

# BEHIND HAPPY FACES

## Alpha Phi - Key



### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

These outcomes show what knowledge and skills participants should gain from the lesson. It is crucial you review the goals of the lesson with the members so they know what they will learn.



### HANDOUT:

It is time to distribute a handout/materials to participants. These can be found at the end of each lesson if it includes a handout. Make copies in advance!



### WRITE ON FLIP CHART:

The main points are included in PowerPoint presentations. In the event you do not have access to a computer/projector, write examples and instructions on flip chart paper in the front of the room.



### GROUP DISCUSSION:

It is time to prompt participants with questions or dialogue for group discussion.



### INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY:

It is time for an activity, like scenarios or a game. These activities help participants feel more connected to the information.



### INSTRUCTIONS:

Read information or directions aloud to the groups.



### WATCH THE VIDEO:

Each lesson includes videos to help introduce the topic and engage viewers to take part in the lessons. It is important to make sure you test them in advance to make sure the video and audio work on your technology.

# Lesson 6: Sympathy, Empathy and Compassion

This lesson focuses on the differences between sympathy, empathy and compassion. Recent studies from the University of Michigan have shown that empathy scores in college students have decreased 40% in the last decade. There have been a lot of educational programs started to help young people develop more empathy in their lives. This lesson provides clear definitions for the differences between sympathy, empathy and compassion. It also includes some intense personal storytelling to help members practice empathy.

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## FACILITATOR:

To facilitate this lesson effectively, it is helpful to have experience or training as a facilitator in other areas of chapter operation or campus life. If you have a member who is or has been a resident assistant, student organization leader, peer advocate or is studying to be a teacher, they could be an excellent facilitator for this program.

## TIME NEEDED:

25 minutes



## OBJECTIVES:

- Explain the differences between sympathy, empathy and compassion.
- Interact with another person's story in order to better experience what it is like to live in someone else's perspective.
- Implement skills for sympathy, empathy and compassion.

## SETTING:

- Choose a room that offers a lot of open space for small groups to be able to spread out and not be distracted by others. Students will need to be able to either sit and gather on the floor or move chairs around into small groups.
- You will show a PowerPoint presentation and play a video during the lesson, so connect a laptop to a projector and screen.
- *If facilitating virtually, you should practice the presentation on your video conference platform to ensure the PowerPoint, video, microphone and sound are all working accordingly. You should read the Purpose of Lesson below and review the facilitation guide to be aware of exercises that will need to be adjusted to the virtual experience.*

## GROUP SIZE:

Groups should be no larger than 20 to make sure connections and conversations remain personal.

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- Before the lesson begins, ask members to count off into groups of 20 (or fewer) and then move to different areas of the room.
- We recommend placing a trusted member or chapter officer in each group who can help follow instructions and facilitate small group discussion.
- If your chapter has more than 150 members, we recommend you use more than one room with different facilitators for all of the small group work.
- *If facilitating virtually, use the breakout room feature of your video conference platform to create groups*

#### **MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Projector and screen
- Sympathy, Empathy and Compassion PowerPoint
- This lesson has two PowerPoints. Based on the exercise you facilitate, use the appropriate presentation.

## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THIS LESSON

### PURPOSE OF LESSON:

The purpose of the sixth lesson is to help members understand the difference between sympathy, empathy and compassion as well as how to use these skills in different situations in their lives.

The University of Michigan has found that empathy scores on a standardized scale have decreased by over 40% in the last 10 years. One of the main factors in this decrease has been our evolution into the technological age of communication. On average, people aren't deep reading to better understand someone's perspective or the full history of an issue. Our communication has become much faster, and we're taking less time to appreciate larger concepts.

As our society pushes for more empathy, people have begun to somewhat shame sympathy, and there is additional confusion on what the role of compassion is in being able to respond to a friend in need. This lesson gives clear definitions for all three of these terms. Sympathy is letting someone know you are aware of their distress and you feel for them. Sympathy is validating that someone has feelings. Empathy is showing you care about someone by entering into their experience and seeing a problem from their perspective. Empathy is sharing feelings. Compassion is when you have strong feelings for others or a cause, have a desire to help and take action. Compassion is taking action. To make this easier in most emotional situations, your choices for a response are sympathy, empathy and/or compassion. Validate, feel and/or act.

For this lesson, you have two options for the exercise you can do. The first option is to set some strong ground rules for how members should treat each other in the lesson. You will want to stress that we're going to try an activity that requires respect, confidentiality and care for each other. The activity will be for one sister to stand up and talk about a painful situation in their life for 2 minutes. You will keep a timer for exactly 2 minutes. Another sister will be chosen as a listener. That sister will listen to the other sister's story and then stand up and repeat the story using first-person language. For example, if the first person stands up and says, "One of the hardest days of my life was when my parents got divorced. I felt like it was my fault. Everything changed. I went from a normal life to missing my dad and not feeling connected..." The next sister will stand up and say the same story using the words "me" and "I" in order to feel the story as if it were their own. They will have 2 minutes to tell the story in first person.

After the sister summarizes the story, you will ask the group a series of questions about how they felt and what emotions they heard. Then you will ask the person who told the story how it felt to tell their story. Lastly, you will ask the person who summarized the story how it felt to tell it in first-person language instead of third-person. This exercise can be extremely effective in a group environment. It can elicit a lot of emotions and connection. If you feel that your chapter can do this exercise, then it can be a powerful way to communicate. It's also helpful if you model the first story and have someone tell your story as the first listener. It sets the tone and shows the group it is OK to do this.

If you don't think your members are ready for this type of activity, then you can do an activity that asks them to think about difficult scenarios that their friends have experienced. They can

provide examples of how to express sympathy, how to express empathy and how to take action to show compassion. This exercise can be as effective in accomplishing the goals of the lesson and is not as intense as the first exercise option.

## **FACILITATOR TIPS:**

To facilitate this lesson effectively it is helpful to do the following:

1. Connect to students early about why mental health is important to you and why it should be important to them. If you have a personal story about why you care about mental health, then share it if you're comfortable doing so. Let students know they should take this seriously. The more that you can make yourself vulnerable and relatable the more effective you will be as a facilitator.
2. Make yourself vulnerable with a boundary. If you are going to share part of your personal story, make sure you share something that you are comfortable with and have processed. For example, if you share that you care about this issue because you have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder and it affected part of your life, then the students see you presenting from a place of strength. If you share something that you are still processing and become emotional, then the students may think they need to take care of you. It's helpful if you can be real about why you care and reinforce what you learned from your experiences.
3. Keep the exercises concise. If you give students too much time, they can devolve into so many other unnecessary conversations. Keep students focused.
4. Allow the exercises to be tools for students to identify how to work on mental health, but do not let lessons become therapy. There's a difference between students identifying what they can work on and voicing all of their experiences or pain. Stress that you want to start conversations, but that they can do the work outside of the lessons. This is a public health approach to mental health and not a therapeutic approach.
5. Focus on connecting students to their emotions and each other. Have fun when you can. Be positive. Make it a team-building exercise that strengthens communication and connection.
6. It is important to let students know that lessons about mental health require everyone to be open, honest and non-judgmental. Students who share their stories need to feel safe and that the values of your organization are being upheld. Reinforce that the main goal is to start conversations about mental health in a way that can bring everyone together.
7. If a student is sharing their story extensively and continues to provide more details about their life than the lesson is asking for, it is OK to let them know that you hear their story and also want to hear from other students. Remind all students that these lessons are a start to this topic and provide ways to open conversations that can be continued after the lessons are over. The recommended time for each lesson is 20-25 minutes. This gives you enough time to do each exercise, however you might find that the group you are teaching wants to spend more time on certain exercises. It is ok to do this when you feel that the group is having a discussion that will help everyone address mental health in a meaningful manner.

8. The recommended time for each lesson is 20–25 minutes. This gives you enough time to do each exercise; however, you might find that the group you are facilitating wants to spend more time on certain exercises. It is OK to do this when you feel that the group is having a discussion that will help everyone address mental health in a meaningful manner.
9. Show the slide that sets the ground rules for the conversation at the beginning of the lesson and make sure everyone agrees the ground rules.



## BRENÉ BROWN ON EMPATHY VIDEO (2.5 MINUTES)

Watch this video about the differences between sympathy and empathy from Brené Brown. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw> **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

## INTRODUCTION

### SYMPATHY, EMPATHY AND COMPASSION:

- We're going to go through a lesson about mental health. This is a serious topic that affects all of us and can be really sensitive for members. If at any time you are triggered by the content in this lesson, you can choose to not participate in the activities or leave the room to talk to someone who can help you.
- Being honest, open and non-judgmental of each other during these exercises will help us learn more about mental health and each other. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- What are some of your thoughts about this video? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- How would you define the difference between sympathy and empathy? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- This video makes sympathy look like the worst thing in the world, but it isn't. Sometimes sympathy is all you want to or can express to someone. This video is showing the major difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is letting someone know you are aware of their distress and you feel for them. Sympathy is validating that someone has feelings. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Empathy is showing you care about someone by entering into their experience and seeing a problem from their perspective. Empathy is sharing feelings. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Compassion is when you have strong feelings for others or a cause, have a desire to help and take action. Compassion is taking action. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- To make this easier, in most emotional situations, your choices for a response are sympathy, empathy and/or compassion. Validate, feel and/or act. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

### Some examples of sympathy are:

- I'm sorry about your loss.
- How awful. Poor you.
- I feel so sad for you. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

### Some examples of empathy are:

- I feel your grief.

- I understand this has been a great loss for you.
- I feel and understand your pain. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Some examples of compassion are:

- Cooking your friend a meal to make sure they eat.
- Hugging someone.
- Volunteering. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

#### **FACILITATOR NOTES:**

If you are going to do the activity where members share their own personal stories, take some time to set the expectations in the room to make sure it is a safe environment. It's helpful if you share the first story. Choose something real from your past when you were in school that the members can understand. Remember to choose something you have processed, so that you can be vulnerable with a boundary.

## **OPTIONAL EXERCISE 1 (20 MINUTES)**



### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

- This next activity is going to require all of us to be respectful of each other. Those of us who are willing are going to share some stories about what has been painful in our lives. It's vital for us to keep these stories confidential in this room, to not use these stories against someone else and to work hard to connect to each other. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- During this activity, we may have some nervous laughter because we're uncomfortable or not sure how to react. It is OK to laugh with someone, but it is not OK to laugh at someone or their story. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- The activity is for one sister to share a story about a painful moment in their life for 2 minutes. This story could be about something that happened to them, their family, their friends or just something they went through that hurt them. Some common examples that people share are being left out, made fun of, bullied, going through a parents' divorce, a breakup, a death, a loss of a friend or a time they were embarrassed. All of these events are things that most people have gone through at some age in their life.
- The sister is going to share what happened to them, how it made them feel and what they did for 2 minutes. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**



- Another sister is going to be chosen to be a listener. That sister is going to listen to the first sister's story and pay attention to all of the details. When the first sister is finished, the second sister is going to stand up and tell the first sister's story using first person language by saying words like "I" and "me." That sister will tell their sister's story as best as they can remember it.
- We will do this with as many sisters who would like to share. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**



## SHARE:

*(Ask these questions after each pair of students tells the story.)*

- What were some of the emotions you heard in this story?
- For the sister who told their story, how did it feel to have someone else tell your story?
- For the listener, how did it feel to tell this sister's story?
- What are some acts of compassion that someone could do to help a sister in this situation? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

## SUMMARIZE:

- This exercise is meant to help you better understand a person's experience and the emotions that occur when they go through a difficult event.
- Empathy scores for your generation have decreased over 40% in the last decade. It's the lowest the empathy scores have been in over 30 years. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- It's important to be able to listen to someone's experience, try to understand their perspective and make a compassionate action if you want to support them.
- Empathy is a really helpful skill, and it cannot be where our understanding of another person ends. If it was, then we'd all be sitting around feeling the same way and that may not lead to anyone taking action. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- All of us are different in our approaches to every emotional situation. This lesson wasn't meant to make sympathy, empathy or compassion seem better than the others. It was meant to help you understand the differences and how each one can make someone else feel.

## FACILITATOR NOTES:

If you don't have members willing to do the first exercise, you can have them read some case studies out loud for a similar effect. Please make sure you use the "Lesson Six \*with optional exercise" PowerPoint to view case studies with members.

## OPTIONAL EXERCISE 2 (20 MINUTES)



### INSTRUCTIONS:

- This next activity will help us better identify the differences between sympathy, empathy and compassion. You will read a couple of people's stories and write down responses that could reflect sympathy, empathy or compassion. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Sydney is a junior. Their parents had been fighting since they were in middle school. Right before the holidays, their mom calls them to tell them that they're getting a divorce. Sydney calls their partner, who decides now is the time to tell them they are breaking up. Sydney texts you to tell you about everything that is happening.
- What can you say to show sympathy? What can you say to show empathy? What can you do to show compassion? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

If you want to show them sympathy, you could say:

- I feel so bad for you.
- It's really terrible to have this happen. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

If you want to show them empathy, you could say:

- My parents got divorced and while I don't know what you're going through, I do know how much this hurts.
- This really hurts and I'm here for you as you go through this. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

If you want to show them compassion, you could:

- Offer to take them out to do something they might enjoy.
- Comfort them.
- Offer to help them with something they need. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Steven's dad got cancer during the start of their senior year, and unfortunately doctors were not able to treat it. In November of that year, their dad passed away. Steven and their dad were best friends. They don't want to come to school anymore and don't care about their future. They can't stop crying and miss their dad a lot. Steven and you are friends. He texts you about how he feels.
- What can you say to show sympathy? What can you say to show empathy? What can you do to show compassion? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

If you want to show them sympathy, you could say:

- This really sucks.
- I'm sorry that this happened to you.

- I can't imagine what you're going through. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

**If you want to show them empathy, you could say:**

- This is such a devastating loss, and I'm here for you if you need me.
- I don't know what it's like to lose a parent. I have lost someone close to me, but never someone this close. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

**If you want to show them compassion, you could:**

- Do something to get them out of their house.
- Go over to their house and watch a movie or play games.
- Ask them if they need to go anywhere. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- **Jordan is a freshman. They are getting adjusted to college and making new friends. Two months into the year, one of their friends got jealous that other friends liked them more. Out of revenge, this person decided to share Jordan's secrets with the group and tell other people that they were talking trash about them. The other friends in the group believed this person. Jordan lost all of their new friends and felt completely alone. You've been friends with Jordan since high school. They call you to tell you what happened. CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- What can you say to show sympathy? What can you say to show empathy? What can you do to show compassion? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

**If you want to show them sympathy, you could say:**

- That's a really messed up thing for that person to do.
- At least you still have friends from high school. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

**If you want to show them empathy, you could say:**

- I've had friends break my trust and it's awful. I'm here for you.
- When someone tells your secrets, it's so violating. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

**If you want to show them compassion, you could:**

- Write a card letting them know how much you appreciate her.
- Spend time with them to make sure she's OK.
- Make time to see them, give her a hug and comfort her. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

**SUMMARIZE:**

- This exercise is meant to help you better understand a person's experience and the emotions that occur when they go through a difficult event.

- Empathy scores for your generation have decreased over 40% in the last decade. It's the lowest the empathy scores have been in over 30 years. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- It's important to be able to listen to someone's experience, try to understand their perspective and make a compassionate action if you want to support them.
- Empathy is a really helpful skill, but it cannot be where our understanding of another person ends. If it was, then we'd all be sitting around feeling the same way, and that may not lead to anyone taking action. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Each of us uses different approaches in every emotional situation.
- This lesson wasn't meant to make sympathy, empathy or compassion seem better than the others. It was meant to help you understand the differences and how each one can make someone else feel.

Please remind members that they should take the survey at the link provided. Show the QPR code on the screen and ask for confirmation that members took the post-test.

[https://corexmstcmk6ytnfrbb6.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_50CU0PA1vbCPvV3](https://corexmstcmk6ytnfrbb6.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_50CU0PA1vbCPvV3)