



LESSON IDEAS FOR TEACHING DIGITAL WELL-BEING AND EMPATHY

In today's world, children are growing up immersed in digital technology. While devices offer incredible learning opportunities, excessive screen-time can negatively impact children's mental health, attention, emotional regulation, and social skills.

As educators and teachers, you have a powerful role in guiding children towards healthy digital habits and fostering empathy, which is essential for positive relationships both online and offline. The following two simple, evidence-based exercises can be easily implemented in classrooms to raise awareness of digital well-being and nurture empathy in students.

EXERCISE 1: "DIGITAL BALANCE REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION"

Objective:

To raise students' awareness of their own digital habits and encourage reflection on the impact of screen use on emotions, attention, and relationships.

Materials:

- Paper and pens or digital devices for note-taking
- Whiteboard or flipchart

Procedure:

1. Introduction (5 minutes):

Begin by briefly explaining what digital well-being means, and the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between time spent on screens and other aspects of life such as physical activity, social interaction, and rest. Explain that screens themselves are not bad, but too much time online, especially without breaks, can affect how we feel and interact.

2. **Personal Reflection (10 minutes):**

Ask students to spend a few minutes reflecting on these questions, jotting down their thoughts:

- a) How many hours do I spend on screens every day (including schoolwork, games, social media)?
- b) How do I usually feel after using screens for a long time — energized, tired, anxious, bored?
- c) What activities do I enjoy that do not involve screens?
- d) Have I noticed any changes in my mood, attention, or sleep related to screen-time?

3. **Group Discussion (15-20 minutes):**

In small groups or as a whole class, invite students to share insights from their reflections. Use a whiteboard to note common themes such as stress, boredom, or difficulty concentrating.

Highlight that being mindful of digital use is important because excessive or unregulated screen time can increase stress hormones like cortisol, fragment attention, and worsen emotional regulation [based on scientific findings].

Finally, collaboratively brainstorm ways to create digital balance, such as taking regular screen breaks, practicing deep breathing or mindful moments, and prioritizing face-to-face social time.

Benefits:

This exercise builds self-awareness, helping children understand how screen habits affect their feelings and behaviours. It encourages intentional tech use and opens conversations about managing digital well-being in an empathetic, judgement-free environment.

EXERCISE 2: “EMPATHY MAPPING – UNDERSTANDING OTHERS’ DIGITAL EXPERIENCES”

Objective:

To nurture empathy by encouraging students to consider how others might feel and behave online, promoting respectful and thoughtful digital interactions.

Materials:

- Empathy maps (simple diagrams divided into sections: “*Think and Feel*,” “*See*,” “*Say and Do*,” “*Hear*”)
- Scenario prompts related to digital behaviour (e.g., cyberbullying, exclusion from online groups, pressure to be always ‘online’)

Procedure:

1. Introduction (5 minutes):

Explain empathy as the ability to understand and share another person’s feelings and experiences. Emphasise how empathy is especially important online, where misunderstandings can quickly arise.

2. Scenario Presentation (10 minutes):

Present a relatable digital scenario. For example: “Imagine a classmate receives unkind messages online and starts avoiding group chats.” Read it aloud or create a short role play.

3. Empathy Mapping (20 minutes):

Divide students into pairs or small groups. Give each group an empathy map and ask them to discuss:

- What might the person be thinking and feeling?
- What might they see around them online and offline?
- What might they say and do in response to the situation?
- What might they hear from friends, family, or others?

Encourage students to place themselves in the person’s shoes and consider emotions like sadness, loneliness, or confusion.

4. Sharing and Reflection (10-15 minutes):

Groups share their empathy maps with the class. Facilitate a discussion about the importance of kindness, support, and checking in on friends online and offline.

Benefits:

This exercise develops emotional literacy and empathy skills, empowering children to be more considerate digital citizens. Understanding the feelings behind online behaviours helps prevent harm and promotes a culture of respect and inclusion.

WHY THESE EXERCISES MATTER

Too often, conversations about digital technology focus solely on rules and restrictions. While limits on screen time are important, true digital well-being arises from understanding the *why* behind healthy habits and cultivating core social-emotional skills such as empathy. These exercises encourage children to think critically about their own and others' digital experiences with kindness and mindfulness.

From a thought leadership perspective, educators who integrate such practices contribute to a paradigm shift, moving from reactive, surface-level management of technology use to proactive nurturing of lifelong digital resilience and emotional intelligence. This supports children in becoming not just competent users of technology but compassionate human beings who can thrive in increasingly digital, interconnected societies.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Schedule “mindful moments” and reflective discussions regularly to embed digital well-being into the school culture.
- Pair these activities with breathwork or mindfulness exercises to help children self-regulate stress and build attention.
- Use empathy maps and similar tools across subjects to reinforce social-emotional learning alongside academic skills.
- Share resources with parents to encourage consistent messages about digital balance and empathy at home.

By equipping educators with simple, effective classroom tools grounded in scientific evidence and emotional development, these lesson ideas empower teachers to positively shape children's digital futures.