**Developing Empathy: In My Shoes**

**(adapted from Teaching Tolerance.org)**

**Purpose:** To help students gain a deeper understanding of empathy and how to put it into practice. When we put ourselves into another person’s shoes, we are often more sensitive to what that person is experiencing and are less likely to tease or bully them. By explicitly teaching students to be more conscious of other people’s feelings, we can create a more accepting and respectful school community.

**Essential Questions:**

* How empathetic am I?
* How can I better show empathy towards others?
* What does it mean to put yourself in someone else’s shoes?
* How is empathy different from sympathy?

**Vocabulary:**

**Empathy** (noun) – the understanding of or the ability to identify with another person’s feelings of experiences?

**Procedure:**

* Can you think of a time – maybe during an argument with a friend or when the boy/girl you likes hurt your feelings – when you wished that someone understood how you felt? When we try to relate to what another person is going through, we’re being empathetic.
* Do you think you’re an empathetic person? Respond to each statement on the Are You Empathetic Worksheet with “Yes” if it describes something you do or “No” if you don’t do what is described.
* If you answered mostly “yes,” you probably do a good job of showing empathy toward other people. The statements you answered “no” to are things you could do to be more empathetic.
* As a class, use the worksheet to discuss how you can follow the behaviors suggested to empathy toward others:
	+ One way you can try to imagine what it feels like being in someone else’s shoes is to ask yourself, “How would I feel in this situation?” How else can you try to understand how others feel?
	+ When you listen to others, making eye contact, not interrupting the speaker, and asking follow-up questions can show that you’re making a genuine effort to understand what they’re going through. What other behaviors might show someone that you are being an empathetic listener?
	+ What can you do to be more attuned to other people’s feelings? For instance, when you talk to your friends, how many “you” questions do you ask compared to the number of “statements you make?
* Now you are going to practice what you learned about being empathetic. You each have a handout with a picture of a shoe. If you walked in my shoes, you would know… You are going to write something you wish other people knew about you (i.e. my parents fight a lot or I am very confident. Then you can decorate the shoe. You do not need to include your name.
* Teachers – collect the pictures and turn them into the counselors. We will hang them up on Main Street. By looking at everybody else’s shoes, we will realize we all have struggles in our life and that can help each of us to have more empathy towards each other.