OVERVIEW by William Filler, MS

Welcome: Thank you for your interest in this game and in spreading the experience of giving and receiving empathy. The only thing you need to begin this game is a willingness to listen to what others are expressing.

Why an Empathy game? Empathy is a greatly misunderstood word. It is not the same as sympathy and doesn't necessarily mean that you agree with what the speaker is saying. It means trying to understand what another is experiencing.

This game is free: The gameboard and the instructions are designed to be downloaded and printed out on any available printer. If you can laminate it, the board and player pieces will last longer. The only other materials that you'll need are a pen or pencil, paper, and a timer. This game is released on the Creative Commons, and can be shared and altered, but cannot be commercialized.

Object of the Game: The goal is for everyone to win. This is accomplished by everyone making it to the innermost circle within a certain number of turns. If everyone doesn't win, then no one wins. Players start on the outside of the circles. As they play the mini games and earn points, they move to the inner circles. The mini games for the last two circles in the center of the board are not playable until enough community points are earned (see Scoring Instructions).

Getting Started: The Empathy Circle Game consists of several mini games. Each mini game can be played by itself as a standalone activity, and you might begin by playing one or a few mini games to get familiar with them. As the players become familiar with these games you can add more. If you're presenting for a group, a mini game might be excellent 'icebreaker" activity to start. The full Empathy Circle Game can be broken up and played in several sittings.

Flexible Modular Design: You will see two scoring sheets in the materials. The first one has a series of games with the game titles included. This is the suggested playing order. The other scoring sheet has the Empathy Game Start mini game and the two ending mini games (Empathy Circle Recognition and Musical Jam), with the rest of the titles left blank. This sheet allows you to customize the game to fit your needs—to build skills, you may want to repeat a game several times, and, in addition to the ten suggested games, there are several supplemental games that may be substituted. Educators and parents may want to take a close look at the Reading Into mini game which involves skills needed for reading comprehension.

Scoring: When players score points, they may add their points to three categories—Personal Points (PP), Donated Points (DP) for other players, or Community Points (CP) for the community. The players may split up their points, but they can't advance to the next inner circle unless they give themselves five Personal Points. If they fall short of the five Personal Points, they can replay the mini game and add the points from the first and second attempts. Remember, however, that the whole group only has a limited amount of turns to win the game. The last two games cannot be played unless there are enough community points (see Scoring Instructions).

Each mini game will have its own scoring method. Games are scored either as an individual score or a group score. When using individual scoring, the player performing receives the points, and each player gets a turn to perform. In group scoring, each person in the group receives the score that the group earned, and they all play together. The specific instructions for each mini game will let you know which scoring method should be used.

Roles: There are three roles. The active players are the ones performing. The passive players are observing and responding. The facilitator times the games and records the scores. The facilitator also acts as an impartial judge should disputes arise. It should be noted that the facilitator is a player as well.

Altering the Game: You may alter the game (adjust the number of turns, the time, substitute other games, and other changes) to adapt the games to different ages and skill levels.

Scoring Instructions

To win, every player must get to the innermost circle within a certain number of turns (see below). Either everyone wins or no one wins. To achieve this, each player must earn at least five Personal Points (PP) to advance to the next inner circle. To unlock the two inner circle games, the players must collectively earn sufficient Community Points (CP). If the group reaches the two inner circles and doesn't have enough Community Points, they can play any of the individual games over (these count as turns) to add to the Community Point total. You may not go beyond the total turns allowed. Use the scoring guide below which is based on the number of players.

SCORING

When a person is awarded their points, they have four choices. They can give themselves Personal Points (PP), can give Donated Points (DP) to another player, can donate Community Points (CP) to the community, or they can split the points and distribute them to two or three categories. The points may be split as the player chooses, but to advance to the next circle a player must give themselves at least five Personal Points. If a player earns less than five Personal Points, they can play the same individual game again and add points from their second try (which counts as another turn) to the points earned on their first try.

Two Players: 24 total turns allowed. To unlock the two inner circles, you must have 30 Community Points. The first 15 Community Points unlock the first covered circle. The second 15 Community Points unlock the second covered circle.

Three Players: 36 total turns allowed. To unlock the two inner circles, you must have 40 Community Points. The first 20 Community Points open the first covered circle. The second 20 Community Points remove the second circle.

Four Players: 48 total turns allowed. To unlock the two inner circles, you must have 60 Community Points. The first 30 Community Points remove the first covered circle. The second 30 Community Points remove the second circle.

Five Players: 60 total turns allowed. To unlock the two inner circles, you must have 80 Community Points. The first 40 Community Points remove the first covered circle. The second 40 Community Points remove the second circle.

Six Players: 72 total turns allowed. To unlock the two inner circles, you must have 100 Community Points. The first 50 Community Points remove the first covered circle. The second 50 Community Points remove the second circle.

Seven Players: 84 total turns allowed. To unlock the two inner circles, you must have 120 Community Points. The first 60 Community Points remove the first covered circle. The second 60 Community Points remove the second circle.

Eight Players: 96 total turns allowed. To unlock the two inner circles, you must have 140 Community Points. The first 70 Community Points remove the first covered circle. The second 70 Community Points remove the second circle.

Note: The turn totals may be adjusted to make the game easier or more challenging depending on the skill levels of the players.

THE EMPATHY CIRCLE GAME
Point Sheet

PP = Personal Points   DP = Donated Points   CP = Community Points   T = Turns

You must earn 5 Personal Points to move to the next inner circle. Area shaded in gray cannot be played
until players contribute sufficient Community Points (see Scoring Sheet for totals needed)

		PLAYER 1	PLAYER 2	PLAYER 3	PLAYER 4	PLAYER 5	PLAYER 6	PLAYER 7	PLAYER 8	
Empathy Game Start	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
People Treasure Hunt	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
I'm going to build a culture of empathy	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
Prop Game	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
Where Am I?	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
What's My Job?	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
What Animal Am I?	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
Applause	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
Empathy Circle Recognition	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
Musical Jam	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
TURNS										
TOTALS										

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	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
	PP									CP Total
	DP									
	CP									T Total
	T									
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	T									
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TOTALS										

Empathy Game Start

The working definition of empathy that we use for this game is: To understand someone else's experience or "to walk in another's shoes." This game involves listening to others and reflecting the content back, to help them feel understood or heard. It is important to *reflect* what someone says rather than *respond* to them.

GAMEPLAY

Player 1, the speaker, will talk for thirty seconds. Player 2, the listener, then reflects what the speaker has said, repeating the words, or paraphrasing the speaker. The speaker can then make corrections or additions to what the listener has reflected. The listener will repeat these corrections. The speaker will then say whether they felt heard or not. If the speaker doesn't feel heard, Player 2 will try again.

EXAMPLE

Reflection (correct): Speaker, "I went to the grocery store today." Active Listener, "You went to the grocery store today."

Response (incorrect): Speaker, "I went to the grocery store today." Active Listener, "I like going to the grocery store."

SCORING (Individual) If the speaker feels heard, the active listener earns ten points. If there are corrections, two points are deducted for each additional attempt.

TIMING 30 seconds

TURNS One turn for each listening session

MATERIALS Timer

ROLES Speaker, active listener, facilitator (timer, provides an impartial opinion if needed)

People Treasure Hunt

GAMEPLAY

2 Players: Player 1 randomly selects and marks ten questions from the 40 questions listed below and asks them of Player 2. The player who first asks the questions is not allowed to record the other player's answers on paper. Player 1 then hands the list of marked questions to Player 2. Player 2 reads each marked question back to Player 1 and asks them to recall Player 2's answers. The players then reverse roles.

3+ Players: Per the instructions above, Player 1 asks Player 2 the marked questions, and they then reverse roles. After Player 1's turn, Player 2 asks the questions of Player 3, and then Player 2 tries to remember Player 3's answers. Continue in this manner with up to eight players.

SCORING (Individual) Points are allocated by the number of correct answers—one point for each correct answer. The facilitator is the scorer except when it's the facilitator's turn to play and another player assumes that role temporarily.

TIMING None

TURNS Each player's session equals one turn.

MATERIALS Question list, pen or pencil

ROLES Players, facilitator (records the number of correct answers)

SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS The questions below can be changed, or new questions may be added.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you prefer red or blue?

2. Do you prefer spicy or mild foods?

3. Do you prefer chocolate or vanilla ice cream?

4. Are you a messy or a neat eater?

5. Do you like baggy or tight pants?

6. Would you wear an ugly sweater given as a gift, or do you hold to your standards?

7. Would you rather go scuba diving or sky diving?

8. Would you rather have Mexican food or Thai food?

9. Do you prefer sleeping on cotton or flannel sheets?

10. Do you prefer raspberries or strawberries?

11. Do you like long hair or short hair?

12. Would you rather ride a bike or go for a run?

13. Are you a day person or a night person?

14. Do you prefer asparagus or broccoli?

15. Are you more comfortable in long or short pants?

16. Do you prefer rock music or country music?

17. Would you rather see a movie or read a book?

18. Would you rather take a walk in the woods or a swim in the sea?

19. Do you prefer purple or green?

20. Do you prefer apple juice or orange juice?

21. Do you prefer football or baseball?

22. Would you rather be too cold or too hot?

23. Do you prefer Italian food or Chinese food?

24. Do you prefer to be in a city or in the country?

25. Do you prefer orange or pink?

26. Do you prefer closed-toe shoes or sandals?

27. Would you rather have a soda or a milkshake?

28. Do you prefer aerobic exercise or weight training?

29. Do you like large parties or small gatherings?

30. Do you prefer jazz music or reggae music?

31. Do you prefer dogs or cats?

32. Do you prefer ants or spiders?

33. Do you prefer sharks or dolphins?

34. Do you prefer eagles or hawks?

35. Do you prefer parrots or doves?

36. Do you prefer sourdough toast or wheat toast?

37. Do you prefer witches or ghosts?

38. Do you prefer cake or pie?

39. Do you prefer carrots or beets?

40. Do you prefer Batman or Superman?

I'm going to build a Culture of Empathy
and I'm going to bring…

GAMEPLAY

Player 1 says, "I'm going to build a culture of empathy and I'm going to bring a _____" (player names an object). Player 2 repeats the phrase and adds an item to Player 1's statement. The following players then repeat what all the players preceding them have said, adding their own item to the end of the list. This continues until someone misses an item or until ten items are correctly remembered.

Example: Player 1, "I'm going to build a culture of empathy and I'm going to bring sunblock." Player 2 says, "I'm going to build a culture of empathy and I'm going to bring sunblock and a trombone." The next player repeats the first two items and adds a third.

SCORING (Group) Each player earns points equal to the number of items correctly remembered by the group. One point is scored for each correct item. One item = every player gets one point, etc.

TIMING None

TURNS Equal to the number of players in the group

MATERIALS Paper, pen or pencil

ROLES Players, facilitator (plays and records the score)

SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS You can change the number of points awarded or the number of objects to remember.

The Prop Game

GAMEPLAY

The facilitator assembles a group of common household items (e.g., a pen, a paper clip, a fork) to be used as props. Player 1 selects an item and writes down five things that they will transform the prop into, showing their list to no one by placing it face down. Player 1 then uses the item, non-verbally, pantomiming in a way that transforms the item into one of the items on their list. The other players must guess what it is. Each time another player correctly guesses the item, Player 1 moves on to the next thing on their five-item list. This continues for one minute or until all five items are guessed. The game is done when each player has had a chance to perform. The same object may not be used twice.

Example: Moving a pen across your mouth like a toothbrush

SCORING (Individual) Two points awarded to the performer for each correct guess

TIMING One minute

TURNS Each one-minute pantomime counts as one turn.

MATERIALS Common household objects, at least one for each of the players, timer, pen or pencil, paper

ROLES Player/performer, guessers, facilitator (times the turns, provides an impartial opinion if needed)

SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS Changing the number of objects or the time limit

Where Am I?

GAMEPLAY

The first player writes five locations (e.g., a bowling alley, an office, a mountainside, outer space, a kitchen) down on a piece of paper, showing their list to no one by placing it face down. The player chooses a location from their list and pantomimes one or more actions that might be performed there (e.g., bowling, typing, hiking, fixing the Hubble telescope, cooking). The rest of the players try to guess where she/he is. Once the place is correctly guessed, the performer does the same for the other locations on their list until they run out of time, or all five locations are correctly guessed. The game is done when each player has had a chance to perform.

Example: The player pantomimes actions that reveal their environment, such as typing to indicate being in an office or hiking uphill to indicate being on a mountainside.

SCORING (Individual) Two points awarded to the performer for each correct guess

TIMING One minute

TURNS Each one-minute pantomime counts as one turn.

MATERIALS Timer, pen or pencil, paper

ROLES Player/performer, guessers, facilitator (times the turns, provides an impartial opinion if needed)

SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS Changing the number of locations or the time limit

What's My Job?

GAMEPLAY

The first player writes down five jobs on a piece of paper, showing their list to no one by placing it face down. The player then pantomimes one of the jobs listed. The rest of the players try to guess what the job is. Each time the job is guessed correctly, the player moves on to the next thing on their five-item list. This continues for one minute or until all five items are guessed. The game is done when each player has had a chance to perform.

Example: Player pantomimes mowing a lawn to indicate the job of gardening, directing traffic for being a police officer, or cooking for being a chef.

SCORING (Individual) Two points awarded to the performer for each correct guess

TIMING One minute

TURNS Each one-minute pantomime counts as one turn.

MATERIALS Timer, pen or pencil, paper

ROLES Player/performer, guessers, facilitator (times the turns, provides an impartial opinion if needed)

SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS Changing the number of jobs or the time limit

What Animal Am I?

GAMEPLAY

Player 1 writes down the name of five animals, showing their list to no one by placing it face down. The player then pantomimes one animal from their list. The rest of the players guess the animal. Each time the animal is guessed correctly, the player moves on to the next animal on their five-item list. This continues for one minute or until all five animals are guessed. The game is done when each player has had a chance to perform.

Example: Player pantomimes an alligator by using their arms to mimic the action of an alligator's jaws or chooses a snake and slithers along the floor.

SCORING (Individual) Two points awarded to the performer for each correct guess

TIMING One minute

TURNS Each one-minute pantomime counts as one turn.

MATERIALS Timer, pen or pencil, paper

SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS Changing the number of animals or the time limit

SUGGESTED ANIMAL LIST

Alligator
Deer
Lion
Dolphin
Cat
Giraffe
Buffalo
Bear
Eel
Octopus
Puffer fish
Dog
Ape
Eagle
Heron
Duck
Mouse
Spider
Caterpillar
Bee

Applause

GAMEPLAY

One player is sent out of the room/area, and the rest of the players think of a four-step task for them to carry out (i.e. go to a specific area, select an object, do something with the object, then perform an additional action). When the person outside reenters, the rest of the players start applauding softly. As the person chooses different directions the applause grows louder or softer depending on how far the person is from the desired destination. Once in the general area of the activity, they rise to a standing ovation. This indicates that the player is in the correct area. The applause softens again. The player now tries to decide what object in the area to manipulate. As they near the desired object the applause grows louder or softer until the object is picked up. This pattern continues until the player has completed the four-step task or three minutes are up. Every player takes a turn performing tasks.

Example: Player 1 goes out of the room. The rest of the players decide that Player 1 should go to the desk in the corner of the room, find a stapler, staple two sheets of paper together, and then place the stapler on their head. Player 1 enters the room to soft applause. The applause softens or gets louder depending how close they get to the general area of the room with the desk. They go to the area of the room with the desk. Player 1 gets a standing ovation. The applause then softens. Player 1 explores the area around the desk. The applause gets louder or softer depending how close to the stapler they get. When they hold the stapler, they receive a standing ovation. The applause softens. The player experiments with different actions until they staple two sheets of paper together. They get a standing ovation. The applause softens. Then they try different actions with the stapler. As Player 1 puts the stapler near his head the applause increases until they place it on his head. Player 1 receives a standing ovation.

SCORING (Individual) Two points awarded for the first standing ovation. Five points awarded for the second standing ovation. Seven points for the third standing ovation. Ten points for the fourth standing ovation.

TIMING Three minutes

TURNS Each three-minute search counts as one turn.

MATERIALS Common household objects or natural objects if you're playing outside

ROLES Main player, clappers, facilitator (times the turns, provides an impartial opinion if needed)

SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS Changing the number of steps or the time limit

Empathy Circle Recognition

COMMUNITY GAME

GAMEPLAY

The group forms a circle. The first player holds the ball of yarn. They identify another player, stating what that player did or said that impressed them (e.g., they listened well, said something funny, etc.). They throw the ball to that person, while holding on to the end of the yarn. The person who has been recognized does the same for someone else until the yarn has been thrown to everyone in the group. When done, there will be a mandala made from the yarn.

Example: "I want to recognize (names another player) for listening to me so well." They throw the ball of yarn to the player they named while holding onto the end of the yarn.

SCORING (Group) This is a pass/fail score. Only if every player is recognized does each player receive five points. If everyone in the group is not recognized, no one can move to the innermost circle.

TIMING None

TURNS Each player uses one turn when they make a recognition (e.g., four players = four turns).

MATERIALS A ball of yarn or string

ROLES Players, facilitator (makes sure that everyone is included)

Musical Jam

COMMUNITY GAME

GAMEPLAY

One player is the designated "conductor" and starts with a simple beat or mouth noise. After about ten seconds, they point to the next player in the circle to add on a sound—either a new sound or mimicking another player's sound. This continues until the whole group is producing a musical jam for 30 seconds to a minute. The conductor then points at the last person to add a sound, and that player stops their sound and places their player token in the center circle. The conductor points at the next to last player to stop, and that player puts their token on the stack. This continues until all the player tokens are in a stack. The group then sits in silence for 30 seconds.

Example: The conductor starts a slow rhythmic beat. The next player adds a hum. The next player adds a different sound or copies a noise another player is making.

SCORING When the Musical Jam is complete, you all have won the game!

TIMING None

MATERIALS None, although you can use musical instruments or other objects if you wish

ROLES Conductor, sound makers

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About the Author, William Filler, MS
A retired Special Education teacher and an active Empathy Circle Facilitation Trainer and is a fervent proponent of bringing the Empathy Circle listening practice into our schools. If you'd like to find out more, or have questions or comments about the game, you can reach him at empathycirclegame@yahoo.com, or attend one of his weekly Zoom sessions (https://zoom.us/j/3521266686), Thursdays at 4pm Pacific Time (7pm Eastern) to experience an Empathy Circle.