

STAFF REFLECTION ACTIVITY

You Be the Judge

Objective

Participants will explore the complexity of making judgments, particularly in positions of power. Through a series of real-world scenarios - both in school settings and beyond - they will reflect on how empathy can reshape their responses, aligning them with the goal of helping others thrive. The aim is to move away from punitive, inherited systems and embrace thoughtful, compassionate decision-making.

Directions

In "You Be the Judge," participants are presented with challenging scenarios that require them to step into the role of a decision-maker. Each scenario involves individuals in difficult or traumatic situations where traditional, punitive responses may feel like the easiest option. Participants will engage in group discussions that explore how empathy and understanding can lead to more thoughtful outcomes, promoting growth and wellbeing rather than punishment.

Before you decide, slow the judgment down.

01

REACTION

What was my first response?

02

ASSUMPTION

What am I assuming?

03

CONTEXT

What information could change my view?

04

POWER

Who has authority, risk, or less voice here?

05

PURPOSE

What outcome are we actually trying to create?

SCENARIO SET 1

You Be the Judge

Read each scenario first without discussing it. Notice your immediate reaction before moving into analysis.

1

Scenario 1

A 15-year-old male student with undiagnosed and untreated bipolar disorder sends a female peer 150 text messages within an hour. The messages appear aggressive and overwhelming, causing the female peer to feel harassed and unsafe.

2

Scenario 2

A 65-year-old man suffers a sudden heart attack while driving. In his weakened state, he loses control of the vehicle and accidentally kills a pedestrian. The victim's family is devastated, but the driver had no intent to harm.

3

Scenario 3

A 5-year-old in kindergarten is having a severe emotional meltdown in class. In the chaos, the child throws a chair, hitting a teacher and knocking her unconscious. The child was responding to overwhelming emotions but didn't intend to hurt anyone.

4

Scenario 4

A veteran teacher is experiencing burnout and is losing patience with her students. In a moment of frustration, she publicly scolds a student who struggles with ADHD, making the student feel humiliated in front of peers.

5

Scenario 5

A high school student, recently grieving the loss of a parent, begins skipping classes and acting out in school. He is frequently late, disengaged, and at times defiant toward staff. He is nearing suspension based on school policy.

PAUSE BEFORE DISCUSSION

Which scenario triggered the quickest judgment? Which one made you hesitate? What changed when you considered intent, context, harm, responsibility, or power?

SCENARIO SET 2

You Be the Judge

Continue noticing where your response becomes more punitive, more compassionate, or more complicated.

6

Scenario 6

An experienced, well-regarded physician is running behind on appointments, causing frustration among patients. In a rush to keep up, the physician makes a mistake with a patient's medication, leading to a mild but preventable complication. The patient is understandably upset, but the physician is deeply remorseful.

7

Scenario 7

A 25-year-old is caught stealing from a local grocery store. After being detained, it's revealed that they've been unemployed for several months and were stealing to feed their younger siblings. The grocery store has a strict zero-tolerance policy against theft, regardless of circumstances.

8

Scenario 8

A manager at a high-pressure tech company consistently underperforms in team meetings, missing deadlines and failing to contribute to group projects. It is later revealed that the manager has been struggling with depression but was reluctant to seek help due to stigma within the company.

9

Scenario 9

A high school student posts a controversial and offensive meme online, targeting a specific group of people. After significant backlash from the school community and social media, the student quickly deletes the post and apologizes, claiming they didn't fully understand the impact their post would have.

Quick reflection

Choose one scenario and capture your first judgment before discussing it with others.

My first reaction was...

I assumed...

The context that matters most may be...

The person or people with the least power here may be...

GROUP DISCUSSION

Questions for Reflection

Use the questions to move beyond the first judgment. You do not need to answer every question for every scenario.

- 1 What was your gut reaction to this scenario?
- 2 What assumptions did you make about the person or situation?
- 3 What context or background information might change how we view this situation?
- 4 If you were in a position of authority, how would you handle this situation?
- 5 What potential consequences could a traditional, punitive response have in this scenario?
- 6 How can empathy help us better understand the people involved in this situation?
- 7 How does power influence judgment in these scenarios?
- 8 Have you ever made a judgment that you later reconsidered after learning more about a person's situation? What changed for you?
- 9 What is the purpose of judgment in leadership - should it be to punish, or to guide others toward growth? How do you balance accountability with empathy?
- 10 What steps can we take as leaders to ensure our judgments align with our values of creating environments where people can thrive?
- 11 What if the scenarios were you or your child? How would you want people to respond?

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO CARRY FORWARD?

Write one idea, question, or commitment you want to remember the next time you are in a position to judge.
