

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Start Talking! 
Building a Drug-Free Future



Know! To Foster Empathy for Bullying Prevention

October is National Bullying Prevention Month.

In the previous tip, **Know! The End of Bullying Begins With YOU**, we learned that in 2016, more than one in five students reported being bullied, and that regardless of what position a child is in - a target, bully, or bystander - they are at increased risk for a variety of mental health and behavioral problems, including substance abuse.

In addition to positive role modeling and conversations specifically telling students, "It is never ok to hurt, harm, or humiliate another person with your words or behavior," we can further help prevent bullying by fostering **empathy**.

By definition, **empathy** is the power to understand perspectives other than your own; the ability to recognize and share the emotions of another person. Essentially it is, "walking a mile in someone else's shoes."

Experts say empathy is an essential life skill that all youth should be taught to master, and that those youth who are more empathetic tend to perform better in school and have healthier relationships. It is popular belief, in fact, that a person's emotional intelligence or emotional quotient (E.Q.), which includes one's ability to empathize, carries more weight than a person's intelligence quotient (I.Q.) when it comes to determining one's overall success in life. Empathy is also an essential factor in teaching youth what bullying is and how NOT to engage in it.

Here are some ways to teach and strengthen your students' ability to empathize (according to TeachHub.com):

- **Be a positive example:** Your students spend a great deal of time with you and your influence is mighty. Keep in mind that they are learning from your character and behaviors as much as they are from your academic instruction. Be a consistent, positive role model of empathy, showing a



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Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free



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caring, compassionate, understanding attitude toward your students and others.

- **Create the environment:** Establish an environment of trust and understanding within your classroom, so that students are more likely to open up and be open-minded toward others.
- **Include lots of stories:** Stories are perhaps the closest thing we have to “Walking around in someone else’s skin.” They make us more human and develop our ability to understand and sympathize with others’ experiences.
- **Work on communication strategies:** The idea here is to help students find the words to express their feelings, in both their speaking and their writing.
- **Offer collaborative group tasks:** As students work together they experience somewhat of a group molding that brings them together, sharing in victory or sometimes in defeat. In either case, they experience it together and that allows them to practice empathy with their peers.
- **Identify shared values and differences:** Provide opportunities for your students to be open with one another through discussions and activities to learn what others’ perspectives might include.
- **Free and structured interaction:** Having students freely interact within the classroom can help to build bonds between groups and open the door to mutual understanding.

While some students are naturally more empathetic than others, it is truly a skill that can be fostered and strengthened. As instructors, you are in a position to help build bridges between individuals with diverse perspectives, teaching them to look beyond themselves and be mindful, understanding, respectful, and considerate of other student’s complex emotions, feelings, and experiences.

Sources: VeryWell.com, Sherri Gordon: [7 Ways to Teach Empathy and Prevent Bullying - Discover how teaching empathy can prevent bullying](#), Nov 2016. TeachHub.com, Jordan Catapano: [Teaching Strategies: The Importance of Empathy](#). BrightHubEducation.com, Lotus Snow: [Empathy - Teaching your Teenager How to Care About Others](#), Dec. 2013.

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