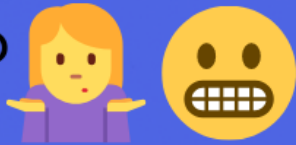
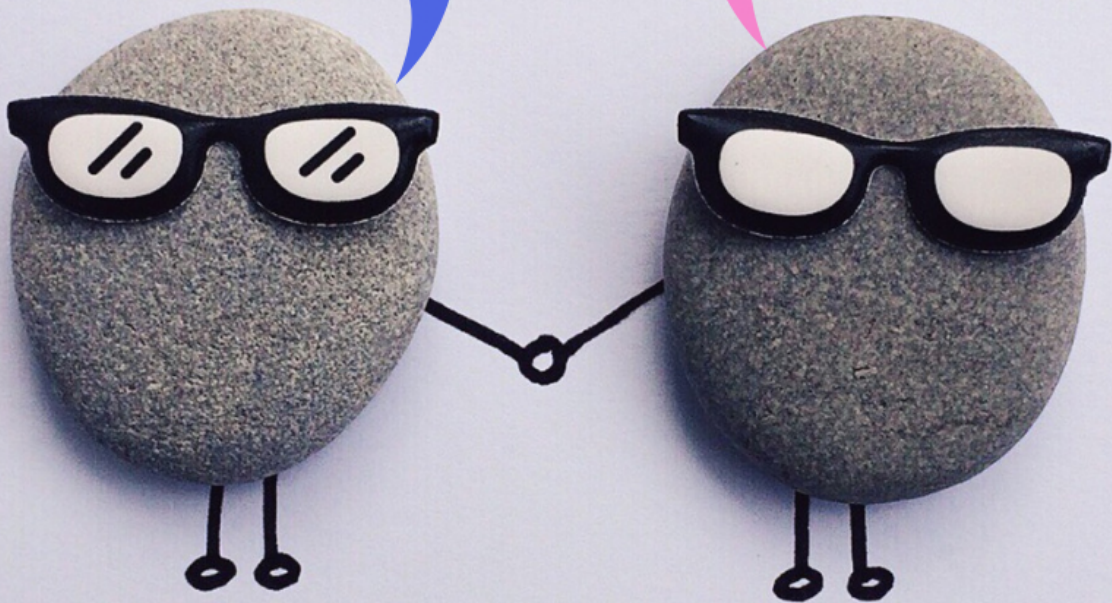


U get what I mean?



I feel U.



Friends with Everyone ...

Tween Small Group

Week 8: Growing in Friendship

ACTIVITY: Empathy Eggs.

Supplies: Plastic Easter Eggs, small pieces of paper

Today we're filling empathy eggs. As you fill these eggs, I want you to think of someone in your life who has needed you to empathize with them over the last week or so. Write a special note of encouragement to them in one of the eggs, and sometime this week surprise them with it!

Feeling what others feel.

“God works in, out, and through human imperfection.” -Friends with Everyone

God often teaches us through the mistakes we make in life, through hard things that happen to us, and difficult situations we go through. None of us are perfect. We all make mistakes. Right from the start, we should all be able to relate to each other! This is so important to remember when we consider our friends.

The story of Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon is an important example of empathy. Paul and Philemon were friends, and Onesimus and Paul had become friends. Onesimus was a slave. He belonged to Philemon. (It was customary for people to own slaves in ancient civilization.) Onesimus ran away to Rome, where he met Paul and began to believe in Jesus. This is why Paul called him “brother.” He was referring to fellow believers in Jesus Christ.

A runaway slave was useless, but ironically, Onesimus' name means “useful.” In Paul's letter, he pleads with Philemon to welcome Onesimus back. Paul is able to empathize with both people in this situation, even though he is neither a slave owner or a slave, himself. Not in the literal sense. However, he does refer to himself as a slave to the Gospel ...and he was sitting in a jail cell as he wrote the letter. All three of these men were connected through their common belief in Christ.

“Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.” Philemon 7

Empathy goes beyond just understanding how others feel. Empathy feels along with them. Paul feels the common ground in Christ he shares with Philemon and Onesimus. These are three people of very different stature, yet with similar feelings for Christ.

Christ is the key to empathy. We can be from very different walks of life, but love exists in them all. No matter who we are, we know how to love, and how it feels to be loved. This was Christ's greatest command, to love one another. It's our common ground. Our key to empathy. Jesus knows how we feel, too. He suffered on this earth. He felt joy, too. And most importantly, He loved others and was loved. We don't have to understand someone to feel what they are feeling. WE just have to stop and put ourselves in their shoes. Picture what it's like to go through what

they are going through. Science calls this mirror neurons. They search our memories for emotions to match the person we are trying to empathize with. God made us to love one another. He makes it possible for us to empathize with those around us because He places us purposefully. Jesus knows all of us. When we are struggling to empathize, we can ask Him to show us how.

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN: "Consider the power of your presence in another person's life."

Speaking to our friends with love.

"We often find friends in hard seasons." -Friends with Everyone

"Therefore, although I could be bold and order you to do what you out to do, I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love." Philemon 8-9

Sometimes we think it's inappropriate, even rude, to bring an issue or a behavior that is bothering us to our friends' attention. But, actually, real friends will talk to each other about hard things. Genuine friends are there to call us out when we are acting differently than we usually do. They can sense when something is wrong, and are there not just to listen, but help guide us and remind us who we are. When trouble comes our way, and it will, we can sometimes forget about those things.

It's important to let our friends empathize with us. Seek out friends when life get's hard or something bad happens. Instead of being scared about what they might think about us, reach out for comfort and community. This is why God put us together. He knew we would have hard days.

It takes humility to listen to a friend as they tell us we are acting in a way that is hurting them. We instantly become defensive, because we would never intentionally hurt our friend. It can feel unfair for them to feel that way! But ...remember ...no one is perfect. We all make mistakes. It's important to listen to our friends when they are brave enough to tell us we have hurt them. We need to look in the mirror, and see if there is any truth to what they are saying. These are huge opportunities for us to grow and mature as people. Good friends can come to each other with the hard things in life, and find a way to empathize with each other through it all.

Like Paul says in the verse we read above, he could have just told Philemon what to do, but instead he chose to speak to him in love ...he chose to empathize.

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN: "Keep the conversation going."

Aggression versus Assertiveness.

“Friendships form the church.” -Friends with Everyone

“I am sending him- who is my very heart - back to you.” Philemon 12

Paul tells Philemon that Onesimus is “his whole heart.” That’s a good friend! Philemon is likely to accept Onesimus back because Paul is vouching for him. If our best friend assures us the new girl is amazing, we will most likely believe her, because we know and trust our friend. This is empathy! Feeling how others feel! We can feel the acceptance our friend feels for the new girl because of the feelings of acceptance we share with them.

Aggression and assertiveness are important words to learn, and characteristics to recognize. When someone is being aggressive, they are telling someone what to do rather than listening and empathizing. When someone is assertive, they listen to their friend’s problem, and then come alongside them confidently. They do not tell the other person not to feel what they are feeling, rather, meet them where they are at with understanding and comfort. Like Sadness in the opening video.

When a friend insults or hurts them, and aggressive person will accuse their friend of purposefully hurting them, and possibly hurt them in return. Or, ignore their friend completely, which is call passive aggression. On the other hand, friends that are assertive confidently approach their friend to tell them they hurt them without accusing them of doing it on purpose. To be assertive is to let people know we were hurt by their behavior, but still love and value them. It’s important to separate what they have done to hurt us with who they are as a person.

We can vouch for our friends. Like Paul did for Onesimus. When we know someone well, we can wisely leave room for them to be imperfect. It should be easy to empathize with this ...because we are imperfect, too! As we grow, we learn to keep our distance (healthy boundaries) from aggressive people and chose to spend more time with assertive friends.

It’s hard to co-exist with people who have hurt us, but we have to find a way. We don’t have to be best friends with them, or even good friends, but if God has put them in our lives, we can at the very least smile and say “hi” when we see them. Being assertive is an important skill in growing friendships.

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN: “You are always forgiven, and never loved less.”

Closing Activity:

(Optional Egg Hunt ...Leaders, fill eggs ahead of time with inspirational notes and/or treats.)