

STAFF REFLECTION ACTIVITY

Empathy Mapping

What is empathy mapping?

Empathy mapping is a structured way to slow down our assumptions and consider how a situation may look, sound, and feel from another person's point of view. It does not require us to agree with every choice or perspective. It helps us notice information we may be missing before we decide what someone needs or what should happen next.

The goal

Be curious before being certain. Consider complex, intersectional experiences. Challenge assumptions. Look for needs, barriers, context, and meaning.

Choose a scenario

Use one scenario as a team, or let small groups choose different scenarios and compare what they notice.

1 Technology for all students

A staff member says, "We should just get rid of tech, cell phones, and social media for all students."

2 Late to class

A student is repeatedly late to first period, even after reminders and consequences.

3 Family communication

A caregiver rarely answers school calls or emails and misses several scheduled meetings.

4 Camera off

A student in a virtual or hybrid setting keeps their camera off and rarely speaks during group discussion.

5 Staff resistance

A colleague pushes back on a new initiative and says, "This is one more thing we do not have time for."

6 Workload and wellbeing

A staff member asks for fewer responsibilities while the team is already short-staffed.

As you map, ask:

What matters to this person? What might they need? What challenges or constraints are present? What are they seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking, saying, and doing? What assumptions are we making?

EXAMPLE SCENARIO

Completed Example Empathy Map

SCENARIO: GET RID OF ALL TECH FOR STUDENTS

EXAMPLE PERSPECTIVE

A high school student who uses a phone to coordinate transportation, work, and family responsibilities, while also recognizing that notifications can be distracting during class.

THINKS

- "I know phones can distract people, but they are not only entertainment."
- "A total ban assumes everyone uses technology in the same way."

FEELS

- Frustrated when adults assume the worst about why students use phones.
- Worried about losing a way to reach family or coordinate responsibilities.

SEES

- Some classmates distracted by social media.
- Other students using devices for translation, accessibility, transportation, work, or family needs.

HEARS

- Adults saying phones are the reason students cannot focus.
- Peers saying phones help them stay connected, organized, or safe.

SAYS + DOES

- Checks messages between classes.
- May resist a blanket ban, while still accepting clear limits during instruction.

NEEDS + CHALLENGES

- Predictable expectations and reasonable boundaries.
- A way to communicate urgent needs without every use being treated as misuse.

CHALLENGE THE ASSUMPTION

Instead of asking, "How do we eliminate phones?" ask, "What problems are we trying to solve, what legitimate needs exist, and what boundaries could address both?"

WHAT CHANGES NOW?

The response may shift from a universal ban toward clearer use expectations, designated times and spaces, exceptions for documented needs, and student input on implementation.

STAFF WORKSHEET

Your Empathy Map

SCENARIO

Write or briefly describe the scenario here.

THINKS

What might they be telling themselves? What matters to them?
What are they worried about?

FEELS

What emotions may be present? What could be underneath the
emotion you can see?

SEES

What environments, expectations, barriers, relationships, or
pressures are around them?

HEARS

What messages are they receiving from peers, family, staff,
leaders, media, or the system?

SAYS + DOES

What are they saying or doing? What might the behavior be
communicating?

NEEDS + CHALLENGES

What might help? What barriers, responsibilities, identities, or
constraints matter?
