

Classroom Ideas to Help Students Develop Empathy Towards Older Adults

A guide to engaging today's students in developing geriatric sensitivity



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Engaging today's students in the development of empathy and sensitivity toward older adults is essential. Empathy is a vital skill for future health care workers who might care for aging patients. Such training also helps young people understand what it's like to be an older adult, which is important no matter what career path they choose. Use this guide to incorporate new, innovative ways to teach students geriatric sensitivity and empathy toward older adults.

Empathy:

The ability to understand and share the feelings of another. This soft skill is commonly valued in the "helping professions," like counseling and social work, but can bring great value to teams in all professions by helping develop camaraderie and trust. It is a key part in helping students develop geriatric sensitivity.



Idea #1:

Empathy Self-Assessment

Doing a self-assessment will help students reflect on how empathetic they are and identify areas they wish to improve upon. After completing other activities from this guide or your own lesson plans, have students complete the self-assessment again to see if they gained additional empathy skills.


Self-Assessment sample from *The Geriatric Experience* curriculum from Realityworks

The Geriatric Experience Curriculum with the RealCare™ Geriatric Simulator

Empathy Self-Assessment

Take this self-assessment and decide for yourself if you need to improve.

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I have a general interest in the welfare of other people.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I have a warm personality.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I am flexible when dealing with situations.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I am alert and can pick up on how others are feeling.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I am able to listen objectively to other people.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I am able to cope with egocentric personalities.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I am sought after by other people to listen to anxieties and fears.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	My friends would not call me self-absorbed.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I am able to focus on the person who I am speaking with without getting distracted.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I understand the difference between sympathy and empathy.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I have a variety of life experiences that help me have a broad understanding of people.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Others see me as adaptable, flexible, and spontaneous.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I am able to maintain my own health and don't get wrapped up in other people's problems.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	I am patient and kind.
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Others would describe me as humble, not conceited.

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Idea #2:

Spend Time with an Older Adult

A key part of empathy is to see yourself in another person's shoes. To develop geriatric sensitivity, have your students spend time with an aging adult. Ask each student to complete a few of the activities below, then complete a reflection exercise.

Activities to do with an aging adult:

- Shop for groceries
- Interview them about their childhood (especially as it compares to yours)
- Perform household chores, like cleaning the kitchen or doing laundry
- Take a walk
- Play cards or a board game



Reflection Exercise:

Journaling is an excellent way for students to reflect on any experience. Have the students write down what activities they did, what they learned from the activity, what they noticed about the adult they were with and what they are thinking and feeling from the experience.

Idea #3:

Explore Careers in Geriatrics and Gerontology

During this activity lets students explore the wide range of professions associated with the older adult population, learn the key skills that are needed to success in these occupations - and perhaps discover a career they are passionate about.

1. Research careers in Geriatrics and Gerontology
2. Choose one career and look for key information:
 - a. Education requirements
 - b. Average starting salary
 - c. Typical job duties
 - d. Occupational outlook
 - e. Needed skills
3. Present the occupation to the class

Geriatric-Related Careers

Gerontologist
Geriatric Nursing Assistant
Geriatric Case Manager
Geriatric Pharmacist
Medicare Office Manager
Geriatric Speech-Language Pathologist

Integrated Care Manager
Memory Care Practitioner
Family Services Coordinator
Hospice Worker
Nursing Home Administrator
Home Health Aide

Idea #4:

Incorporate Geriatric Training Tools into the Classroom

Give students a chance to “walk in the shoes” of an aging adult with training tools that simulate age-related challenges. The geriatric training tools listed here provide interactive, real-world experiences that let engage students and help them relate to aging family members or patients.

Geriatric Training Tools

To learn more visit www.realityworks.com/geriatric Implementation



RealCare™ Geriatric Simulator

This award-winning wearable simulator enables users to personally experience a variety of age-related physical challenges such as stooped posture and restricted range of motion.



Geriatric Medication Management Simulation Kit

This one-of-a-kind learning aid helps students build empathy and understanding of the challenges experienced by older adults who have multiple medications to manage. It enables users to experience a loss of tactile sensation and visual impairments while trying to manage several prescriptions.



Geriatric Sensory Impairment Kit

This kit includes a Hearing Impairment Simulator, Geriatric Arthritis Simulator and Geriatric Tremor Simulator. These tools enable users to experience common sensory challenges aging patients face every day.

Idea #5:

Don't Forget to Reflect

Whether your students are interviewing an older adult, researching geriatric careers or completing tasks while wearing the RealCare Geriatric Simulator, reflection is key. Provide time for students to reflect on their experiences. Ask them what went well, what could be improved on and what they noticed. Not only does reflection help underscore core concepts, but it helps your students develop soft skills like critical thinking and reasoning, which are highly in-demand in today's workforce.