound or movement of your choice. Students must wait for their turn and recognise each other's choice of sound or movement.
- After a few rounds – 2-3 minutes – number two is also replaced with a sound or movement (not the same as number one) and so on until three also has a sound or movement.

## ESSENTIAL 1 / EXERCISE 8

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### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- Which number was manageable?
- How did you manage to do it?
- What was the funniest part?
- What changes within have happened from before the exercise?
- Are you ready for some more teaching again?
- If not, sing a song together and continue the teaching afterward.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

How energy changes to strong and focused vibrations. It is good to laugh and have some fun together in schools - it connects the students to each other. It strengthens their feeling of a unity within the class while creating good memories.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

There are many ways to get students energised. The teacher can ask them to stand up, stretch, jump, or sing 'Head, shoulder, knee, and toes'. The point is to meet the students where they are and lead the way as their role model to create new and increased energy.



# There is Nothing Without a Good Relation

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Relational Competence

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# Relationship

# Relational Competence

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To create the best environment for empathy to unfold in a meaningful way, the teacher must, as a priority, create the conditions in which empathy can thrive. That is essentially means building stable, balanced, and ongoing connections with and between students to avoid emotional blockages. In order to be able to create a good connection with the students, it is initially necessary to find peace and balance within. It opens the possibility for connections to be created, so that a safe and open communication can take place, and where you can best support and help yourself and the students.

The teacher's relational competence (how well a teacher connects to the heart and motivation) affects student's well-being, academic performance, ability to regulate how well challenged students are doing, their future and ultimately whole-class relationships. A securely attached student will recognise that their teacher will comfort them when they are distressed. They will develop an understanding that they are worthy of being consoled and taken care of. This is essential for healthy development in students and sets them up for a good start to their school life. Students will be more able to manage their own feelings and behaviours and, therefore, relate better and more empathically to their classmates.

# Let Your Students Know that You See Them

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## RATIONALE

The primary purpose of this exercise is to ensure that all students feel seen and acknowledged for who they are and the important place they occupy in the school. It also serves the purpose of starting the day with a big smile and a sincere welcome, which is important for a happy and productive class atmosphere. It is all about ensuring the students have a sense of belonging to the class in general and essentially valued by the teacher in particular.

## OBJECTIVES

When students feel securely connected to the teacher, they know they can count on them for emotional and physical support. This may encourage them to take more emotional risks and to connect more empathetically with classmates.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

The trainer says:

- Depending on how the procedure is at your school, you can either choose to say 'Hello!' and look your students in their eyes when they enter the class (suitable for the older students) or line them up in the hall outside the classroom door, saying good morning to each student by name. Basically, there are many options. You can let them choose from either a hug, handshake, a dance move or high-five greeting – to just looking them in their eyes and greeting them good morning.

## DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- What do you do to make each of your students feel seen daily?
- Can eye contact make a difference?
- How would you implement more eye contact in your class?

## WHAT TO OBSERVE

Students are feeling a part of, and essential to, the teacher and the class as a whole.

## NOTE TO TRAINERS

This tool should be implemented as a routine; otherwise, it has no effect. This is the simplest, and the most important, personal connection to practice every day that makes a big difference.

# Let Students Inside Your World

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## RATIONALE

Bringing stories of the teacher's family into the teaching is quite familiar for Danish teachers and inviting the class home to eat or play with the whole family is not unusual. It builds a strong connection to the students as they feel special and valuable to the teacher. Opening a window to the teacher's world humanises them. It helps make teachers more accessible to their students. Teachers do not lose authority but, as a result, gain respect as they become role models that can be easily related to.

## OBJECTIVE

Letting students inside the teacher's world builds connection, presence, and meaning for the students as they gain a greater insight into the teacher's true self.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

The trainer explains:

- One of the teachers from the class team could bring the students home for you so that you have time to go ahead and prepare for the visit. Alternatively, you could turn the visit into a class excursion in which you and the class as a whole go together as a group.
- Start by showing that you have been looking forward to seeing them or are excited to bring them home to you. Show your enthusiasm and happiness.
- Be real. Embrace them.
- Do not be afraid to let students see you make mistakes or that not everything isn't perfect. They will learn more from watching how you react to a blunder than you could teach in an hour-long lesson. They will also come to understand that you do not expect perfection, and they may become more willing to take risks of their own to boost learning and broaden teaching and learning horizons.
- Serve fruit, muffins, and something to drink in a circle outside (weather permitting) or inside around the dining table. Let your own children join in if they wish to as most students show significantly more interest in the children of others.

## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 2

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Go outside in nature and play a few games and exercises such as; Atmosphere E4 or Relationship E7.

At the end of the day, your colleague could take the students back to school to give you time to tidy up.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

How much joy the students show if they are comfortable with you and each other. They will feel special and a sense of belonging, and you will receive a lot of love in return.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

I did this with my students who I followed for many years. I took the opportunity to ask them individually questions about the future, which I recorded and many years later used for their farewell ceremony, to the great delight of them all.

## Class Time

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### RATIONALE

In order to be truly empathetic, students need to learn more than simply putting things into perspective; they need to know how to value, respect and understand their classmates' points of views, even when they differ from their own. They need to learn to listen to and care for their classmates and value them as both individuals and members of the class as a whole. Students simply need to create positive and meaningful bonds to their classmates. It is for this reason that Danish teachers ensure the students develop these important skills during school time as the school is in a unique position to provide the crucial tools required to make meaningful connections within the class and between the student.

The hour of empathy is as important as the time spent on subjects such as English or mathematics. During the class-time students discuss their problems, whether school related to school or not, and the whole class, together with the teacher, tries to find a solution based on real listening and understanding. If there are no problems to discuss, children may simply spend the time relaxing together and enjoying HYGGE, a word (and also a verb and an adjective), which cannot be translated literally since it is a phenomenon closely related to Danish culture.

Class Time is the best way to let all students feel heard and seen, and it has multiple purposes:

Firstly, teachers have the opportunity to reflect on their own efforts to create an inclusive learning environment where students want to learn and join in – and where sound, strong relationships can be built. It is a way to let the class empathic community grow.

Secondly, Class Time aims to promote student engagement in their own psychological development by increasing their knowledge about each other and themselves and thus work for a better mutual understanding and acceptance of all. In this way, they get a better insight into different perspectives and experience a greater sense of well-being while at school. They are simply building empathy!

## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 3

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**OBJECTIVES** The class teacher works with students to solve specific tasks and issues within the class. 'Class Time' aims to support students' social and emotional competences, highlight class values, and the individual student's importance, and responsibility in the community.

**MATERIALS** (No materials needed).

**PROCEDURE** The trainer explains:

Class Time does not necessarily have to be a scheduled lesson in the timetable (it depends on the school), but the focus of attention and all key values are part of life in school. It is a fundamental part of the Danish curriculum. Since the students spend so much time in school, it is necessary that the teachers help them get in touch with something deeper within themselves, their self-accord, and that they do not focus solely on academic achievement. It is important that the teacher allows students to express something from their own world beyond the school. By so doing, the teacher helps students connect the life they have in school with their private lives and this, in turn, helps them find a balance between how it is okay to act according to their own beliefs and feelings while at the same time connecting with the class as a whole.

Issues that can be brought up:

- Relational issues between students
- Mobile phone problems
- Bad and tense atmosphere
- Bullying
- Low motivation
- Personal issues that need to be addressed
- Changes to the class rules
- Football tournaments between classes, etc.
- Evaluation with the class about parents' involvement and social events such as trips, events, parent cooperation, etc.
- How to commute safely
- Conversations about how to have a healthy life (health, sexuality, family, and friends' relations).
- Information about education, vocational and labor market and talks about their own decisions they can take.



## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 3

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

Ways to act:

- Responsibility goes both ways
- Take responsibility
- Nothing changes by itself, so although you may think that it is everybody else's fault, YOU need to do something to change it
- Talk about it
- Everyone needs to bring up issues
- Write it down!
- Make a class manifest where it is written down what you have talked about, along with the class rules. It may be that you must remember to say hello to everyone; that one must not slander or turn eyes. Print it out and hang it up in class.
- Decorate
- It is always nicer to be somewhere you feel comfortable. Put up posters on the wall, make a cozy corner, and agree on what kind of music you want to be played during breaks.
- Fun Ideas
- It is a good idea to do something together, which is not about school. Arrange a movie night, throw a party, or arrange to eat breakfast together on Saturdays. But remember not to exclude anybody!

Openings for conversations about difficult issues:

Students will feel lonesome and especially when having problems/sorrow within their families and the tricky thing about personal changes in life or the difficulties of becoming part of groups, so at this moment openings based on feeling-words:

#### **Fear**

- Tell about a time when you were afraid.
- What else can make you afraid?
- Who/what can help you when you are afraid?
- Are you afraid of someone/something at school?
- How can you see that a person is afraid?
- How can you best receive help/give help?



## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 3

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

#### Privations

- Have you tried to miss someone very much? - Tell us about it.
- What happened?
- How were you able to move on?
- Is there anything or anyone that can help you when you feel like that?

#### Joy

- Tell about a time when you were happy.
- Try to describe how it felt in your head and your body.
- Are there other/others who can make you happy?
- Can your classmates at school make you happy - how?
- How can you see that a person is happy?

#### Bullying/teasing

- Have you teased anyone?
- Have you tried to be teased by someone?
- What is it like to be teased?
- What did you think when you were bullied?
- Why do you think that someone teases others?
- How can you help someone who is being teased?
- Have you tried to tease one for fun - and the other did not think it was funny?
- How was it? Did you become good friends again?
- How can you be friends again with someone you've bullied or you have been teased by?

#### Grief

- Can you see if a person is in sorrow? How?
- What do you do if you in school discover that one of your classmates is sad?
- If you feel sad, what would you expect from your classmates/teachers?
- Tell about a time when you were upset, and someone helped or comforted you.

## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 3

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**WHAT TO OBSERVE** Moments of honesty and connection to students' hearts makes for stronger bonds between the teacher and students and between the students themselves. The security created lays the optimal foundation for empathy to unfold.

**NOTE TO TRAINERS** It is always important that no students feel pressured to participate in these conversations. Some students learn by simply listening, others by sharing their lives. Since the teacher can never know what is going on inside a student, all levels of participation must be respected. Such times are great for creating strong bonds with the students. Over the years I have talked to students about almost everything. Now, many years later, I still have beautiful relationships with many of them, which testifies to the effect of building a strong, meaningful contact.

# Teamwork

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Teamwork can be defined as a form of work where students actively participate in their own learning and work together in groups on a shared task or goal. The characteristic of teamwork is that students gain greater ownership and responsibility for their own learning process. As a form of teaching, it requires the teacher to take on a facilitating role, where the teacher lets the groups work independently, but helps and supports when needed. Teamwork allows students to simultaneously develop their social skills and collaboration skills, professionalism, and social relationships. Teamwork is a pedagogical form of work, where a task that requires cooperation to achieve a common goal is solved in small groups.

## **1. TEAMWORK CAN STRENGTHEN STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

Teamwork is a student-activating form of teaching. Students work with more actively with the academic material when they work in groups than when they listen to the teacher in class-based teaching. In collaboration with others, students can test and develop their ideas, arguments, and understandings. An assignment is solved jointly by the group, through the sharing of skills, knowledge and understanding that would be beyond the scope of an individual student.

## **2. TEAMWORK CAN STRENGTHEN STUDENTS' COLLABORATION SKILLS:**

Students must learn to work in groups as it is a form of work that they will encounter in many contexts later on. It is mainly the following competencies that they develop: relational competencies (having empathy, respecting, accepting, and acknowledging others), communicative competencies (being able to listen to others and express one's own views. To be able to compromise and resolve disagreements), and organisational competencies (to take responsibility for a collaborative process and a product that has been developed jointly). Students should be able to structure the work and draw on each other's competencies, so they can solve a task without a teacher.

## **3. TEAMWORK CAN STRENGTHEN STUDENTS' SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPROVE THE CLASS COMMUNITY:**

Teamwork can enhance social relations in the classroom and improve the community. This is because the students gain valuable experiences by working together and approaching things in a different way through sharing ideas within a community.

## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 4

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### RATIONALE

One of the ways to foster empathy is through teamwork, which makes up around 80% of the tasks carried out in schools in Denmark. The focus is never to excel over others, but to have a responsibility in helping those who are not equally gifted or just to cooperate so as to get the best outcome for the benefit of all. For these reasons Denmark is also considered one of the best places to work in Europe. Competition is exclusively focussed on oneself, not with others. Danish schools offer neither prizes nor trophies to students who excel in school subjects or in sports, so as not to create competition. Instead, we foster a culture of motivation and personal improvement, which is exclusively measured in relation to ourselves.

### OBJECTIVE

Teamwork can strengthen students' social relationships and improve the class community. When students are put to work collaboratively in groups, their participation in teaching and learning increases along with their personal and professional development.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Relational competencies:

The teachers emphasise that students must be able to accommodate people who are different and provide space for everyone to be heard and have an input into collaborative activities. In other words, they must practise fundamental democratic values of accepting and respecting each other. It is something that students learn, both when they are together as a class and when they work in groups. These are competencies that are essential to successful, constructive and focused group work.

Communicative Competencies:

Students' ability to communicate with each other is crucial to whether the group work is effective. Teachers are busy teaching students to explain their ideas and attitudes to others while listening to each other. It is very much about teaching students how to be good listeners, sit, and show attention. Teachers also work on how students give each other constructive feedback.

Organizational Competencies:

An essential prerequisite for being able to work in groups is that students can do without the teacher's presence and organise their work themselves. It is about working independently as a group, which means that all students participate actively and take part in the responsibility for the group's work.

## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 4

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### NOTE TO TRAINER

Security and mutual respect are not something the teacher can instruct the students in. On the other hand, the students must be put in situations where they experience differences so as to learn to accept others and be responsible for their own behaviour.

There are several elements that it is essential to present and clarify to the students. These elements are:

- Team composition: How big is the group and who does it consist of? Students must not be in doubt about who to work with.
- Time availability: How long does teamwork last? Students should know the overall time frame, and they should know when to return to class if they are working elsewhere.
- Physical location: Where can the work take place? How do the students position themselves and each other within and outside the classroom?
- Expectations for the work: What does the teacher expect from the students, and how can the students live up to these expectations? If the teacher's expectations are clear, it can help direct to the students' work.
- Work objectives: Why does the class work in this way, and what should it lead to? Students must understand the goal and find it meaningful.

# A Tree of Hearts

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## RATIONALE

Students benefit from being recognised for their good deeds. They grow by being noticed, gain energy and go on to be noticed again. The process is infinitely more valuable and important than the result. When students commit to the process of not giving up, creatively overcoming setbacks and obstacles and trying new strategies, a wonderful metamorphosis occurs, and they become more whole. They grow and learn by being part of processes and such changes are the real value that must be noticed, not a specific outcome. Looking for the good things in others helps to keep an open heart where empathy can live.

## OBJECTIVES

To feel heard, seen, and acknowledged as a part of a significant community. When students are recognised and feel important, they become someone, which makes them more capable of being empathetic.

## MATERIALS

A plant, or the students can create their own class tree with branches, coloured soft paper, cardboard hearts, a vase etc. The possibilities are many and varied.

## PROCEDURE

The trainer explains:

Make a tree or get a plant and then have a box with red hearts to hang on the tree.

- The teacher introduces 'a tree of hearts' to the class, their new classmates and explains the idea behind this new plant.
- Have students make small hearts out of card and thread a length of string through them.
- All hearts are gathered in a box, which is on the shelf and accessible to everyone.
- Students should take hearts from the box and write the name of any student that they think has done something friendly or positive during a specific time period.

This is an ongoing exercise for a whole school year, and the tree become more and more decorated. It motivates more kindness and care as students like to be highlighted.

## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 5

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**WHAT TO OBSERVE** Students feel important in the class as a whole, knowing they contribute to care and kindness.

**NOTE TO TRAINERS** Always highlight and focus on what works instead of pointing out flaws or mistakes. Keep in mind what the students' real intentions are as it helps to find the positive in a possible negative situation. This exercise works well for all ages.



# Are We Friends or Classmates?

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**RATIONALE** This activity aims for students to reflect on how friendships and participation in their communities affect their well-being, relational and empathy skills. Among other things, students can work on what good friendships are and a community is and become better equipped to seek out what gives them value in their lives.

**OBJECTIVES** Attention to contexts and social and emotional rules.

**MATERIALS** (No material needed).

**PROCEDURE** The teacher guides:

The activity is built up in 4 phases, which emphasise activating pre-understanding, clarifying concepts and preparing and presenting the role-play.

- Start by brainstorming with the students what a good friendship is. Write all the words on the board and let all students say what it means to them.
- Then brainstorm with the students about what a good community is. Write all the words on the board and let all students express what they are thinking.

An example of a community where students do not choose who they are with could be a class, a football team, a choir, or a scout camp. In such communities, students share a common interest, cause or goal to work towards. In these communities, everyone is required to treat each other with respect although they do not necessarily have to like or be friends with everyone.

With friendships groups, however, students get to make choices for themselves. Therefore, they will typically like their friends in different ways.

## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 6

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Have students share what is essential in a good community and a good friendship.
  - What is important in both friendships and communities?
  - What are the exact differences between a friendship and a community?
- Next, the students work in groups of 4 on a role-play activity in which they are given a note with different words or phrases that characterises friendships or communities such as cooperation, care, forgiveness, security, respect, how we trust each other, how we have the same goals, how we like each other, how we have fun together, how we help each other or any other good responses arising from the brainstorm.
- Once the groups have received their notes, they can (without showing the word to the others in the class) try to role act out an expression of their word or phrase. They must decide for themselves how to best show the others in the class what to say.

Here are the following rules:

- The students are given five to ten minutes to come up with and practice their role-play.
- Everyone in the group should be a part of the role-play, and the students should not say anything when presenting it.
- The groups can then show their role-play to the rest of the class. The other students can then guess which word or sentence the group is performing.
- Feel free to ask about the role-play with a focus on facial expressions, for example, or whether the bodies are facing each other or away from each other. The questions can be asked both to the group that is carrying out the role-play and the rest of the class.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- What do you think happened here?
- What did you pay special attention to?
- How can you tell if it is a community or a friendship?
- What did their body language show?
- If you were to play a community that did not work, how would you do it?
- If you were to play students who were angry at each other, how would you pose?

All groups show their role-play in this way, and the teacher highlights the essential points.

## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 6

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### WHAT TO OBSERVE

- How the students cooperate with each other: do they contribute, listen, compromise, include others, and acknowledge new ideas?
- Do they have fun working independently, using their imagination, and presenting it for the benefit of others?

### NOTE TO TEACHERS

It may be necessary for the teacher to consider the following questions before starting the exercise.

- How do students best gain an understanding of the concepts of friendship and community?
- How do I make sure that both the similarities and differences between friendship and community are articulated?
- How should the group work be organised, and on what basis should the groups be divided?
- Where can the groups work with their role-play?
- How do I make sure that all students become part of the group's role-play?

The exercise can be differentiated depending on the grade level of the class. Younger students, more straightforward questions - older students, more detailed conversations where students can draw on their own experiences.

# Butt-race

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## RATIONALE

An essential task for teachers to master is establishing positive relationships with students and the class as a whole. It is crucial for students' well-being and academic, social, and personal development. The teacher's relational competence helps to enable a healthy learning community to be established in the classroom.

The concepts can be displayed with the body to visualise an understanding of linguistic expressions. Using their bodies to express linguistic concepts, the students are encouraged to take an active part in the exercise. They have to first analyse the word or phrase thoroughly to then be able to embody it. This way of using the body can be used in many other contexts, where the focus must be on difficult or special words and concepts.

## OBJECTIVES

Bodily sensations and training communication skills.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

The teacher guides:

- The students are divided into 4 teams and count 1-2-3-4-1-2... or a number that is convenient.
- The four teams stand in a row.
- At one end of the row, put a chair opposite each group and put a pile of notes in different colours on the chairs for each group.
- The first in each team runs to the group's chair and takes a note. On each card, it says a word for the rest of the group to guess.
- For example, if the word is CAT, it must be spelled with the whole body, using arms and legs, bending, moving the stomach and so on. The group guesses the letters one by one, or they might guess the entire word. Each member of the group takes turns in proposing a letter until the right one is found.
- The group that first solves all the words on the notes has won.

## ESSENTIAL 2 / EXERCISE 7

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**WHAT TO OBSERVE** Engagement, happiness, fun, and unity.

**NOTE TO TEACHERS** The students can also compete within time limits.

# Chaos Versus Harmony

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Compassionate awareness

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## Chaos v. Harmony

# Compassionate awareness

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It takes great empathy for teachers to meet students with respect, kindness, and curiosity, while maintaining strong personal integrity in conflict-filled, challenging, chaotic, and stressful situations.

Teachers must guide and support their students so that later in life they can become part of a complex society that emphasises qualities such as humanity, compassion, and cooperation. It is perhaps one of the most crucial things a teacher can do that can make a difference in whether a student will succeed later in life or not. Challenging situations are those in which those skills must be practiced with the teacher leading the way.

The complex role of the teacher is to be able to take responsibility for the academic as well as emotional, and social learning while, at the same time, working on creating harmony and security in the classroom and within the students. This is not always an easy task.

A golden rule is that unwanted behaviour almost always stems from unmet needs. To improve compassionate awareness and help students regain balance, teachers must first identify the underlying cause of the students' actions and address their social and emotional needs.

Sometimes it can help to think of the student as a new-born; innocent, untouched, and still in the process of learning. The student tries as best they can to apply the behaviours and responses that they have learnt, but they do not always have the words or the tools to behave in alternative ways. Students need guidance and support and, most of all, to feel safe and not scolded or rejected.

# Morning Routines

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## RATIONALE

Students benefit from structure and good habits which create security and peace. The students need to know what is expected of them each day, which makes challenging situations rarer. Therefore, during the first few minutes after the teacher enters the classroom in the morning is crucial as it is the time to set the mood for the rest of the day. Having good morning routines can also make the school day more comfortable and save time as all students are allowed to settle in class, freeing up surplus time for the students to learn efficiently and productively. Relaxing, caring and community-creating morning routines should be mandatory for all students.

## OBJECTIVES

This exercise objectives are balance, self-accord, calmness, and a sense of community and alignment with the class.

## MATERIALS

Paper, pen, songbook (Guitar, piano or whatever is available).

## PROCEDURE

The trainer explains that there are different ways to approach this. The point is to start the day off in a good way for all students. Here are some inspirational ideas:

### **Sing Together**

Start the morning by singing two songs from a songbook. Let two students choose a song each (alternatively, let it alternate according to the protocol). It is a real advantage if you can play the guitar. Otherwise, everyone sings along to the best of their ability. Singing is a beautiful way to start the day as it brings togetherness and creates inner peace and a shared positive energy.

The teacher uses a couple of minutes afterward to end the singing with 5 deep, guided breaths (See below).

### **Question of the Day**

Since it is essential to give students self-determination and recognition for their competencies, the teacher can ask them each week to write down some questions on a small piece of paper. These could include all kinds of questions that the student wants answered, such as:



## ESSENTIAL 3 / EXERCISE 1

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Why do we have to do homework?
- What is your favourite colour?
- Why do some people tease?
- Why do you say cats have seven lives?
- The best thing about a friend is ...?
- What I love most is ...?

The students' questions will form the basis of 'Question of the Day' for the following week, which the students will be met with in the morning and written on the board. When students enter the class, they must answer the day's question in their notebooks and in silence until everyone has responded to it. This brings the class together, gives a calm and reflection, and gives a sense of meaning and ownership because they know they came up with the questions themselves.

The teacher uses 10 minutes to hear some of the answers and ends the round with 5 deep breaths.

### **Morning Yoga**

Morning yoga is a significantly positive way to start the school day. Many students can come to school anxious or stressed if their parents have not created some lasting morning routines at home. This can make it harder for students to learn and receive instruction, as their thoughts are often distracted by worry.

Yoga provides a way to relieve stress and gain focus. By teaching simple yoga poses, students' attention can be maintained while reducing the accumulated stress.

Students could stand in a circle and do a few exercises with a focus on breathing and balance.

The teacher guide by saying:

- Reach your arms out to the sides, lift them up to the sky, and then relax back down.
- Twist your whole body from side to side and swing your arms back and forth.

## ESSENTIAL 3 / EXERCISE 1

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Lift up onto your tiptoes and reach your fingers high.
- Bend your knees and sweep your arms back.
- With your knees bent, glide your hands up high.
- Press down through your feet and stretch your spine so it is long.
- Roll your shoulders back and press your palms together.
- Sit with your legs crossed (still in the circle). Grow your spine taller, roll your shoulders back, and rest your hands on your knees.
- Still sitting comfortably, close your eyes.
- Take a deep breath in and let a long breath out.
- Let your whole body relax.
- Notice the air as you take another deep breath in and out.
  - Does it feel cool?
  - Does it feel warm?
  
- Now, let a word come into your mind that describes how you want to be today. It could be a word like joyful, kind, friendly, or curious. It could be a word like happy, peaceful, enthusiastic, or brave.
- Choose the word that best describes how you want to feel.
- Hold it in your mind.
- As you breathe in, fill yourself up with the feeling you want and as you breathe out, send this feeling out into the world.
- Feel how you want to be today.
- Take another deep breath in and let a long breath out.
- Open your eyes.
- You are ready for this day.

### **Breathing Exercise**

This exercise is good for students when they need to focus and concentrate on a task. It takes 5 minutes and creates a good start to the day.

The teacher guides:

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of 4. Hold your breath for a count of 7. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of 8.

## ESSENTIAL 3 / EXERCISE 1

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**WHAT TO OBSERVE** Students create shared energy, where everyone is allowed to start the day from the same starting point. It will reduce conflicts and unrest and provide room for empathy.

**NOTE TO TRAINERS** These four ideas are intended as morning routines but can be advantageously included in all teaching hours over an entire school day where there is a need for cohesion and balance to be renewed.

**DEBRIEFING  
QUESTIONS  
FOR TRAINERS**

- What do you think about good morning routines?
- Are there any of them that can work for you and your class?
- Can Class Rules help calm the class down and regain balance?
- When will you start introducing morning routines?
- What will you achieve with morning routines?
- How can you know that it has succeeded?

# Class Rules

First module

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## RATIONALE

Understanding students is crucial in achieving a consistent empathic behavioural pattern and a classroom environment where the students can feel safe and secure. Therefore, it can be a good idea to have rules in class about ensuring the best possible circumstances for well-being and a behavioural framework that everyone can adhere to.

Knowing that the rules are made jointly creates a sense of security in the class, as everyone knows what to relate to. It is possible for the teacher to adjust the rules together with the class during the year if necessary. Rules should not be seen as inflexible and rigid, but as a common point of reference that everyone in the class can relate to.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives for 'Class Rules' are community, co-responsibility and cohesion.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

The trainer says:

Together with the students, the teacher works out some class rules on how they can be good classmates. They can create a healthy and caring classroom environment for everyone to feel accepted and comfortable in the class.

Talk to the students about class rules. Use the following questions:

- What are class rules?
- Can rules be different in different contexts?
- Why are class rules important?

## ESSENTIAL 3 / EXERCISE 2

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

Divide the students into groups of 3-4 to work on the following questions:

- Describe one situation where a class rule could be necessary (e.g., when eating, talking during class, recess, feeling upset, need help).
  - Why is it essential in this situation?
  - What should the class rule be?
- Have students present their suggestions to each other by writing them down, drawing them, constructing them in LEGO, or presenting them as a drama.

# Class Rules

## Second module

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### PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

- Formulate, based on the students' suggestions, 5-7 class rules which correspond to your own wishes about class rules.
- Tell students that you have formulated a draft of class rule based on their suggestions.
- Review the class rules for students. Describe any connections and similarities between the groups' different proposals.
- Invite students to jointly talk about whether the class rules are comprehensive or if something important is missing - something they have overlooked in their suggestions. The adjustments are made jointly.
- The class rules are copied, laminated, and made visible in the classroom.

The class rules are passed on to the parents at the next opportunity or via the school's communications platform.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- How do you currently communicate the class social values?
- Will it work for your class to develop some 'Class Rules'?
- Can Class Rules help calm the class down and regain balance?
- When all students take co-ownership on how to be with and around each other, can empathy grow?
- What can you take away with you that you know works?
- How will you present it?

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

A greater degree of unity, fewer quarrels and conflicts - and a nicer classroom atmosphere.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

It is possible for the teacher to adjust the rules together with the class during the year, if required. Rules should not be seen as inflexible and rigid, but as a common frame of reference that everyone in the class can relate to and adhere to.

# We are the Ones, Who...

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**RATIONALE**

It is essential to create a good narrative about the class. Some classes experience the outside world (students, parents and teachers, and others) as viewing the class and the students with judgmental and hostile eyes. They are forever doomed to fail and to be negatively defined. If the story of a class is negative in this way, nobody recognises the alternative, positive stories that can also be told and which deserve to be focused on instead. That causes a downward spiral as the negativity becomes self-perpetuating to the point where the possibility for empathy to unfold becomes near impossible.

When teachers tell each other about good experiences; empathetic, fun, caring and loving students, a good atmosphere in the class arises, an understanding of togetherness, and the feeling that it is nice to be together increases. This can also be done with a little effort on the part of the students themselves.

**OBJECTIVE**

This exercise aims for students to focus on good experiences in the class, which can help define the class positively and create harmony.

**MATERIALS**

(No materials needed).

**PROCEDURE**

The teacher says:

Now we are going to focus on why you are unique and special – and why I love being your teacher. I want you to brainstorm individually to honestly find and see yourselves. You have to think back and come up with one good experience you have had here in class and in school. It can be with the whole class or it can also be with one or more classmates.

You must think of a time when you have, for example, experienced fun with the whole class and what created this. Or maybe when someone helped you in a difficult situation or said something nice to you. Come up with an experience, which you recall created positive feelings within you such as gratitude and happiness. I have many lovely examples I could tell you, but

## ESSENTIAL 3 / EXERCISE 3

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

I want you to come up with your own experiences, as it will teach me what matters to you.

Now you have five minutes to think about a good experience you have had here in class. You have to close your eyes and think of something nice that you have experienced here. (Let silence fill out the room, while they are working on this on their own.)

When the time is over, say: Now we will have a storytelling round where you take turns telling us about the experience you came up with. You do not all have to share your experiences with us, but let's see how many stories we can reach in the next 10-15 minutes. Is there anyone who would like to start by describing something nice they have experienced here in class?

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Most often, there will come some fun anecdotes, which creates laughter. These should be very much welcomed. Observe the intense and warm energy that will arise.

### NOTE TO TEACHERS

Take notes and write the essence of the stories down and hang them on the wall. For example, Daisy ran for help when I was sad (we show care for each other). Frederick and Lucas stopped a fight and made them good friends (we resolve conflicts together).



# Giving Back

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**RATIONALE**

This exercise is about creating a feeling of togetherness between the students to become familiar and safe with each other. It is also about the students contributing something of benefit that does the others good and makes chaos less applicable.

**OBJECTIVE**

In this exercise, the students are allowed to practice the ethical ideal of giving something to others.

**MATERIALS**

Soothing and relaxing music.

**PROCEDURE**

The teacher guides:

- The students should be gathered in a circle sitting on the floor.
- Explain to them that they should sit placing their hands on the person ahead of them, close their eyes and when the music starts, they cuddle or massage lightly in silence while the music plays.
- After 8-10 minutes, you ask the students to turn their bodies towards the centre of the circle, breathe a couple of times deeply, and afterward turn their head to the person who did the massage on them, saying thank you.

**WHAT TO OBSERVE**

How the students feel calm, relaxed, and comfortable around each other. How students connect when giving something good to others.

**NOTE TO TEACHERS**

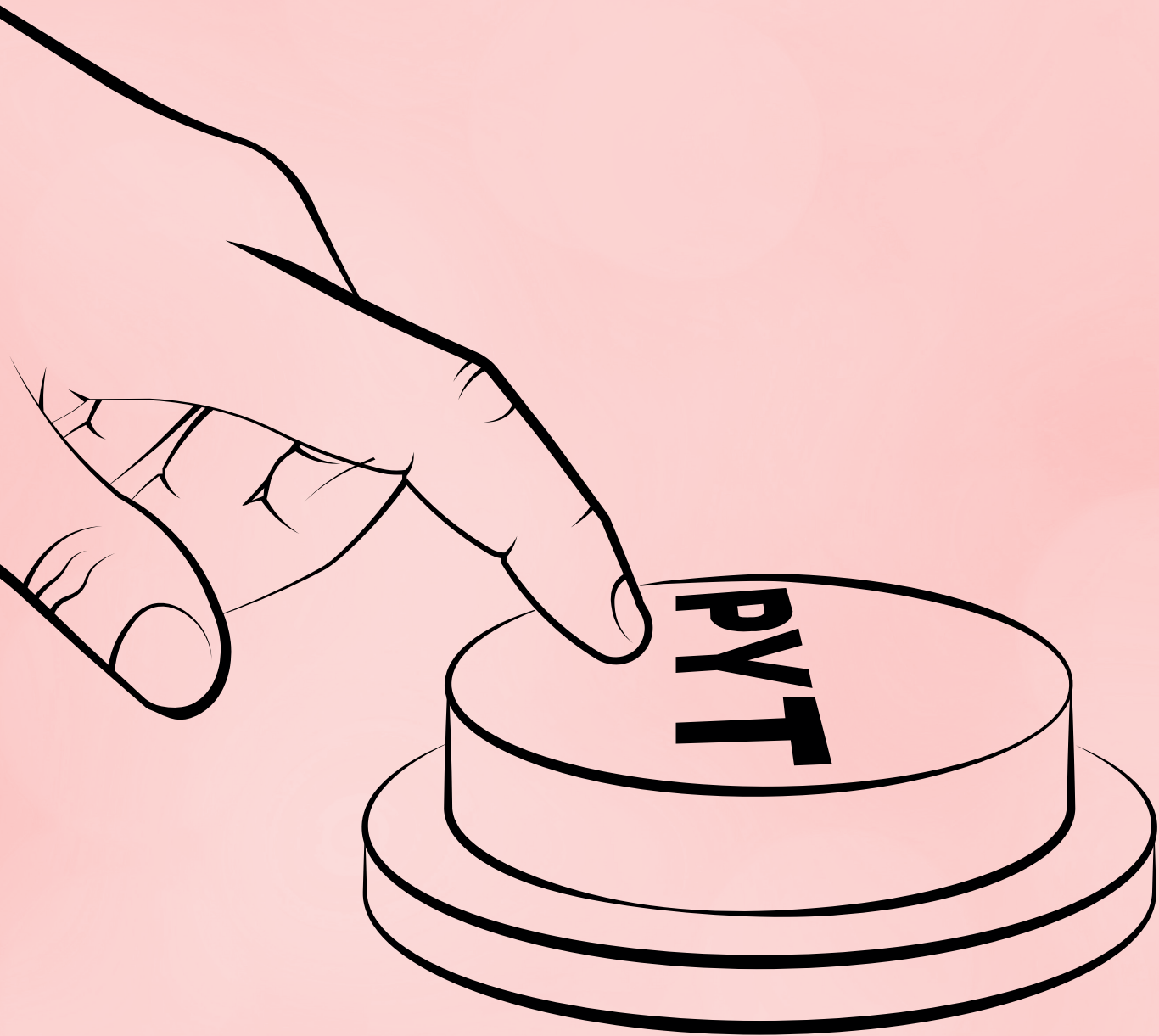
The exercise can be done outside without music, but only with the sound of nature. It is a beautiful alternative if the weather permits.

As some students may find it awkward touching others, it is essential to respect all personal boundaries. Let students find a way to touch their classmate in line with what feels right to them.

# PYT-Button

The never mind button

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# PYT-Button

## The never mind button

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### RATIONALE

It can be the act of an individual that overturns the world for all of us, and it is no different for students in school. It may be a small or insignificant detail for some, but a heavy dark cloud for others. When students do not experience being seen, heard, or recognised, it affects their self-esteem and self-confidence and their hearts close down as a result. When self-esteem, self-confidence and resilience are promoted and strengthened, students develop a balance and are more able to meet the world with empathy. It is essential and healthy for students to learn to reduce conflict and understand themselves in context with others. This promotes self-insight and gives rise to strategies in tackling challenges and adversity. Sometimes, it is necessary to be present and have meaningful conversations about how something makes us feel. At other times, it is necessary avoid getting bogged down in detail and letting ourselves be confused by it. This distinction can be useful for students to know.

### OBJECTIVES

The objective of this exercise is inner awareness of what: 'I feel' and restoration of balance, harmony and attention.

### MATERIALS

A PYT button (Can be homemade or bought).

### PROCEDURE

When introducing the PYT button to teachers, time must be spent explaining and talking with them about the situations in which PYT can be used.

The PYT button is NOT for undermining emotions or knowing how others feel. Not to superficially say to a student: 'It wasn't so bad, so press the PYT button', 'I don't think it hurts, so press the PYT button.' 'He just took your eraser, don't cry but press the PYT button.' In other words, emotions must be taken seriously. Students must be able to go to school and have confidence that what they experience or feel can always be true and believed.

Where the PYT Button CAN be a helpful tool is in situations where students can handle smaller things themselves. Situations where they can say PYT and shrug their shoulders at lesser insignificant things such as if a drawing did not turn out as expected, if the best friend is picked up early, when the

## ESSENTIAL 3 / EXERCISE 5

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

sportswear is forgotten, when one of the gloves is missing, when they have been given a difficult question, and so on. In other words, small everyday situations where students are not affected on an emotional level, but just need a way to get out of an awkward situation and move on.

Of course, decisions are always made on an individual basis. No one, other than the student, can assess whether something belongs to the category PYT. Therefore, other students can NOT press the PYT button for someone else but only for themselves.

Ask the students to go in groups of 4. Let them discuss these questions:

- What does it mean to say PYT?
- What things can you say PYT to?
- Which things are hard to say PYT to?
- When is it good to be able to say PYT?
- When have you tried to say PYT?
- When have you tried not to be able to say PYT?
- When did you try to get the teacher to say PYT, but did not want to say PYT?

Gather the class and review their answers based on each question. Acknowledge their thoughts and write keywords on the board, forming the class rules for the PYT button.

The teacher then writes down the rules and they are hung together with the PYT button on the board or another place where it is easily accessible.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

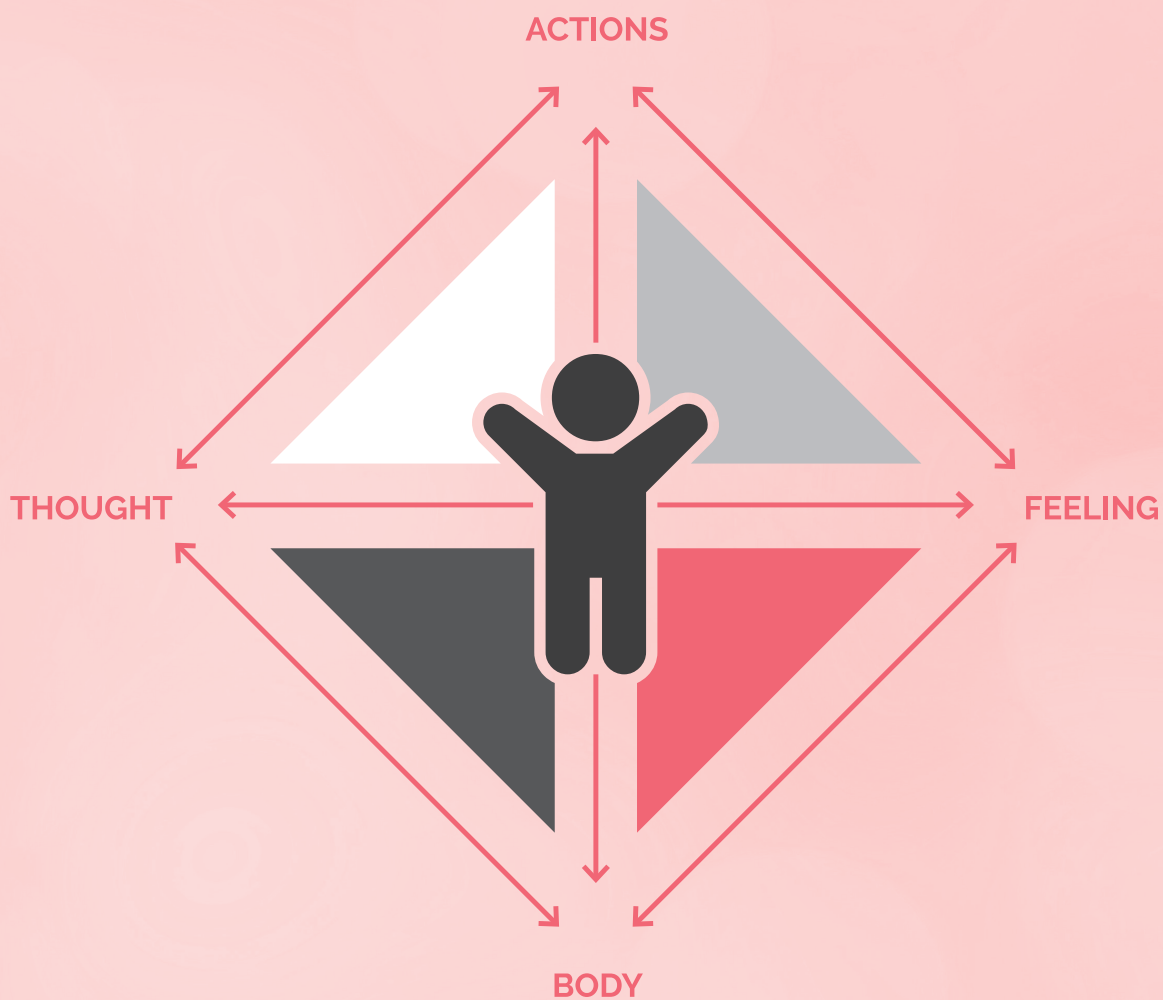
Conflicts are minimised, respect for the individual student is strengthened, and there is generally greater attention to oneself and the well-being of others.

### NOTE TO TEACHERS

Let the teachers know that the PYT button is an experiment that they can try. If it does not work for them, then they have tried it and definitely learned something anyway. The Danish institutions that use the PYT button recognise the schism in learning to let things go, while at the same time taking emotions seriously. Therefore, this button requires that teachers have a good sense of their own balance and that of the individual students.

# The Cognitive Diamond

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# The Cognitive Diamond

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## RATIONALE

The word 'Cognitive' comes from the Latin word 'Cognitus', which means 'learning to know, recognise, understand', that is, the things that have to do with cognitive processes in the brain. The cognitive diamond captures the various inner processes that take place in any situation that anyone might experience on a daily basis where communication is present. The processes in the cognitive diamond affect each other mutually and consistently and must be seen as a tool to understanding and better resolving conflicts.

The cognitive diamond has two dimensions:

1. Firstly, the cognitive diamond is a tool for teachers to better understand themselves, and their students' reactions. The tool makes it easier to analyse the process of why challenging situations between students occur and how to effectively resolve them by adding the steps of the conflict into the cognitive diamond. It also helps teachers to better let go of those things that trigger their own, unwelcome responses.
2. Secondly, the cognitive diamond is a tool to practise with students for them to understand themselves and their classmates better. Without actual calling the process of resolving a conflict 'The cognitive diamond', the teacher can ask clarifying questions from the cognitive diamond to understand what lead to the conflict. That makes it easier to empathise with all students involved in the conflict. It also enhances empathy between students.

## OBJECTIVE

In this exercise, students should practice reflection and communication in the plenary phase of the lesson. Based on the cognitive diamond, they need to think about how they react in different situations.

## MATERIALS

Worksheet and pen. Most students have probably tried to be in a situation where a friend has cancelled an appointment and where they became annoyed and upset. They felt a little hurt and didn't necessarily understand why the meeting was cancelled.

## ESSENTIAL 3 / EXERCISE 6

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### PROCEDURE

A thought arises in them: 'Why?' They consider, that perhaps there may have been a different cause than the one they were told and whether in reality it had to do with a possible break-up. 'Are we not friends anymore?' 'What did I do wrong?' 'Am I not good enough?' 'I thought we were best friends.' A sadness grows, and disappointment and anger fill the whole body. As a reaction, aggression, anger, ignoring and a cold shoulder is given. The body collapses, the heart beats hard and it hurts in the throat when the crying is suppressed, and distance is born. 'I will leave him alone.' 'If he doesn't want to be my friend, I don't want to be his either.' 'I don't want to come to school.'

In a situation like this, a thought arises, which becomes a feeling that affects the body and finally leads to action. Based on the cognitive diamond, students need to think about how they react in different situations.

In working with the students, the teacher should create and hand out worksheets with the title 'What Challenges.' Here, students are asked to describe briefly three different situations where they have tried not to be sad, scared, insecure, or angry, and where they did not know what to do. This may be because they were afraid of being hurt or rejected. It may be from the experiences they have had with friends, teachers, family or others.

If there are students who cannot think of any challenging situations, they may recognise some of the following situations:

- If your friend suddenly does not want to talk to you.
- If your parents or teachers get angry or disappointed with something you have done.
- If you experience being kept outside by some friends that you usually talk to during recess.
- If you are sad and do not dare to say it out loud.
- If you get outraged.
- If your parents decide to divorce.
- If you have sent a personal text message to a friend/classmate and have not received a reply.
- If someone has written negatively about you on social media.
- If you are nervous that someone in the class is gossiping about you.
- A party where you were not invited.
- If your boyfriend/girlfriend talks a lot with another boy/girl from the class.

## ESSENTIAL 3 / EXERCISE 6

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

Next, illustrate the processes; thought, feeling, body, and action (without necessarily calling it the cognitive diamond). Let those of them who want to, tell stories from their lives in which they have experienced something challenging and see if they have grasped the meaning. They will have to analyse their behaviour themselves, with support from the teacher.

Say: Where in the cognitive diamond should this be? So, you felt sad, right? Do you remember, what you were thinking about and what happened? Oh, so you were afraid that you were no longer friends. That makes sense. Now we have a thought and a feeling. How did your body feel, can you remember that? Heavy! That is understandable. Did you do anything? Okay, so you walked alone in the schoolyard and playing alone. Thank you so much for sharing your story.

Students will subsequently learn how it can help the teacher understand each student better and how the students can understand their own reactions and those of their classmates more thoroughly, and thus express empathy towards each other and themselves.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Even though the first part is a written exercise, it will most often leave the student calm and energised. When the teacher allows difficult situations and hurt feelings to be typically talked about, an atmosphere of inclusion, warmth, care, and inclusiveness is established. It gives students space to be themselves.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- Did you gain new perspectives, as a result of newly acquired background knowledge of the cognitive diamond?
- How can you use 'The cognitive diamond' actively in situations in which your students find themselves in future?

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

Pay attention to any students who feel uncomfortable or have difficulties in writing about what hurts. Maybe they need a little more of your attention after the class is over.

This exercise can be used on all ages and modified to be less academic for the lower age groups.



# Creating a Safe Atmosphere

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Authentic classroom management

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# Atmosphere

# Authentic classroom management

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To ensure a safe atmosphere, classroom management is needed. It is a collective term for teachers' practice to create a dignified and meaningful atmosphere for students' learning and empathic development. Thus, classroom management constitutes a complex and targeted effort to frame, organise, support, facilitate, and differentiate learning and development processes for all students within a secure and accepted framework. It is a practice where the didactic, professional, social, and emotional are intertwined. The shared energy, when a safe atmosphere is established, feels comfortable and accepting.

When teachers are good at setting boundaries and doing so with clarity, students most often do what they are asked because there is nothing else to disturb them or for them to be concerned about.

For example, teachers may be thinking about how long (or relatively short) their introductions and instructions should be to fit the students' needs. They consider what level of detail is acceptable for a work task to appear meaningful and approachable. That there are good transitions from recess to class, how teaching can be

differentiated and varied and that there is a focus on a good start to, and rounding off, the day. It is often the small things, that make the classroom atmosphere a safe place for all.

A crucial aspect in creating such a classroom atmosphere is that the teacher is present and authentic, both to the students and to themselves. This is where teachers are in touch with their self-accord, empathy skills, and professional knowledge. This is because the better the teacher's connection is between inward and outward attention, between head and heart, between professional expertise and personal being, the easier it is to bring the qualities into the classroom and strengthen the learning and empathic environment that is necessary for students to feel safe and receptive to learners.

Security and mutual respect do not just happen by themselves. It is something that must be consciously worked on to promote and nurture that which allows the best circumstances to thrive. A safe classroom atmosphere is like an invisible energy that emerges when everybody feels welcome, acknowledged, listened to, and valued.

## ESSENTIAL 4

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Such considerations and incorporated transitions like these mean that teaching flows while, uncertainty and confusion among students are minimised. More time is then spent more on students' learning, where they can be curious and dare to experiment in an atmosphere characterised by recognition and security. Students do not learn if they do not thrive and vice versa: learning and participation in academic activities increase students' well-being. Shortly put: academics and well-being are closely linked.

# Co-responsibility for the Classroom

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## RATIONALE

There are some different factors in the classroom that matter to the overall learning environment and atmosphere. These include the classroom design, furniture and equipment, the placement of tables and chairs, decoration and storage, and the availability of technology. It feels good to be in a place that exudes personality and warmth. By involving the students in creating such a classroom, they will take better care of things as they mean something to them and they have been a part making it happen.

## OBJECTIVE

This main objective of this exercise is for the teacher to guide the students to plan and carry out actions to take joint responsibility for the class and the school. Students will learn to analyse and be critical of their own ideas. They experience how they can help make a difference in their class and school, while strengthening their relationship and view of the school. The idea is that the students develop ideas for how the classroom can become a place of cosiness and cohesion - a place they like to be. Making it clear to them that this is about having to help find and implement solutions. Having students think about what it takes to make their classroom cosy and comfortable.

## MATERIALS

Post-its.

## PROCEDURE

Tell the students to develop ideas for how the classroom can become a place of cosiness and cohesion - a place they like to be. Make it clear to the students that this activity is about having to help find and implement solutions. Have them think about what it takes to make their classroom cosy and comfortable.

Students sit in silence for a few minutes, contemplating the following (give them the list as a template):

- What is my idea about?
- How does it contribute to the atmosphere of the class?
- What does it take for the idea to be carried out?
- Is there anyone who can help?
- What can I, or the class, do to bring the idea to life?

## ESSENTIAL 4 / EXERCISE 1

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

Then ask the students to write their one idea down on a post-it and put it up on the board in silence. They can walk around reading each other's notes. Make sure that the students, as far as possible, find answers and solutions themselves based on the questions on the student template, so that they experience taking responsibility by assessing which initiatives are realistic to implement.

Ask the students to sit in groups of 4 and let them choose one of the ideas from the board that they would like to work on. The teacher can introduce different voting methods, such as a lottery or voting with one or more votes each and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the other ideas.

Summarise by agreeing on who does what (bring posters, plants, blankets, sack pillow, comics, etc.)

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- What is the first thing that comes to mind that could be a place to start?
- What does it mean for the class atmosphere that it is relevant and personal? Do students feel more relaxed, tense, nervous, attached to, and so on?
- Is it likely for your students to get support for this project from home? (Contribution of posters, plants, furniture, books, etc.)
- What do you think it will mean for the students to contribute to the class atmosphere in this way?
- Who would you like to involve? (The team around the class, the parent representatives, the school management, others?)

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

How engaged are the students in the project? Giving responsibility is what makes growth possible.

### NOTE TO TRAINER

It is essential that the teacher motivate the students to implement the initiatives the class have agreed so that they can see that their efforts lead to real results.



# Who Inspires

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## RATIONALE

Role models inspire students as they wish to follow their example and emulate them. In this exercise, the students reflect on and generate a list of qualities that define their 'positive role model'. Such role models can be brought into play when students are having difficulty, are demotivated, or need inspiration. Equally, the more the students know about each other, the more care and compassion they feel for each other and the better the atmosphere.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective in this exercise is to use a third person as an externalising agent to bring out positive abilities, attributes and reflections in the student.

## MATERIALS

Paper & colours.

## PROCEDURE

- The students gather in a circle sitting on the floor. (Optimal standing)
- Explain to the class that they should walk around the room to the music. When the music stops, they have to stop and join a three-person-group with their classmates closest to them and share their answer to a question you will ask.
- The groups will have 2-3 minutes to discuss the questions they will get.
- Start the music and let the students dance freely, jump, walk, or slide around the room.
- Pause the music.
- Ask students to form groups of three with students closest to them.
- Ask all of them the first question: 'Who is a role model in your life, and why?'
- The students have 2-3 minutes in total to tell their answers to each other in the group.
- Start the music again and let the students dance, jump, walk, or slide around the room.
- Pause the music.
- Ask students to form groups of three with students closest to them.
- Ask students to explain what a positive role model for them?
- Students are again given 2-3 minutes to share their answers with each other.

## ESSENTIAL 4 / EXERCISE 2

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Start the music and let the students walk or dance around the room again.
- Pause the music.
- Ask students to form in groups of three with students closest to them.
- Ask students to describe how they are a positive role model for others.
- Students are again given 2-3 minutes to share their answers with each other.
- The exercise ends.
  
- Gather the students in the circle on the floor again.
- Write the words 'positive role model' on the board.
- Invite 3-4 students to tell what a role model is for them.
- Ask if there are more who would like to share what a role model is for them (everyone should have the opportunity to say something).
- Finally, all students must draw/paint their role model on a piece of paper, colour it, and write the person's name. The paintings should be hung on the wall in the classroom to look at throughout the year.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- What do you think about this exercise?
- What is it like to think about your role model?
- Does your role model know that he or she is your role model?
- Are you someone's role model?
- What does that mean to you?

By drawing their role model, which is hung up in the class, the teacher can always draw positive parallels when they see a student behave empathetically. The teacher can ask if the role model did that too. In a conflict situation, the teacher can ask what the students' role model would do in this case. The student's stories, being caring, helpful, and listened to, will help to reinforce a positive identity that manifests itself in self-esteem, care and empathy.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Using role models to build the student's self-esteem should be seen in new, small behaviours: a happier attitude, an increased eagerness in approaching classmates, sparkling eyes, better concentration, and more empathy.

# All Emotions are Equally Valid

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## RATIONALE

Students most often find each other in groups based on interests or personalities in a class. Some individual students are not affiliated in the community because many class cultures do not create the conditions necessary for students to get to know each other personally. They simply have no sense of how a classmate reacts to comments, non-verbal communication, negative statements (including social media) because they have not created relationships among their classmates to recognise feelings, develop empathy, and an understanding of them. This often results in more misunderstandings and quarrels.

All students need to feel recognised and understood in their social and emotional states to combat loneliness in the class. This recognition can best be achieved by the classmates around them. It works powerfully and is what makes the classroom environment and atmosphere safe and secure for all.

## OBJECTIVES

This exercise is an ideal way of working with students to talk about how they can have different emotions simultaneously and how they can take better care of each other and create a safe atmosphere.

## MATERIALS

White plastic cups, and thick black pens.

## PROCEDURE

- The teacher brainstorms with the students the kind of emotions they know about. All emotions are written on the board or flip-chart.
- The teacher asks how each emotion is expressed.
- The teacher asks what sad, happy, angry and so on look like. The students have to show it with their facial expressions.
- The teacher asks how they can be sure that what they see is also how it might feel inwardly.
- The teacher hands out plastic cups to as many students as there are emotions on the board. The students must draw a feeling on the cup - draw, for example, a happy face, a sad face or a surprised face until all emotions from the board are on the cups.
- Now the teacher illustrates that the cups can be inserted into each other, and in this way, demonstrate how you can show a happy face to the outside, and inside may be upset.



## ESSENTIAL 4 / EXERCISE 3

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### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- How many in here know about feeling something inside and showing something else outside?
- How can you get better at remembering that everyone feels the same way?

Write their suggestions on the board and acknowledge them for their ideas: for example: Say it to an adult. Go to a friend. Say it out loud. It is okay to be sad and show it.

- How can you be a good friend when a classmate is angry or sad?
- What can you do to get your balance back if you feel angry, upset, annoyed, and so on?

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

If students feel safe, they will open up and share their own experiences. It creates an atmosphere of closeness and openness that is priceless.

# Cooperating

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## RATIONALE

The primary purpose of this exercise is to strengthen unity and community and show that it is through a concerted effort that a safe atmosphere is established. That fun and laughter also strengthens togetherness and gives the desire to work together and be empathic towards each other.

## OBJECTIVES

To gather the students in an atmosphere where mistakes are welcome. It is about the students getting to meet and have fun with each other; collaborate, laugh together, and get to know each other. It is not about WHAT they do, but HOW they do it.

## MATERIALS

Different balls: e.g., volleyball, tennis ball, soccer, rugby ball.

## PROCEDURE

- Stand in a large circle (the whole class).
- The first student calls the name of a classmate opposite themselves and hands over the ball (one may only receive the ball once).
- The ball is caught, and the one with the ball similarly calls another classmate's name and delivers precisely.
- This is how it continues with names and passes until everyone has had the ball.

Now this is the pattern of the class that must be maintained. Everyone must receive the ball with the one who started with the ball being the last pass it.

- First round: play the ball quickly and accurately around for 2-3 minutes until they have control of the pattern.
- Second round: Now you have to put one more ball into the game. Let the round continue with the students continuing the pattern with just two balls to keep an eye on.
- Third round: Now you must add some more balls into the game. Start with one, but this time it has to be delivered in a different way (through the legs, with the left hand, from over the head and so on. This is the decision of the one who started out.
- Fourth round: Once the students control the pattern and the second and third round, they are ready for the fourth round.

## ESSENTIAL 4 / EXERCISE 4

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Start with one volleyball and wait with the other balls until later. The students must play precisely the same pattern, where they call the person they are to throw to and play the ball. This time, the student must follow the ball when thrown and run over and stand in their partner's place.
- They have a shared responsibility to play the ball accurately and avoid hitting each other while running and keeping the circle's shape.
- Fifth round: Continue as with round four but with more balls in the game at the same time.
- Sixth round: Continue as with round five but now entirely without sound. You must be aware of who you will receive the ball from and where your passing partner is. Use body language.
- Seventh-round: Now, the students divide into two equal groups and make a new pattern in each and compete against each other. The team try to play the balls around the fastest in three full rounds.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- How did you manage to collaborate and help each other solve the task?
- Did you have fun?
- How did you communicate?

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Greater cooperation among students, strengthened the sense of community and joy.

### NOTE TO TEACHER

If necessary, take a few timeouts along the way, and talk about how the teacher can best solve the task, and round off the exercise by talking about how they can best help each other and make the pattern work.

Ask teachers to consider the following questions

- Is it important to you that your students feel togetherness and community? Why or why not?
- What happens to the atmosphere when students do something fun together?
- What then becomes possible?
- What does it do to you as their teacher?
- What does it mean to you?
- How can you feel it in your body?
- Does it make you do something different?
- Do you want to do more or less to create a safe and good atmosphere in the class? Why?
- What can you take with you from this exercise?

# Body Language

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## RATIONALE

The primary purpose of this exercise is to make teachers reflect on how nonverbal communication can be used in a positive or negative way and how either the one or the other affects the atmosphere in the classroom.

The purpose is also to understand how it feels for students when they are not being seen or acknowledged but rather treated unfairly and when teachers use their power destructively as ignoring or humiliating them. An atmosphere of fear and tension will arise, making students use all their energy so as to not stick out from the crowd or say anything wrong because they will be too scared of the consequences.

When teachers misuse their profession in such a way or are not capable of being open, present, and aware, they cannot create the needed connection with the students nor be aware on their own or the students' mental states. This denies the optimal conditions for a good and safe classroom atmosphere to take place. It will make it much harder to create the conditions in which empathy can unfold.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective in this exercise is self-awareness and how nonverbal interactions affect emotional states unconsciously. When teachers do not have a good knowledge of themselves, are unclear as to how they identify effects on the body, and lack a sense of their own self-accord, it can become challenging for them to be genuinely available to students and offer a relevant professional relationship and meaningful teaching.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

- All teachers are divided into two groups; A and B. Group A enters another room where the group members are instructed in their task. B stays in the room and the group members also informed of their task.
- Group A is instructed to talk about an experience from their teaching/learning that was very challenging.
- Group B is instructed to seem utterly uninterested in what A is telling them. With body language and facial expressions, members of Group B must indirectly show that they are bored and indifferent to what the person has to say.

## ESSENTIAL 4 / EXERCISE 5

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Once the story is told, both A and B should sit in silence.
- Once each group has understood their tasks, A and B gather two by two in front of each other sitting on a chair.
- Group A members start by sharing their experiences while Group B respond as they have been instructed. The trainer counts the time while only Group A speaks. When the time has finished, the trainer asks all Group A members to describe what it was like to tell their story. Group B is also asked what it was like to behave that way.
- In the second round, B must leave the room. This time, they are instructed to be attentive, interested, and present when they hear Group A's stories – using their facial expressions and body language alone and without using any words.
- Group A stays in the room and is instructed to share a personal experience that has had special significance for or an essential event in their lives.
- Once each group has understood the task, Group A and Group B gather in pairs and sit on chairs in front of each other.
- Group B starts by telling stories while Group A reacts as instructed. It should take about three minutes, and only Group B speaks. When the time has finished, the trainer asks all members of Group B to describe what it was like to tell their story. Group A is also asked what it was like to behave that way.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- Do you sometimes deliberately use nonverbal communication to show who is in charge of your students?
- In which situations does this happen? (Are you in balance or not in balance?)
- How do you feel afterward, when reflecting on your behaviour?
- How would you like to feel instead?
- How can you change from using nonverbal language negatively to deliberately communicating care, respect, and 'I am here for you'?

## ESSENTIAL 4 / EXERCISE 5

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### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS (CONTINUED)

Conclude on the exercise. Say, for example:

- So, your ability to talk, to tell even a straightforward story, depends very much on how others react. This means that even though you may have many exciting things to tell and are good at talking, you find it difficult if others ignore you or mistreat you. So that means that the others are involved in deciding how you can be and the version of yourselves you choose to project.
- When you think about it like that, think about how important a role you play for each student in this class. Through your actions, you help to decide who the students have the opportunity to be. Because you can influence students so much, you have a great responsibility for them. Responsibility is about you being kind to them and taking care of them, in accordance of your basic values and empathic skills.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

How teachers change from using nonverbal language negatively to deliberately communicating care, respect, and 'I am here for you.; 'I like you.' Additionally, it will also become easier to set boundaries in the cases where someone is not behaving respectfully towards you, as you know the signs to be aware of.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

In round three, Groups A and B switched roles, so everyone gets to experience both cases. This exercise can also be used with the students. It is important to change the topics to describe such things as their pets or a fun experience. They could talk about a person you like or about what they want to become when they grow-up. It is important to note that topics should be personal, but not private.

# A Good Support System Fosters Empathy

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The Circle of Empathy

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## Support System

# The Circle of Empathy

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With a great support system around them, teachers can realise the best circumstances and opportunities for teaching empathy. The support system should ensure knowledge sharing, transparency, support, security, and effective workflows around the joint project of students' learning. A sound support system is about everyone contributing on equal terms in a coordinated effort to solve a task together. It is about creating common solutions through different inputs and perspectives, where all individual competencies contribute to a positive result. Therefore, there must be an awareness that there is nothing unnecessary that disturbs and stands in the way of the teacher's teaching and access to students' hearts. Likewise, there must be a focus on communicating for the benefit of the student's best interests. This happens if everyone around both teacher and student collaborate well and support them as best as possible. A good support system works best when there are clearly shared task and visible and meaningful goals for everyone involved.



# Teams

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A classic definition of a team is:

'A number of people who, within the framework of an organization (school), have such a degree of interaction that they have the opportunity to work towards - and in principle contribute to the fulfilment of - goals associated with this organization.'

Source: Graversen/Larsen: The psychology of working life.

For teachers must feel motivated to manage their resources in the best possible way, promote balance and energy, they need to have supportive colleagues around them. Being part of a healthy, well-functioning learning environment reduces stress. It provides greater joy and makes everyday life more comfortable with a sense of togetherness and community.

When having professional sparring partners close by to listen, support, and give feedback, the teachers appear as a cohesive unit rather than just a single, more vulnerable individual. It makes them better equipped and less exposed to criticism from parents, students, or management. When the purpose is clear and leads to better pedagogical work, learning and well-being, teamwork works the best.

In Denmark, teams are often composed of each grade level or based on subjects and didactics. In these teams, teachers can structure interdisciplinary courses, put together annual plans and take over each other's teaching, if necessary, where they use each other's resources to the greatest joy and benefit of the students.

# Heart

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## RATIONALE

In order to be able to create a good contact to the teachers in the team, it is necessary to find peace and balance inside to begin with. It opens up for a connection to be created, so that a safe and open communication can take place, and where teams can best support and help each other.

## OBJECTIVES

The focus of this exercise is on the body and the sensations in the body. The extent of self-awareness also increases the movement of the breath. Being aware of one's breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system and regulates the level of stress. That means that awareness on the breath is an important component in the training of self-management and empathy.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

- Sit down in a comfortable position.
- Take five deep breaths.
- Place the right hand on the physical heart and place the left hand over the right.
- Feel where the hand meets the chest. Feel the area around the heart. Feel how the breast rises and falls.
- See if you can feel the heart beating with your hands. Can you hear it beat?
- Now feel the whole heart area. How does it feel? Can you feel a particular mood? Is there a feeling? Can you feel anything physical? Is the temperature different or the same as in the rest of the body?
- You just have to pay attention to what is happening in the heart area - there are no rules for how it should feel. If you do not notice anything, that is fine. The important thing is that you turn your attention to the heart.

## WHAT TO OBSERVE

How calmness spreads in the body and gives a better opportunity to see things from the outside.

# Breath

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## RATIONALE

When stress and irritation fill up in everyday life, cortisol, which is the body's stress hormone, is activated. It happens to many teachers during an ordinary day, which may be observed but not necessarily responded to. By learning a simple breathing exercise, the teacher is helped to calm the body and thereby reduce the risk of prolonged stress.

## OBJECTIVES

The focus of this exercise is on the body and the sensations in the body. The extent of self-awareness also increases the movement of your breathing. Being aware of one's breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system and regulates the level of stress. That means that awareness on the breath is an important component in the training of self-management and empathy.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

- Sit in a comfortable position.
- Notice your breathing. Notice that you are inhaling and that you are exhaling.
- Notice how the breath causes your body to move. Notice where your body is moving: the abdomen, chest, diaphragm, or other.
- Notice the pace of your breathing. Do you breathe fast or slow?
- Notice if you are breathing in shock or in a sliding motion.
- Now notice if your breathing has changed since you started the exercise. If that has changed, how is it different? Keep in mind that there is no fact list. Your breathing is as it is.
- However, you may a pause between inhaling and exhaling - a short moment where there is complete calm.
- Breathe in - pause - breath out - pause.
- Sit with it for a few minutes.

## NOTE TO TRAINER

This exercise is good to use in many contexts and can quickly have a positive effect.

# Better and Worse

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## RATIONALE

Some teachers may need help with reflection and support around understanding themselves, their reactions, and development areas. Here, the class team or other colleagues can help if there is a deadlock or a challenging situation.

## OBJECTIVES

Clarity, balance, and self-awareness.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

Two colleagues sit comfortable in a room on their own – or the team is gathered to a weekly team meeting. On the agenda is this exercise.

### First part:

The focus person starts talking about personal strengths and weaknesses of being a teacher and tries to open up as much as it feels comfortable to do so. The idea is to help the focus person, develop a greater understanding of reaction patterns and who he/she is as a professional. The interviewer asks questions like:

- Tell me a little more?
- What is it like for you to be in this situation?
- What do you do?
- What does it make you think?
- How do you feel it in your body?
- Can you find your way back to your balance? Get in touch with your centre of being?
- ... and other clarifying questions that may come to mind.

### Second part:

If possible, the 'interviewer' puts the focus on how development opportunities can be strengthened for the teacher in question and how to support and challenge him/her in that process.

## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 3

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

The work with the development opportunities can be specified so that it is clear to the focus person just what kind of support is needed and how the group/team can provide such support in the best possible way. Using questions like:

- What would you like to change?
- What would it take to do that?
- What do you want more of instead?
- Why?
- What will it give you?
- Who will you talk to about this?
- Who would you like support from?

#### **Third part:**

After the interview, the others in the team, who until now have sat and listened to the interview, give their suggestions on what they have noticed that the teacher is already mastering. What they come to think of, from their own life about that skill and what they want to do so that they can best support the teacher going forward.

#### **Fourth part:**

Finally, the focus person can put words on how it was to be interviewed. Perhaps using these sentences:

- It was...
- I came to think about...
- I now feel...
- And I know that I will now do...

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- What do you think about using your team to talk to address what is complicated or challenging?
- What will it give you to spar with your team around life as a teacher - good and bad?
- How can you make sure that everyone feels safe? (Confidentiality, recognition, physical and mental presence, clarity and so on.)

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Creating a trusting and cooperative relationship in the team is strengthened by the colleagues continuously showing care for each other and patiently focusing on the teacher's learning and well-being.

## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 3

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### NOTE TO TRAINER

If a team does not work well (quarrels, mistrust, bullying, communicating poorly, if what the principal required of them was not realised or new teachers were not welcomed), the management must work more closely with the team. They should feel the mood, follow the agenda items, or make a point of having a little more understanding as to what is going on. They should see the team's agendas and minutes regularly, so they can keep up.

In Denmark, teams never feel that the management's role is that of 'great leaders' who have to go in and control. Instead, they think that it is necessary to have leadership with clear vision and the ability to make a difference and get things done. How are you doing? How do you solve this? What can we do to make this work, with this class, with these parents? Trust is the keyword.

The school encourages teachers to carry out social events together in their free time or on special occasions. Christmas and summer parties are organised and held by the school, and money is put aside in the school's budget for such events.

Some teachers voluntarily arrange Christmas lunches, make announcements about a cinema tour, a wine club tasting, Easter breakfast, invite the management for pizza, and a beer/soda to promote connection and togetherness and staff the party includes recreation and auxiliary staff, who must also be able to join them once a year. It is about liking those who you work with.

# How is it Going?

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## RATIONALE

In hectic times, it can be hard to find time to reflect on how things are going. However, moments of inward attention and discussions with colleagues are essential for change and for continuously ensuring a well-functioning everyday life for the teacher, the team and the students.

## OBJECTIVE

Individual reflections on the positive and negative aspects of one's own school culture and the opportunity to shed new light on them through dialogue with others are the objective of this exercise.

## MATERIALS

Paper and pencils.

## PROCEDURE

This works well at a team meeting as an agreed exercise on the agenda. It starts as an individual exercise for each teacher in the team, and finish with collectively reflections.

- Write on a piece of paper all kinds of things that characterise your classroom. Things that are working well and things that are not so good, what you like, and what you don't like. Positive and negative small things and bigger things. Use the template.  
5 minutes.
- Choose 1 negative and 1 positive statement. Choose the ones that express your most substantial feelings and draw a line under them.
- Think for a short while about these two statements. Focus on each statement, one by one:
  - What do they mean to you?
  - What is the core or source of the problem?
  - How do you recognise or resolve the problem?
- Find and choose two specific situations where the positive and the negative are shown in the class (one for each). Something happened on the outside that made you feel something.
  - What was that?

## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 4

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Feel the situation.
  - What becomes active in you?
  - Which feelings?
  - How do you sense your body, your breathing, and your thoughts in the situations?
  - What are the signs that make you recognise the problem or the resource?
- Turn your attention towards the others in the team and each of you presents the problems and resources. Give 5 minutes each to this.
- Let all members from the team come up with their thoughts and reflections on what they hear, focusing on your resources and what they specifically notice.
- Reflect on yourself.
  - Did the group reflections give you another understanding of what you have written on the paper?
  - In what way?
- Sum up in the plenary phase and let all know that you appreciate being in a team, where it is possible to show vulnerability and provide help.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

When teachers have someone who spars with them, that they dare to be open to and seek support from, they let their barriers down, and it becomes easier for them to be empathetic.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

Implementing new ways of working can take time. Therefore, everyone must have time to find their own point of view in the group and, by so doing, be there for each other while, at the same time, turning their attention inward.



# School and Home

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Denmark is a rich, modern, democratic society where there are real opportunities to find a way of life where everyone can be happy. To a large extent, we can help create this life for ourselves and for our children. This means that many parents develop a lot of different attitudes and expectations of what is good for their children to learn in school.

Due to different values and attitudes - parents, school management, and teachers need to create a shared understanding through a dialogue of what a good school is within a broad framework that the state and the municipalities have determined. It optimises learning for students when such collaboration works well.

In good school-home collaboration, the school and the parents have clearly defined roles, respect each other, share knowledge, and work together with a common interest in the students' professional, emotional, and social development. To build a healthy collaboration, teachers must consider parents as partners, who they need to work well with to best support and stimulate the student's well-being. This means that the teachers show confidence that all parents can contribute and be a positive resource for constructive communication. Strong school-home collaboration gives the students' better-learning conditions. It also removes the burdens that teachers might otherwise endure, and which further inhibit empathy.

### **Collaboration is a Partnership**

The School Act of Denmark states that parents play a central role in students' schooling, learning, and development. The collaboration may concern the individual student, or it may focus on entire classes. Therefore, the collaboration is characterized by several different activities and areas of cooperation, such as dialogue with the school, parent meetings, conversations between school and home, joint exercises, and ongoing dialogue with teachers.

There are some areas a teacher must consider when a well-functioning partnership between school and home is to work most favourably:

### **Trust**

Trust is an essential element in a well-functioning collaboration. If parents do not trust the teacher, they hold back critical views because they worry that it may harm the student. A trusting relationship helps deal with problems and conflicts when they arise. Therefore, it is important that the teacher reaches out to the parents about everyday topics and continuously communicates the students' strengths and potential when needed.

This ongoing contact can take place, for example, when the teacher writes weekly updates to the parents via the school's communications procedures in an informal and personal way. In this way, the teacher shows a commitment that helps to give the parents security and trust.

## ESSENTIAL 5

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In the younger classes, the teacher can be in class in the morning when the parents drop their children off and give time for small-talk with the parents. In the older classes, a short phone call, every now and then, can provide the opportunity for an informal talk about the student.

The work of creating a trusting and cooperative relationship is strengthened by the teacher continuously showing care for the student and patiently focusing on the student's learning and empathic well-being.

Debriefing Questions for Trainers:

- What do you think about trust between the school and home? Is it relevant? (Why)
- Do you see the collaboration differently now that it has become clear that trust is crucial?
- What are you particularly aware of?

### Learn from Parents

To support good collaboration between school and home, teachers and management must understand the parents' values, perspectives, and expectations for such collaboration and, at the same time, set a clear direction for the collaboration to take place. The school's responsibility is to frame the collaboration, develop a dialogue with the parents, and create shared understandings. Parental knowledge can give teachers a more coherent picture of the student and better understand strengths and weaknesses.

In concrete terms, this means that the teacher, in the meeting with the parents, is listening and asking about their experiences. If the student is challenged, the teacher must avoid interpreting the parents' perspective either as wrong or as an expression of an inherent problem with the

student or family, but instead show curiosity and empathy. The parents' perspective can be an essential source for understanding the student and the student's family culture and background. Practicing empathy here is of great significance.

Parents' commitment to school-home collaboration is created relationally through the school's opportunities for participation. Therefore, it is essential that the collaboration makes it possible for all parents to be heard and does not place higher demands and expectations on the parents than they have the opportunity to live up to.

In some cases, the school-home collaboration goal may be that the student attends school every day or has a packed lunch with them. Particularly in the case of vulnerable families, there may be a need for informal and flexible forms of cooperation. In concrete terms, this may mean that the school must supplement jointly written messages with personal or telephone contact so that the relevant information reaches all parents - regardless of reading skills or language background. To accommodate the parents who have negative school experiences, the teacher can also choose to move meetings and activities away from the school's usual setting, to the sports hall or entirely outside the school for example. Another option may be to go on home visits and gain a greater insight into the student's everyday life.

Trainer Debriefing Questions:

- Does it feel okay for you to listen to the parents of your students?
- What can they provide that you can benefit from?
- How will you let them know that you value their input?

## ESSENTIAL 5

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### Commitment

If teachers are to succeed in developing forms of cooperation that are flexible and accommodating to the parents' prerequisites, it requires well considered strategies and management. Management is of great importance for ensuring teachers maintain positive attitudes towards parents and for maintaining an empathic approach. It focuses on opportunities and resources rather than barriers and shortcomings.

Three key elements should underpin any strategy designed to raise parents' commitment to, and cooperation with, the school. These should be articulated clearly to parents and included in a document or parent handbook to be provided to parents when their child begins in school.

- Firstly, the strategy must clarify the division of roles and responsibilities for both teachers and parents.
  - That an inclusive school is a shared responsibility.
  - That the learning conditions work best when everyone contributes to the community, as it influences their living conditions and development opportunities.
  - That everyone has a shared responsibility to be able to include, accept, and respect the students with their living conditions and stories.
  - That there is open communication, and challenges are solved together.
  - That parents and school equally speak positively about the other.
- Secondly, the strategy must formulate a value-based foundation for the collaboration. The parents are mentioned as partners who

can make a positive contribution. The school management must convey its belief in the parents' prerequisites and willingness to cooperate in that the parents:

- Help their child meet the school's expectations.
- Show interest and loyalty in collaboration with the school.
- Are informed about the school's activities.
- Actively participates in promoting a good environment so that everyone thrives.
- Understand and contributes to their child being part of a community.
- Make demands on their child according to their ability.
- Teach their child to strengthen friendships and develop good manners.

- Thirdly, the strategy must clarify the resource framework for cooperation. In short, it is the management's task to create clarity about resources and time for collaboration.
  - Responsibility - consider each other as whole people, take co-responsibility, and be credible in both word and deed.
  - Attitudes - make demands, and have expectations of each other, maintain healthy traditions, and use humour.
  - Care - create security for all, respect each other, and use disagreement constructively.
  - Community - have a good working environment and commitment to daily work.
  - Ambitions - prioritise a social, creative, and highly professional learning environment and make use each of others' competencies.



## ESSENTIAL 5

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Debriefing Questions for Trainers:

- What are you already doing to create good school and home collaboration?
- What do you find challenging? (And why)
- What works well? (Describe)
- Does your school inform new parents about the school and home collaboration and what does it entail? (Via leaflets, handbook or parent meeting.)
- What would it take to make it even better?
- Who can support this?

# How Parents Can Support Their Child at Home

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## RATIONALE

Many parents feel insecure about how best to support their child's learning and empathic development at home. Therefore, the teacher must make the teaching content and its working methods available to the parents via weekly schedules and annual plans. In this way the parents can find the necessary information to support their child in their progress.

## OBJECTIVES

The objective is to provide tools that can strengthen parents' commitment to their children's learning while supporting the school and its appreciative and empathic approach.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

At a parent meeting, the teacher can provide the parents with some tips on supporting their children's progress and learning at home (especially when working with homework). Write on the board and let the parents know that this is optimal and therefore, should only be seen as a source of inspiration:

Focus on the child's efforts and not on the outcome:

- Be curious and ask open questions while leaving your agenda at the door.
- Describe what you noticed and how it made you feel.
- Make eye contact with your child while praising their effort.
- Only say what you mean.

Example: 'You have such great patience. I see you how you encountered a few challenges a few times, but you kept trying, and it was good to see that it made you successful. I am very proud of you.'

- Being supportive and interested and not controlling.

## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 5

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

Example: 'As long as you make an effort, it's good enough. I am learning too. The most important thing is that you know why it is important to know this - and not necessarily that you can actually master it. It will come.'

- Using the same terms that the teachers use in school.

Example: 'I have read in the annual plan that you use these terms in mathematics. I know them well. Should I try to explain it to you my way?' (Avoid statements such as: 'When I was a child, we did...' Times have changed!)

- Use positive words about the school, the teachers, and the other students. Although there may be students that your child does not find fellowship with, recognise that there must be room for all differences.

Example: 'How glad I am that you go to a school where everyone takes care of each other, has skilled teachers and sweet classmates. There is room for everyone to be different, while you have a strong unity. It's worth its weight in gold.'

The mathematics teacher can, for example, hand out a list of ten ways to use math in everyday life. Or the class teacher can share the 'class rules', that they and the students made jointly. Parents can read a text with their child and talk about specific issues (feeling alone, what is a good friend, how to say 'no', how to ask for help and so on.) along the way.

Specific parental involvement can be noted in the weekly schedule or in connection with homework that requires parent support.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- Were you able to be present, authentic, and maintain your authority with a clear structure during the meeting?
- What worked well?
- How did the parents receive suggestions on how best to support their child with homework?
- What suggestions did they contribute to themselves?
- What did you learn?
- What do you want to take with you to the next meeting?

## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 5

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### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Parents like to be listened to and be involved in their children's daily lives. By letting them contribute ideas on how to see themselves supporting their child with schooling, you recognise that their opinion matters. When they receive concrete tips that can be applied immediately, you will experience a great deal of satisfaction from them by the end of the meeting.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

Be aware that we are all different, and some parents thrive best on not actively participating in these meetings. It is okay. Everyone listens and absorbs what they can or need.

# Parent-meetings

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## RATIONALE

A constructive meeting must be clearly framed. The teacher must set out a clear purpose and present an agenda for the meeting and allow the parents to express their expectations and influence the meeting's content. This means that space is provided for the parents to have a say or to organise events/groups/initiatives outside the school, possibly by the parents talking to each other in small groups or inviting them to a workshop day. However, it is important that parents do not feel insecure about the teachers' qualifications and didactic knowledge. Involving parents is more about them being taken seriously and involved in their child's learning and school life and supporting with good spirit the activities outside school.

## OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to be clear to the parents what their role is, that they have influence and that the agreements that have been made apply to the parents and the school.

## MATERIALS

Paper and pen.

## PROCEDURE

At the first meeting for parents for the class at the beginning of a new school year, let the parents sit in groups of 6 working with these questions:

- What school experiences were the best and most educational and that you have taken away with you?
- Why do many children, when they reach a certain age, find school boring?
- How effectively do students learn when they are bored?
- Does the school become more or less exciting when the teachers continuously measure the students' performance?
- What motivates you the most to give your best?
- How important are communities and well-being for learning?
- Should teachers focus on everything in school that can be measured and tested and spend less time on soft skills?
- How important is it for you that your child maintains and strengthens his/her curiosity, creativity, and empathy at school?
- Are good relationships with classmates and teachers essential to your child's learning?



## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 6

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

After 20 minutes, one parent from each group should present the key conclusions of each question. The answers are noted on the board and used to understand the parents' expectations and values.

A reflective dialogue can open up a constructive dialog about the school's values and the teacher's knowledge of relational competences, community, empathy, and well-being. In this way, it will give the parents a better understanding of the foundation the teachers come from and how they can all better cooperate. The parents can better support the social and emotional initiatives that are implemented in the classroom while recognising that all aspects of school life contribute to a holistic approach in promoting empathy.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- Did all parents participate in the group work?
- Were they good at listening to each other?
- Could they find consensus?
- Was there a balance between professional expectations and the desire for well-being for their children?
- What did you learn about the parents of the class?

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Did some parents change perspective from being focused only on didactic competencies and high grades to appreciating the soft values like empathy and community more.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

An appreciative approach to parents can present a dilemma. On the one hand, the teacher must be open and accommodating to the parents' different values and expectations. On the other hand, it is the school's responsibility as the professional party to formulate a purpose for the collaboration and give it a clear direction. However, the teacher must be able to balance being attentive and appreciative and being a professional authority. For example, the teacher cannot accept that some parents ultimately interfere with the student's schooling, or that a parent takes over an agenda at a parent meeting. It is the teacher who is professional in this context.

# Personal Letters

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## RATIONALE

Parents want the best for their children and want them to be recognised and seen as individuals. Confident parents provide calm working conditions for the teacher, who will then be able to meet the students with an open heart. Therefore, parents are good at being honest and open about where their children excel and where they need support. Personal letters serve a higher purpose than getting to know the students, as the teacher can create individualised differentiated student plans that suit each student in the best possible way and also create a deeper contact to the student, if it is needed.

## OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to provide insights that will help the teacher create contact with the heart, meet the student with recognition, and maintain the trust of parents with the utmost care.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

No one knows their children better than their parents. At the start of a school year, with a new class, the class teacher asks the parents in the welcoming letter to the parents or at the first parent meeting to write a short letter about their child to the teacher.

Let the parents know what the purpose is and that they will be able to talk more about the content with teacher at the first individual parent-child consultation with an emphasis on discussing well-being and development. They should only write down what they feel comfortable sharing.

At the first school-home consultation (most often in autumn), the teacher has the letter available, which the parents wrote at the beginning of the year. The teacher acknowledges the good things that are stated about the student, and then asks the parents to elaborate on those areas in which they believe their child needs help.

- Tell us a little more about where you feel Amber needs help?
- In which situations have you previously experienced Amber having difficulty with this? (In kindergarten, at home, with friends)

## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 7

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- How do you help Amber at home? Does it work?
- What I hear is that you want the focus to be on XX. Is this correct?

At the next meeting with the teachers and parents it is important that the teacher follows up on the focus areas that have been agreed. Sometimes it is necessary to have small telephone conversations in between, to ensure a continuous open and supportive collaboration.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

How parents openly and honestly share both positive opinions with their real concerns and how they show trust in you as a result of recognising your interest in their child.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

In Danish schools, differentiation is a concept highly prioritised. Basically, it means, that the teacher must differentiate their teaching according to needs and reinforce activities and interests that students already show an actual partiality to. Make an effort to meet the students' emotional and social needs, while still keeping the educational focus relevant and inspiring.

# Parent-Parent

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Even though it is outside the school area, many Danish schools encourage parents to do social things together in their free time (they are handed out a folder). It is to strengthen the unity and joy around the students' lives in school. It is also intended to create bonds between parents who then know each other's values and motives. This will make it easier to talk about difficult

topics, should they arise, as adults who spend time and enjoy each other's company are more tolerant of small conflicts. Happy parents are more motivated to arrange social activities outside of school, which helps to strengthen the unity and the understanding of the individual in the class. As with students, parents must also work together for many years to come.

# Self-organised Play Groups

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## RATIONALE

Another way to bring students together and strengthen their social skills and empathy is the self-organised play groups. Many Danish schools encourage parents to organise playgroups outside of school. Children learn and develop empathy skills when they participate in social contexts. Making a contribution to the community by hosting play groups has a positive impact on the quality of student life and supports further developmental opportunities. This, in turn, contributes to reducing bullying, since it is harder to tease someone they know while also knowing the family. Therefore, it is extremely advantageous to have a well-functioning community in and around the school.

## OBJECTIVES

This initiative is to strengthen the sense of community among the students. When they come to each other's homes, play, eat, and meet their classmates' parents, it becomes harder to bully or be bullied. The students get mixed up in different social and play groupings each time and come home to a variety of families. It also blends students across genders and interests, opening up new friendships, which reinforces non-bullying behaviour and enhances empathy.

When students feel they have friends in school, they take their guards down and are more willing to learn. Therefore, this has a significant impact on the learning environment for all involved.

## MATERIALS

Snacks and dinner.

## PROCEDURE

One of the class parent representatives organises all students into small mixed groups of 5-6 students to come for 'Eat and Play' at their house after school till around 7-8pm once per-month (or 5-6 times a year).

A set of parents creates the hosting groups of students, agreed on at the first parenting meeting. The parents and students rotate every month, changing the group of students and hosts. All children get to be a host during the year.

## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 8

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

Once the groups are made and passed on to all parents, immediately after the parent meeting, the host parents take responsibility for scheduling their week. The event must be held on a day that suits the family during the given week. They must be sure to invite the visiting students through their parents in order to determine whether everyone can participate.

the parent meeting, the host parents take responsibility for scheduling their week. The event must be held on a day that suits the family during the given week. They must be sure to invite the visiting students through their parents in order to determine whether everyone can participate.

# Joint Birthdays

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## RATIONALE

Shared birthdays are when the students of the class are celebrated in groups. Everyone is in a group, and the whole class is invited every time. As a basic rule in Denmark, students invite either all girls, all boys or the whole class home for private birthdays. It is not tolerated that there are students who are not invited. As a parent, you can do a lot to make the joint class birthday parties excellent and fun for all children to feel a part of a whole.

## OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose is to gather the students around something fun and welcoming. When they experience good things together, they forge new bonds and create new communities and friendships. It reduces bullying and loneliness and fosters empathy. The parents also get to know each other better, and their joy of working with other parents to solve a task spreads to the students.

## MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

## PROCEDURE

- The parents are divided into birthday groups according to the month in which the children have a birthday. Gather the groups so that birthdays are celebrated 3 or 4 times a year.
- Each group agrees on a date for the birthday and announces it through the school's communications procedures so that the calendar can be ticked.
- The groups meet to vote on expectations and start planning when time is near for their birthday to be planned.
  - How long should the birthday be?
  - What should the expectations be? A good piece of advice is NOT to make it too complicated but to keep it simple but fun.
  - Does anyone have a shared house or an adequate space at home? For example, can you ask whether the school hall is available or find a good playground somewhere?

## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 9

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Once the framework is set, make a small birthday meeting with the children, hear what they would like and make sure that all the children have a say.
- Before the meeting, each parent couple could have a short talk with their child about the day's wishes within the framework and demonstrate to them that for a joint birthday, there are several individuals who need to decide. Tell the children that now the parents have written down their wishes they will sit down together to plan the event.
- Put the day together and make sure all children have an input. Each parent tells their child how the day will be.
  - Now the parents must divide the tasks among themselves.
  - Rooms, decorations, and music.
  - Food and drink can be divided between several, so one bakes muffins/cake, provides fruit and snacks, provides drinks, and makes chicken skewers and vegetables, or whatever you need.
  - Entertainment - games, treasure hunts, or whatever it may be.
  - Cleaning.
- Write a warm invitation that is handed out to the class and sent in line with the school's communication procedures. Remember to write:
  - Where to meet, date, and time schedule.
  - That the children can be picked up and brought if their parents cannot.
  - Name, telephone number and contact email address.
- Do what you can to get all the children to join the joint birthday event. Call those parents who have not reported back within the deadline. Offer to pick up and bring the child if the parents are unable to.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Fellowship, joy and togetherness.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

It may be a good idea for the teacher to talk about how birthdays should be held among the class students. This can be brought up at this year's first parent meeting, and questions such as the following can be discussed:

- Do you hold birthdays separately, or should you consider joint birthdays?
- Who do you invite to birthdays? The whole class, the boys' group or the girls' group, so that no one feels left out.
- Do the children give gifts? Do the parents of the birthday child buy a joint gift from the whole class? What must the gift cost?



## ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE 9

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### NOTE TO TRAINERS (CONTINUED)

- Should there be ½ hours of parent coffee at pick-up? A quick and effective way to get to know each other better and show the children that the parents talk well together.

Highly prioritise birthday invitations. The fact that the student does not want to participate is not a good reason to cancel.

- Respect the way the parents of the class have agreed to hold the birthdays.
- Birthdays do not have to be the big event, it is more important to keep them simple, cosy, and fun for the kids.
- Talk openly about different ways to celebrate birthdays. It is just as exciting if there are differences. Remember that even a small criticism regarding their family's options and choices can hit a student hard.
- Stick to the agreed gift amount. No one should have their worth measured in the price and size of a gift.

# Extra Exercises

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For inspiration

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## EXTRA EXERCISES

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# Sing, Sing, Sing

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### RATIONALE

Singing is life-giving and meaningful because it builds self-confidence, promotes self-esteem, engages emotions, promotes social inclusion, supports the development of social skills and empathy, and enables students of different ages and abilities to meet success in a community while increasing their motivation. Singing encourages students to be together, express their feelings, and sharpen their ability to communicate.

### OBJECTIVES

The main objectives are to create a feeling of connection and togetherness and release good energy.

### MATERIALS

A class songbook (one for each student).

### PROCEDURE

The teacher says:

- This is a song that many children all over the world know. When we sing it, we feel like we are connecting to all the children we don't know. Maybe some of you know the song already – otherwise, just follow me. Come stand in a circle and take each other's hands. Are you ready?

Hello, bonjour, buenos dias  
Good day, guten-Tag, konichiwa  
Ciao, shalom, do-brey dien  
Hello to all the children of the world!

We live in different places from all around the world  
We speak in many different ways  
Though some things may be different, we're  
children just the same  
And we all like to sing and play!

Hello, bonjour, buenos dias  
Good day, guten-Tag, konichiwa  
Ciao, shalom, do-brey dien  
Hello to all the children of the world.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

There are children in the deserts and  
children in the towns  
And children who live down by the sea  
If we could meet each other to run and sing and play  
Then what good friends we all could be!

Hello, bonjour, buenos dias  
Good day, guten-Tag, konichiwa  
Ciao, shalom, do-brey dien  
Hello to all the children of the world Hello to all the children of the world

Hello to all the children of the world.

The teacher says:

- Now, place you on the floor in a circle.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- Let me know; how your mood is right now?
- If you put your right hand on your heart, what does your heart say right now?
- Shall we thank all children in the world so they know that we are thinking about them and being thankful for their existence? (All shout in choir loudly to make sure they can hear it everywhere)

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

How singing connects and calms the students down.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

The song is written by Manya Stojic  
The teachers can find it on YouTube to watch:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpTR1wF4M6k>

I strongly recommend that there is a songbook lying in the class for each student, created by all with favourite national hymns and songs.

### OPTIONAL

Brainstorm with your students how you say 'Hello' in different languages. See how many words they can think of as a group or engage them by guessing the countries the 'hellos' come from:

Hello: English. Bon Jour: French. Buenos Dias: Spanish. G' day: Australian. Guten tag: German. Konichiwa: Japanese. Ciao: Italian. Shalom: Hebrew. Dobrey dyen: Russian.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### OPTIONAL (CONTINUED)

You can also have the students develop dance for the song by making a gesture for matching each greeting. For example, for 'Hello', students could wave their hands, for 'Konnichiwa' can do a deep bow, etc.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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# Connecting to the Heart

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### RATIONALE

When teachers are in contact with their heart, they will experience more receptivity of grace, love, compassion, generosity, fulfillment, and peace. When the heart is closed, there can be feelings of resentment, fear, jealousy, hopelessness, judgment, and cynicism.

### OBJECTIVE

This technique helps the teacher connect with their deeper heart, increase mental clarity, regulate brain chemicals and hormones, and, produce a natural high.

### MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

### PROCEDURE

The trainer says:

- Put yourself in a comfortable position.
- Scan your body briefly.
- How and where is the contact with the chair?
- Now focus your attention on the pelvic area and note the weight of your body.
- Follow your spinal cord all the way from the coccyx to the upper cervical vertebrae.
- Move your consciousness to your feet, your hands, and your head.
- Spread your consciousness to your feet, your hands, your head, and the spinal cord and pelvic area at the same time.
- Stay here for a moment.
- Note your breathing - inhalation, and exhalation.
- Let your consciousness stay with your breath for a while.
- Put your attention on your chest and the area around your heart.
- Feel your heartbeat.
- Maintain attention to the heart area and notice how it feels.
- Do you notice a specific mood?
- Is there a feeling?
- All you have to do is notice how it feels and what sensations are around your heart area - there is no specific way it should feel.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- It's totally OK if you do not notice anything.
- The important thing is that your attention is focused on your heart.
- Think of someone you love. Notice how it feels in your heart. It could be someone from your family or a good friend or spouse.
- Now let this loving feeling spread all over your body, right up to your feet, out into your fingertips, and up to your hair's roots.
- Notice how this feels.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- If your heart could speak right now, what would it say?
- What does it mean to you?
- Is there something you want to do more of in your life?
- Who do you want to tell it to?

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

That it is possible to connect emotionally to your heart while simultaneously listening to your inner sensation.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

All teachers must follow their pace and only share with the others what they observe. There is no right or wrong way to do this exercise.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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# A Secret Friend

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### RATIONALE

In this exercise, the focus is on what works and is good for the atmosphere in the classroom and between the students. It contributes to increased security, greater self-confidence and a sincere joy of going to school. It is nice to know that someone is caring about you, while at the same time being a good friend creates a sense of healing.

### OBJECTIVES

The exercise is about strengthening the students' ability to notice each other, say something nice to each other, and improve their ability to see what the other is doing well.

### MATERIALS

A small box, small notes with all the students' names on.

### PROCEDURE

The teacher says:

- In this lesson, we are going to do an excellent little exercise in secret. Are you ready for that?
- You will all pick a name from this box (show them the box with the names within). You must keep the name you pick a secret. Can you do this?
- Now draw a note from the name box.
- Tell the class that the name on the note is the student's 'secret friend' and having a secret friend means that in the next hour they shall notice all the good things about their secret friend.
- When the lesson is about to end, the students are asked to sit in a circle, and a 'secret friend round' is made, where all the secret friends are revealed. The teacher starts by saying that they must choose the one thing their secret friend did, that they liked the most and still keep it to themselves. To inspire the round and show that the students only have to mention one good thing that they have noticed, the teacher starts.
- I've had you, Anna, as secret friend, and I've noticed that you comforted Emma really well when Emma was upset. And you, Anna, who did you have as a secret Friend?
- All the students in the class take turns talking about their secret friend, led by the teacher.
- When the round is over they end the exercise by giving hugs to each other.



## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### WHAT TO OBSERVE

The exercise often creates new connections between the students. It gives the students a feeling that they have been noticed and are valued.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

Teachers can increase the focus on skills by asking about the students' questions. 'What was it that Emma did that made you say she was cute?' 'Why is that good?' 'How did that make you feel?' 'Is there anything you would like to do now?'

In many Danish schools, students have a 'Secret Santa Claus' throughout December, who, without being discovered, puts small greetings or goodies to their classmate 2-3 times a week. It creates a good atmosphere and a close connection among the students. On the last day before the Christmas holiday, each student must guess who their secret Santa is. It is most often associated with great joy and excitement.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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# To Lead and be Led

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### RATIONALE

The exercise can be used to strengthen cooperation, responsibility, and values and norms in relationship work, body, training, and well-being. When things are going well, a class is usually characterised by trust, security, and helpfulness. When there is dissatisfaction, there are situations of insecurity, teasing, and worries about looking silly and lacking empathy and help. Therefore, it is always essential to work with responsibility, attention, and cooperation.

### OBJECTIVES

The main objectives are development of cooperation, trust and security. The goal is also for the students to relate to the responsibility it requires, when they occasionally have to touch each other and work together where physical contact is necessary.

### MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

### PROCEDURE

- The teacher asks the students to go together in pairs. The teacher emphasises that it is not so important, who they are with, as they have to change partners regularly.
- Students should hold hands or take forearms and keep pace with the music while feeling the other person's movements. After two minutes, the teacher stops them. The teacher makes it clear that they must not speak but only communicate with the body.

The teacher says:

- That's great! Now feel that when you walk, you both steer/lead and let yourself be guided and led, right?
- Now you must take turns leading and letting yourself be guided. The one who leads must create a good and safe experience, and the one who leads must be led with closed eyes. You are very welcome to vary direction and pace. Hold in one hand and place the arm around the shoulder of the partner. Sense what feels nice, so you can give your partner a pleasant experience.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

After 1-2 minutes, roles change, and the exercise is repeated.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- What does it take to make it feel safe to be guided or lead?
- What does it look like when you are aware of each other? (Eye contact, be close, hold firmly, respect, avoid touching intimate places).

In the dialogue, the teacher listens to whether the students themselves get to the points that there may be a difference between leading a boy or a girl and a difference in what each individual student (person) experiences as nice. Often the students themselves come up with statements such as 'I find it difficult, strange, or clammy to lead one of the opposite sex.' The teacher gets an excellent opportunity to get them to talk about respect and about showing consideration.

- How to lead your partner with light and precise movements?
- How can you feel for your partner, whether it is nice and safe or uncomfortable and insecure for them when you lead?
- Where and how is it okay or not okay to touch each other?

You do not have to completely agree, but the discussion is critical for you to show consideration and cooperation towards each other in the future.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Laughter, cohesion and joy.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

The teacher can add an extra dimension to the exercise so that the leader switches the grip from the shoulders to the hands so that the pairs can either form a bridge or go under the bridge that another pair forms.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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# In Our Class, We...

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### RATIONALE

It is significant to involve students and share the responsibility for achieving the most extraordinary commitment and effect when it comes to students' own well-being. They often know best what is required to create inclusiveness, kindness, and trust in a class, as they are in the middle of it and feel the consequences of not achieving these things. Students must be listened to and recognised for their contributions.

### OBJECTIVE

This activity aims to sharpen students' attention to what they can do together that contributes positively to the well-being and empathic community of the class.

### MATERIALS

Paper, colours – creativity.

### PROCEDURE

The trainer explains:

Tell the class that they need to work as a class community; what the class can and does well.

Divide the class of students into pairs of two (one they know well).

Let them talk for 10 minutes based on the following questions (worksheet in the appendix):

- It is nice to be in class when...
- In teaching, we are good at...
- In the breaks, we are good at...
- We help each other when...
- Teachers like it when we...
- Our parents think it is a good class when...
- A school day gets better when...
- Can we give a name to what we do together?

Then divide them into larger groups of 4-6 students. The large groups should be mixed with students, that do not necessarily know each other that well.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### **PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)**

Let the groups jointly prepare a presentation of what the class already does well together. They can create a role-play, a collectively painted drawing, a collage, a video clip, a mind map, or a visual model using constructions kits for example.

Once all groups have presented their perception of what characterises their class, the teacher collects the groups' definitions and hangs them on the wall in an 'In our class' display.

### **WHAT TO OBSERVE**

Conflicts are minimised, respect for the class and the relationships among the students are strengthened, and there is generally greater attention to everyone's well-being. Focus on the positive gives rise to more of the positive.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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# Our Dream Room

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### RATIONALE

Play, being an inherent part of the Danish tradition, is crucial for students in Denmark! Research clearly shows that play facilitates social skills, self-control, confidence, coping skills, and reduce stress and anxiety. Through play, students experience greater confidence in their bodies. They become more familiar with what they can and cannot do. This understanding helps them to commit themselves to the world with greater security. Their awareness of themselves and their consciousness to their surroundings and the world expands. In this way, they become teammates for events, experiences, impressions, conversations, and chores that school life provides. Through their body, they understand themselves and the world around them better. Together with their consciousness and thoughts, whole, empathic and balanced students develop.

This exercise should be carried out in cooperation with the team around the class and across subjects such as visual arts, crafts, and mathematics.

### OBJECTIVE

Practising listening, cooperation, negotiation, compromise, delegation, and problem solving skills in order to creating an exhibition for the upcoming parent meeting or event.

### MATERIALS

Cardboard-box, water colour, things from nature, shoe box, fabric remnants, glue, scissors, markers, ruler, nails, hammer and so on.

### PROCEDURE

The trainer explains:

#### **Day one**

Ask students to bring a cardboard-box for the following week (or one for each group). Let them know that they are going to build, construct, and furnish their dream room with a classmate.

Place them in pairs of two and let them start brainstorm on how such room look like. They can use the worksheet from the appendix.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- What is needed in our room? (e.g., bed, desk, mirror, books, closet, curtains, etc.)
- What should be on the walls? (Painted in a colour, posters or other kinds of decoration)
- What mood do we want there to create? (Simple, cosy, warm, practical)
- What can we bring from home to use in the process? (A shoebox for the bed, some fabric remnants for curtains, pillow and duvet and so on.)

During the plenary session, ask all the groups to explain what they will bring from home for the following day/week.

### Day two

The cardboard-boxes should be collected in the classroom.

The trainer explains:

- Students must cut holes for windows and turn the box upside down.
- The teachers can take the students with them to the forest, to find branches, moss, stones and more with which to make furniture. Or they can use a shoebox to make a bed.
- The mathematics teacher can help students measure and calculate size ratios.
- Curtains can be sewn, and carpets knitted.
- Finally, the cardboard box can be painted with watercolours, making the dream house fun and accommodating. Only the imagination sets the limit.

Frame the day's agenda for the students and ask the following questions:

- Did everyone remember what they were supposed to for today?
- Those of you who are going to the forest go with teacher XX.
- Those who need help cutting holes in the cardboard-box go with teacher XX.
- Those who need to sew go with teacher XX.
- The rest of you start with what you have in mind.

As the process progresses, the groups will rotate according to where they need help and guidance. Teachers can have stations (specific classrooms) where they are located, and which students can apply to if they need help.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

The last stage is the preparation for the exhibition, where each group sets up their masterpiece, writes a note with the name of their room (Hula hoop room, candy room, space room, princess room.) and states the students' names. Here it will be ready for the parent meeting the same evening or any other upcoming event where parents can join.

Remember that students must be allowed to live out their creativity. The teacher must guide and support, making the student successful, on the student's own terms and ability. Such a project can be completed in one day, and most students love the creative process.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

Commitment, motivation and students who can shine but generally fail to do so in the more academic subjects.

### NOTE TO TRAINER

Teachers need to be aware that disagreements can quickly arise and need to be resolved with understanding and recognition. Frustrations occur when students do not work at the same pace, when they are not given a clear framework for who does what, when they lose concentration or when something does not succeed. Remember that it is part of the exercise to get through this together, in the best possible way.

Danes focus on developing student's internal locus of control. Locus of control refers to the place from which one feels a sense of control over one's life. Where students believe that they have the power to control their lives. Trusting students to do and try new things and giving them space to build their own trust in themselves is an essential factor in creating a 'whole child'. Teachers provide them with a 'scaffolding' for their development and help them build their self-esteem and empathic skills.



## EXTRA EXERCISES

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# Role-play

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### RATIONALE

The primary purpose of this exercise is to clarify how students are affected by the teacher's unconscious emotional states; bodily, sensory, and linguistic. When there is no consistency between what they say and what they do, they become untrustworthy as teachers and lose authority which, in turn, is reflected in the classroom atmosphere. Remember, that the students have identified their emotional state a long time before they even realise it, which is why this exercise is a learning opportunity in awareness, as 80% of the way others see them takes place through nonverbal cues.

### OBJECTIVE

The exercise gives a picture of how students or colleagues and parents see the teacher when they enter the class. Does their body language show that they are tired and about to give up? Do they express sincere joy in being with the students? Is there a consensus between what their students see and how they want to be seen?

### MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

### PROCEDURE

The trainer explains:

A teacher is selected from the audience who walks outside the door and is instructed in the task. The teacher must improvise entering a class of students, with a drained emotional state. There has been some unresolved quarrel with the partner the night before, and the teacher has hardly slept. On the way to class, the teacher also met a colleague who always talks down to the them, which is also extremely frustrating.

When the teacher enters the classroom, all these feelings are within, but must be suppressed while managing a full class of students. The teacher should improvise and see what happens and how it would take place in reality.

While the teacher is instructed outside the room, some from the audience are given different roles to play.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- One plays the student who walks around, disturbing the rest of the class.
- Another asks the teacher many questions.
- A third refuse to do as told.
- Two girls roll eyes and giggle.
- Everyone else acts like their students would usually do.

During the plenary, it is important to talk about how it was for the teacher to enter the room with a head full of thoughts and unresolved issues.

### DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS FOR TRAINERS

- What strategies did you use to help manage meeting the students?
- Was it possible to meet students with empathy?
- With an open heart?
- Without being provoked?
- With kindness and curiosity?
- Was it possible to create a connection to the students?
- What happened to you?
- How did you change from being triggered to being balanced?

It is essential, to be honest, and reflect on the actual situation.

During the plenary, it is also essential to ask how it was to be in the role of a student, who challenged the teacher (most often unconsciously) and could not focus. It is rarely fun to stand out from the crowd for any child. The differences should be discussed and the effect on the students and/or the teacher considered.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

As a teacher, you are only human. It is okay to have down days, and it is okay to tell your students that you do not have that much energy to give them today. Say that it does not have anything to do with them and that you are okay. You are simply tired. Start out with a breathing exercise in the class, maybe listen to some calming music and see how you, and the class, slowly change negative and draining energy into caring and compassionate awareness.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### NOTE TO TRAINERS

It should be part of a teacher's professional conduct to keep an eye on their own feelings. It is better to use 10 minutes to get in balance together with the class than being a short-tempered, limited and stressed teacher. This will help the teacher to better meet each of the students with an understanding of their intentions, rather than just bad behaviour

This exercise can be done with the students as well. Get them involved and make it a fun activity because they are often very good at imitating situations, feelings, and providing solutions, leading to a better connection to themselves and their hearts.

# Joint Events

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### RATIONALE

Joint events are for the whole class and planned and held by groups of parents of that class. Here the students meet outside school hours for joint activities such as with Joint Birthdays and most often at weekends. The school prepares proposals for the parent groups before the first parent meeting to make sure this important initiative reaches all parents in school. From this point on, the parent representatives from each class put together four groups (Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer). Parents from the wider parent body, together with students, are then invited to join the group with the name representing the season in which their child's birthday occurs. As it is outside school time, Danish schools take no responsibility, but support these events nevertheless.

### OBJECTIVES

Joint events help to ensure well-being in a class and thus contribute to making everyone feel comfortable. Planning and conducting joint events is a unique opportunity to build up a social community among the parents, which is also essential for the well-being of the class as a whole. Most of all, these events are about securing community and well-being in all students, where boys and girls learn to interact with each other across genders, share experiences, create memories, connect, and have fun.

### MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

### PROCEDURE

- The parents are divided into three groups, organised and determined by the class representative.
- Each group agrees on a date for the event and announces it through school's communication procedures so that the date can be set in the calendar. Parents will most often correspond by email or through established school channels.
- The groups meet to discuss what kind of event they would like to hold.
  - How long should the event be?
  - Could it be an overnight stay in a shelter, bowling, a bike ride, a Campfire or a fun swimming pool event. Parents might even consider a treasure hunt, a visit to a parent's workplaces or a theme party. The possibilities are endless.
  - How high should the level of expectation be set? A good piece of advice is - NOT to be too ambitious, but to keep it simple and fun.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Once the framework is set, hold a small meeting with the children involved.
- Hear their suggestions and be sure that all the children have a say.
- Before the meeting, each parent couple can have a short talk with their child about wishes for the day within the agreed framework and help them understand that for joint events, there are several who people who to decide. Tell the children that now their parents have written down their wishes, they will sit down together to plan the day.
- Put the day together and make sure all children have an input. The parents can later explain to their children how the day will be.
- Now the parents must divide the tasks amongst themselves; Practical things are dependent on the planned activities and location while food and drink can be divided between the parents.
- Write an invitation that is handed out to the class and sent via the school's communication procedures.
- Remember to include the meeting place, date, and time and make arrangements for children to be picked up and brought to the event if their parents cannot do so. The Name, telephone number and a contact email address are also extremely important.
- Do what you can to get all children to participate in the joint event. Call those parents who have not reported back within the deadline.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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# Running Dinners for Parents

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### RATIONALE

Running dinner is a concept derived from the dating industry. Singles sit at tables for 2 minutes and then move on to another table, to meet a new potential boy/girlfriend. This is not the intention of running dinners in schools. The idea is that to best support the students' schooling, it is important that parents can communicate well with each other on such themes as conflicts, joint birthdays, agreements regarding screen time, anti-bullying rules and so on. Such difficult conversations and decisions are more easily communicated if the parents know and share some fun experiences with each other.

### OBJECTIVES

The event makes it easier for parents to collaborate and make difficult decisions. At the same time, the students experience 'feel-good vibes, which they then mirror. Many families become friends and meet privately afterward. This feels safe and really nice for the students, and it also reduces bullying and enhances empathy.

### MATERIALS

Excel sheet and a lot of good vibes.

The organisers have either in consultation with the parents to the first parent meeting decided whether everyone will contribute food and drink to the event or whether the food is to be ordered and delivered by a supplier. In most classes in Denmark, parents pay an amount of DKK 200-300 per person, with which to cover all expenses in connection with the event. Both work well, so it depends on energy and options. If there is money left from the event, it goes to the students' class teacher who can then buy new supplies or take the class on a theatre trip.

### PROCEDURE

The trainer says:

You meet many parents for two nice dinners that approximately take 2 hours in each place (a fixed time is set, so everyone changes at the same time). Finally, all parents meet for dessert and party together in one place, partying, talking, and having fun until the party ebbs out.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

4-5 parent representatives in the class together organise this event for the parents, which takes place on an agreed Saturday during the school year (a recurring annual event). The parents have voluntarily signed up (approximately 10 families depending on the number of students in the class) to host a dinner before the plan for the evening is handed out. The event is without student participation.

All parents are divided into 5-6 groups (separated from partners). The groups meet and eat the first dish in 5-6 houses/apartments. They get 2 hours at the first place, and it is different how the hosts facilitate the individual dinner. Some make rounds to present everyone before eating if it is the first time they meet privately. Some are creative and play fun games before eating.

The groups are then remixed according to the plan for the groups that all parents received ahead of the party. 5-6 new groups are therefore made, where these groups eat the main course together at a new place. They have 2 1/2 hours for this second dinner.

Around 11 pm, all parents join together at a third location, where they eat dessert, dance, talk, and have fun into the early hours of the morning or as long as one sees fit.

### WHAT TO OBSERVE

How sharing moments of fun and laughter connects, and how friendships arise, which the students then benefit from.

### NOTE TO TRAINERS

It can be extremely challenging for parents to call a classmate's parents and tell them that their child has been teasing or making their child upset. Parents cannot relinquish such a responsibility and let teachers solve everything. They must, therefore, go ahead and show their children that they must respond to such situations. The classmate's parents must know the incident in order to talk to their child about what happened. It is also essential to always keep in mind that there are two sides to every story.

## EXTRA EXERCISES

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### **NOTE TO TRAINERS (CONTINUED)**

Here it is beneficial for the parents to know, who they are calling. Is it a family that they know? Is it a family that does not tend to be very responsive and cooperative? Is it a family that is in crisis for some reason? At the same time, it is much easier to start the conversation by referring to the running dinner party, where there was definitely something to laugh about. It solves an awkward conversation and makes it easier to find an excellent way to resolve the students' conflict.



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# Empathy for Children



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