

Duration - 15-20 minutes for each scenario

Goal of the Activity

The purpose of the exercise is to step into the shoes of the families you work with and understand their experiences and emotions.

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard or pieces of poster paper
- Markers
- Sticky notes
- Open minds

Instructions

- Split participants into small groups of 3-4 people. If you have a small team, you can do this as a unit, too.
- Each group is given a scenario that they may encounter through their work.
- As a team, the group draws an empathy map on a large sheet of paper or whiteboard. The map is divided into six boxes: Says, Thinks, Does, Feels, Gains, and Pains. The chart below defines each category.

<p>Says- This section captures the actual words or phrases that the family members might say in each scenario and helps us understand their verbal expressions and concerns.</p>	<p>Thinks-This section reflects the thoughts and beliefs of the family members and gives us insight into the internal thought processes and worries.</p>
<p>Does- This section describes the actions and behaviors of family members in response to the situation and helps us observe their coping mechanisms and strategies.</p>	<p>Feels-This section captures the emotions and feelings experienced by family members and gives us understanding into their emotional state and how the situation affects them.</p>
<p>Gains- This section identifies the positive outcomes or benefits that the family hopes to achieve from addressing the situation.</p>	<p>Pains-This section highlights the challenges, difficulties, or negative experiences the family is currently facing or fears they might face.</p>

- On sticky notes, participants write down ideas for each of the boxes in the empathy chart based on their scenario.
- After about 15-20 minutes, each group will come back together and present their empathy map to the larger group.
- After each group presents, discuss common themes, surprising insights, and how this deeper understanding can improve their work with families and give them a different perspective.
- To close out the activity, hand out a note card to each participant and have them reflect on how empathy charting and building empathy can lead to better outcomes for the families you serve.
- Some examples of scenarios could be as follows:
 - Assisting a family with parenting challenges
 - Helping a family adjust to a new community
 - Assisting a family with financial stress
 - Supporting a family through conflict
 - Assisting a family with a child who has exceptional needs
 - Supporting a family through family separation
 - Supporting a family from a different cultural background with integration

However, you can come up with scenarios that would best fit your team and the population of people you serve.

Example of the Exercise

Situation: Helping a family navigate a child's behavioral issue

Context: A family is struggling with their child's recent behavioral changes, which are affecting the child's school performance and family dynamics. The professionals need to provide support, strategies, and resources to help the family address these issues.

Details: Two parents are struggling with the behavior of their 10-year-old child. The child has become increasingly defiant, has frequent outbursts at home and school, and is struggling academically. The parents are feeling frustrated and helpless, and the child is experiencing emotional distress. Meanwhile, the school is concerned about the child's behavior.

Example of an Empathy Chart

<p>Says</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • i.e., We don't know what to do anymore • why is our child acting out • we need help 	<p>Thinks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • i.e., Are we failing as parents? • What are we doing wrong? • How can we help our child?
<p>Does</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks advice from teaching staff and counselors at school • Tries different parenting strategies from online and from parenting group chats • Keeps a journal of child's behavior 	<p>Feels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopeless and anxious • Frustrated • Confused • Still trying to remain hopeful for solutions
<p>Gains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved understanding of the child's needs • Strategies for managing behavior • Stronger family relationships • Increased academic performance • Increased mental health 	<p>Pains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional stress • Feeling inadequate as parents • Ongoing behavioral issues • Impact on family dynamics

Follow-up Questions

- How can professionals help the parents understand the underlying causes of the child's behavior?
- What strategies can be recommended to manage and improve the child's behavior at home and school?
- How can professionals support the parents and child?