

## Cool to Be Kind

by Kirsten Weir

### Put yourself in somebody else's shoes.

Amanda O. was in fourth grade when her mom passed away. Amanda had been bullied before, and, incredibly, older kids at school teased her about her devastating loss. "People bullied me about how I looked, how I dressed. They bullied me about my mom," says the 14-year-old from El Paso, Texas.

Amanda told the principal, who called the bullies' parents. Amanda also confronted the kids herself. "I said, 'You didn't know my mom. She was my best friend. If you lost a best friend, how would you feel?'"

The bullies backed off, and Amanda felt good about standing up for herself. She may not have realized it at the time, but Amanda was asking her tormentors to have a little empathy.

"Empathy is a matter of learning how to understand someone else—both what they think and how they feel," says Jennifer Freed, a family therapist and codirector of a teen program called the Academy of Healing Arts.

In other words, empathy is being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Many people who bully others are particularly weak in that department, says Malcolm Watson, a psychologist at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. "Bullies don't tend to have a lot of empathy," he says.

Everyone is different, and levels of empathy differ from person to person. "Some people are more highly sensitive than others. They will naturally feel what other people feel," Freed says. "Others don't understand emotions in other people as well."

The good news? "Empathy is something you can learn," Freed says. In fact, she adds, teaching empathy to prevent bullying is more effective than punishing bullies after the fact. And anyone can learn it. In her teen programs, she says, "every semester we see bullies change their behavior."



Jose L. Pelaez/Corbis

*Volunteering is a good way to develop more empathy, experts say.*

You don't have to be a bully to benefit from developing empathy. Having compassion for others is a valuable skill that everyone should work to improve, she says. "I think everyone needs to develop more of it."

## Emotional Intelligence

Last year, researchers from the University of Michigan reported that empathy among college students had dropped sharply over the past 10 years. That could be because so many people have replaced face time with screen time, the researchers said. Having empathy is about understanding other people. Today, people spend more time solo and are less likely to join groups and clubs.

Freed has another explanation. Turn on the TV, and you're bombarded with news and reality shows highlighting people fighting, competing, and generally treating one another with no respect. Humans learn by example-and most of the examples on TV are anything but empathetic.

There are good reasons not to follow those bad examples. Humans are social by nature. Having relationships with other people is an important part of being human-and having empathy is critical to those relationships. Researchers have also found that empathetic teenagers are more likely to have high self-esteem. That's not all. In a book titled *The Power of Empathy*, psychologist Arthur Ciaramicoli writes that empathy can be a cure for loneliness, depression, anxiety, and fear.



Empathy is also a sign of a good leader. In fact, Freed says, many top companies report that empathy is one of the most important things they look for in new executives. Good social skills-including empathy-are a kind of "emotional intelligence" that will help you succeed in many areas of life. "Academics are important. But if you don't have emotional intelligence, you won't be as successful in work or in your love life," she says.

What's the best way to up your empathy quotient? For starters, let down your guard and really listen to others. "One doesn't develop empathy by having a lot of opinions and doing a lot of talking," Freed says. Here are some great ways to dig beneath the surface and really get to know other people-and to boost empathy in the process:

- Volunteer at a nursing home or a hospital. Challenging yourself to care for others is a great way to learn empathy, Freed says.
- Join a club or a team that has a diverse membership. You can learn a lot from people of different ages, races, or backgrounds.
- Spend time caring for pets at an animal shelter.
- Once a week, have a "sharing circle" with your family. Take turns listening to one another talk, without interrupting.

## Playing Your Part

With bullying such a big issue in schools around the country, experts are looking more closely at empathy. Many schools are teaching teens how to tune in to others' feelings. Often, kids who bully others come from homes where empathy is in short supply, says Watson. Teaching them empathy skills can help squash their aggressive behavior. Just focusing on the bullies and their victims isn't enough to stop the bullying crisis, though. To do that, everyone in school must show some empathy.

Have you ever watched a classmate being teased or pushed around, without intervening? Imagine that victim was your little brother or a close friend. How would you feel about the situation then? It takes both courage and empathy to confront a bully or to report an incident to a teacher. It may not be easy, but working together is the best way to make schools safer, Watson says.

That makes sense to Patrick K., a 16-year-old from South Carolina. He was bullied in middle school and lived in constant fear. One day one of his tormentors threatened to kill him and later threw a rock at his head during gym class.

Fortunately, Patrick's family moved to a new school district not long after that incident, and things are much better at his new school. But he wasn't content to just sit back and let other kids suffer the way he had. He became a teen ambassador for Love Our Children USA's STOMP Out Bullying campaign.

Last year, Patrick saw a classmate getting pushed around at school. He immediately reported the incident to the principal and a guidance counselor. The school called the kids in to sort out the problem, he says. Patrick doesn't think he did anything special. "I feel that everybody should be treated with respect," he says. "I just felt like it was the right thing to do."

## Expressing Empathy-Creatively

If you've ever been called nasty names, you know how awful it feels. Here's your chance to help others understand what it's like to walk in your shoes. The No Name-Calling Week Creative Expression Contest wants your poems, artwork, essays, music, and videos! Tune in to your artistic side to illustrate how name-calling has affected you and your peers. No Name-Calling Week happens each year in January. (But being kind is cool any week of the year.)



Chris Price/Istock



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is empathy?

- A. Empathy is the ability to make other people do what you want by threatening them.
- B. Empathy is the ability to understand how other people think and feel.
- C. Empathy is the choice that many people make to spend time alone instead of joining groups.
- D. Empathy is the choice that many people make to watch TV shows full of fighting and disrespectful words.

2. What problem does developing empathy help solve?

- A. Developing empathy helps solve the problem of unexpected death.
- B. Developing empathy helps solve the problem of homelessness.
- C. Developing empathy helps solve the problem of lung cancer.
- D. Developing empathy helps solve the problem of bullying.

3. Empathy is something people can learn.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A. Teaching empathy to prevent bullying is more effective than punishing bullies after the fact.
- B. After Amanda O.'s mom died, older kids at school teased her about her devastating loss.
- C. Patrick K.'s tormentors threatened to kill him and later threw a rock at his head during gym class.
- D. Researchers from the University of Michigan reported that empathy among college students had dropped sharply over the past 10 years.

4. What policy would most likely result in a decrease in bullying at school?

- A. a policy requiring students to spend at least three hours doing homework every night
- B. a policy requiring students to take more math and science classes but fewer arts and language classes
- C. a policy requiring students to volunteer every month at a nursing home, hospital, or animal shelter
- D. a policy discouraging students from speaking up or taking action if they notice a classmate being teased

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. fear and loneliness
- B. depression and anxiety
- C. poems and music
- D. empathy and bullying

6. Read the following sentences: "Have you ever watched a classmate being teased or pushed around, without intervening? Imagine that victim was your little brother or a close friend. How would you feel about the situation then? It takes both courage and empathy to confront a **bully** or to report an incident to a teacher."

What does the word **bully** mean above?

- A. a person who naturally feels what other people feel
- B. a person who teases, threatens, or harms someone else
- C. a person who does research studies on how students behave
- D. a person who is a good leader and successful at work

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

There are several ways to develop empathy, \_\_\_\_\_ listening closely to others and getting to know people from many different backgrounds.

- A. such as
- B. although
- C. never
- D. before

8. How much empathy do bullies tend to have?

---

---

---

9. Name two benefits of empathy mentioned in the passage.

---

---

---

10. Therapist Jennifer Freed thinks that everyone needs to develop more empathy. Based on the information in the passage, explain whether developing more empathy is or is not a good idea.

---

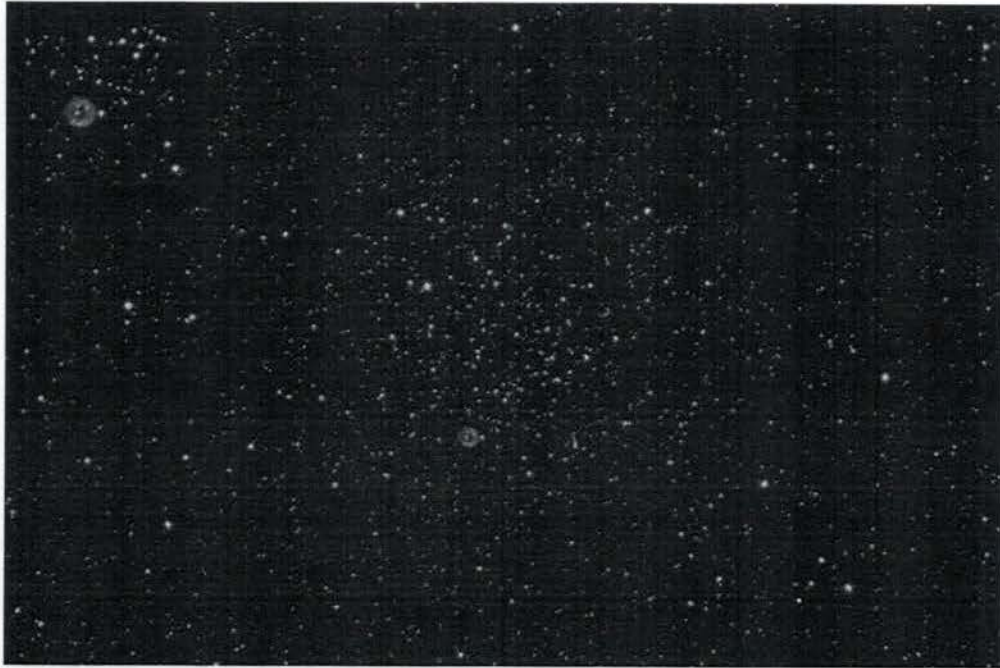
---

---



# Stargazing

by ReadWorks



After the sun sets, take a look at the night sky. On a clear night, you'll be able to see stars scattered across the black expanse that we call our universe. If you're lucky, you might be able to spot some stars that look bigger than others—they shine brighter and attract our attention more than their smaller neighbors do. You might wonder: why are some stars brighter than others?

After much observation, scientists discovered the way stars appear to us depends on more than their actual size—it's also about how far they are from us. Therefore, the farther a star is from Earth, the smaller it will appear to us. The closer it is, the bigger it will look.

Try to think of the biggest star you've seen in the sky. An easy one, right? The sun! That's because the sun is closest to us compared to all other stars, located at just a short 150 million kilometers from Earth.

The next one? That's a tougher question. Many people answer Alpha Centauri, but some don't know that it's actually a cluster of three stars—Alpha Centauri A, Alpha Centauri B, and Proxima Centauri. Proxima Centauri is 4.24 light-years away and closest to our sun. A light-year is the distance that light travels in one year. We use this measurement because light is the only thing in the universe that maintains a constant speed. However, even though



Proxima Centauri is the closest star to the earth after the sun, you can only see it with a very powerful telescope. That doesn't make sense-didn't we just say that closer stars appear larger and more visible?

Well, Proxima Centauri is what we call a red dwarf. Red dwarf stars are very small, typically having less than half the mass of the sun. That means they generate less energy than the sun. Most stars burn hydrogen for fuel. Similar to the way a car uses gas for power, a star uses hydrogen for energy. Red dwarfs burn hydrogen very slowly, which means they generate little light compared to stars like the sun.

Proxima Centauri is the closest star after the sun, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's what we consider close in our minds. To completely understand how far away this star is, let's think about traveling 4.24 light-years away. NASA has built one of the fastest spacecrafts in existence, called New Horizons, which travels at about 60,000 kilometers per hour. Even at this speed, it would take the spacecraft 78,000 years to reach Proxima Centauri from Earth.

Sadly, the first few closest stars are not visible to the naked eye at night, which means we can't see them while we're stargazing from our homes or backyards. The closest star we can see at night is called Sirius, or the Dog Star. While Proxima Centauri is only 4.24 light-years away, Sirius is 8.6 light-years away. However, since Sirius is so large (almost twice the size of the sun), we can see it in the night sky.

So go outside and see what you can find up there!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What affects how big a star appears to be?
  - A. a star's distance from Earth
  - B. the speed of NASA's fastest spacecraft
  - C. what a car uses for power
  - D. the name of the star
2. A large star shining brightly in the sky is an effect. What could be a cause?
  - A. The star is burning hydrogen very slowly.
  - B. The star is far away from Earth.
  - C. The star is close to Earth.
  - D. The star is less than half as big as Proxima Centauri.
3. The sun is closer to Earth than any other star.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A. A light year is the distance that light travels in one year.
  - B. Alpha Centauri is a cluster of three stars.
  - C. Sirius and the sun can be seen without a telescope.
  - D. The sun appears bigger than any other star.
4. Why do you need a telescope to see Proxima Centauri?
  - A. Proxima Centauri burns hydrogen for energy.
  - B. Proxima Centauri is too small to be seen without a telescope.
  - C. Proxima Centauri is too close to Earth to be seen without a telescope.
  - D. Proxima Centauri is too close to the sun to be seen without a telescope.
5. What is this passage mainly about?
  - A. why Sirius is known as the Dog Star
  - B. why some stars appear larger than others in the sky
  - C. the difference between a light year and a year on Earth
  - D. the New Horizons spacecraft built by NASA



6. Read the following sentence: "Sadly, the first few closest stars are not visible to **the naked eye** at night, which means we can't see them while we're stargazing from our homes or backyards."

What does the phrase **the naked eye** mean in the sentence above?

- A. what people see when they shut their eyes
- B. an eye that cannot see as well as it used to
- C. a patch worn over an eye to protect it from very bright light
- D. eyesight without the help of glasses, telescopes, or other items

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Proxima Centauri is a red dwarf star; \_\_\_\_\_, it does not generate as much light as the sun.

- A. most importantly
- B. before
- C. including
- D. consequently

8. Why can Sirius be seen in the night sky?

---

---

---

9. Which would probably generate more light: a star that burns hydrogen quickly or a star that burns hydrogen slowly?

---

---

---

10. Imagine that you are looking at two stars in the night sky. The second star appears brighter than the first star. Name at least two reasons from the passage that the second star might appear brighter.

---

---

---



# Healthy Eating, Healthy Planet

by ReadWorks



## BEING HUMAN

Humans are unlike any other animal on Earth. Our unique brains and bodies allow us to use the world's resources in ways no other animal can. No other animal can claim it's been to the bottom of the deepest ocean, to the top of the tallest mountain, *and* even up and out of Earth to the moon. On a simpler level, do you know of any animal that can build a two-story, single-family brick home with an attached garage?

Or just make one of the toilets in the house?

While exercising our profound abilities (like making toilet bowls), we have fundamentally changed our planet and, in many ways, we've made it *our* planet. We've cut down entire

forests to construct towns and cities. We've replaced the trees and plants with buildings, and paved over the forest floor with roads. These activities help us live, but they also create pollution that affects the air we breathe and the water we drink.

## **EATING FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET**

Luckily, we can reduce the impact our activities have on the planet. One such activity is growing food. Think of all the land, equipment and work that go into a potato farm, an apple orchard or a cattle operation. By eating the right foods grown in the right way, we can limit the effects our farms and ranches have on the environment and eat our way to a healthier planet!

### **EAT LIKE SQUIRRELS**

A great way to limit your impact on the planet is to follow other animals' way of eating. Squirrels, for instance, eat nuts found close to their tree house. Elephants eat the trees and bushes that grow around them. Killer whales eat the fish swimming with (and away!) from them. What these animals are doing is eating in-season and locally. We can do the same.

### **EAT IN-SEASON**

Most of our favorite fruits and vegetables don't grow year-round and have their own natural season. Modern farming techniques have changed that, and we can have almost anything any time of the year. But when this produce is grown during its natural off-season, it may not taste the same. If we eat with our foods' natural seasons, we are eating in sync with nature.

### **EAT LOCALLY**

Eating locally means consuming produce that is grown close to your home. It will definitely limit your choices, but it will ultimately lower the impact you and your eating habits have on the environment. An easy way to get local produce is to shop at a nearby farmer's market.

Love to eat grapes? Well, you can eat them in-season and locally...if you moved around the world a lot to follow the seasons! Grapes are a summer fruit so during the winter, many northern American supermarkets buy them from farmers in Chile, which is more than 4,000 miles away!

### **GROW YOUR OWN**

One of the best things you can do to be a lower-impact animal is grow your own food. It may seem like a lot of work but people and communities all over the country grow some or all of their own food. There are many benefits to growing your own food.



One benefit is just learning about where your food comes from. Most produce found in your grocery store has stickers or signs that tell you where it was grown. Let's say you pick up a tomato and learn the tomato was grown hundreds of miles away before getting into your hand. If you grew a tomato in your backyard, school or local community garden, not only would you save a trip to the grocery store, you would save that tomato a long trip, and the planet a lot of resources.

Another benefit of growing your own food is that your food is fresher. It can take weeks for produce to get from the farm to your supermarket. By growing your own food, those weeks become just days, hours or even seconds. Now that's fresh!

## **COMMUNITY**

When you buy food that is grown locally, you're also supporting your own community. The money you spend goes toward your neighbors' jobs and businesses and keeps your community strong and unique.

## **HEALTHY EATING, HEALTHY PLANET**

Although human activities alter the planet, there are many things we can do to limit our impact. The impact of growing and raising our food on the planet is high but by eating locally, in-season, and even growing our own food, we can make the planet a better place while eating great food!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why are humans unlike other animals?

- A. because we only eat in-season and local food
- B. because we do not use the earth's resources as much as other animals
- C. because we can use the earth's resources in ways other animals cannot
- D. because we do not have to grow our own food

2. The author tries to persuade the reader of what?

- A. Eating locally and in-season is good for the planet.
- B. Eating locally and in-season is dangerous for the planet.
- C. Humans are the most resourceful animal on earth.
- D. Humans should mimic killer whales and only eat fish.

3. We are able to eat many foods year-round thanks to modern farming techniques. What evidence supports this conclusion?

- A. When produce is grown during its natural off-season, it may not taste the same.
- B. If we eat with our foods' natural seasons, we are eating in sync with nature.
- C. Most fruits and vegetables don't grow year-round and have their own natural season.
- D. Many fruits and vegetables can be made to grow during their natural off-season.

4. . Read the following sentence: "Grapes are a summer fruit so during the winter, many northern American supermarkets buy them from farmers in Chile, which is more than 4,000 miles away!"

Based on this evidence, what conclusion can be made about grapes that are bought in the winter?

- A. American supermarket owners must travel to Chile to buy the grapes in the winter.
- B. The grapes bought in the winter must be shipped from Chile to America.
- C. The grapes bought in the winter are less expensive than the grapes bought in the summer.
- D. The grapes bought in the winter taste better than the grapes bought in the summer.



5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. how humans can help the planet by growing food in big, industrial farms
- B. the importance of shopping at your local farmer's market
- C. how we can help the planet by growing our own food and eating locally and in-season
- D. the ways in which humans are hurting the earth with their farming practices

6. Read the following sentences: "We've replaced the trees and plants with buildings, and paved over the forest floor with roads. These activities help us live, but they also create pollution that affects the air we breathe and the water we drink. Luckily, we can reduce the **impact** our activities have on the planet."

What does "**impact**" mean as used in the passage?

- A. an effect
- B. a type of food
- C. a cause
- D. a natural resource

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Humans alter the planet more than any other animal; \_\_\_\_\_, we should do our best to lessen our impact and keep the planet healthy.

- A. especially
- B. finally
- C. on the other hand
- D. therefore

8. What does "eating locally" mean? Give an example of one way to eat locally.

---

---

---

9. What are the benefits of growing your own food? List two benefits from the passage.

---

---

---

10. What might happen to us, our communities, and the planet if we did not eat locally or in-season? Support your answer with details from the passage.

---

---

---



## How to Say What You're Feeling

"I can't believe that you forgot to come over and study with me last night!" shouted Sherri as she walked down the hall toward her best friend, Taylor. "You're so thoughtless sometimes. You just don't care about anyone but yourself!"

"You're being ridiculous, Sherri," replied Taylor. "I didn't come over because I had to stay late at baseball practice. I called and told your dad. I guess you didn't get the message."

"Because of you," Sherri said, "I failed today's math test. Go away and leave me alone."

Sherri spent the rest of the day upset at Taylor. She was so mad, she wanted to scream. Now she would have to work hard to make up for today's low test score.

Have you ever been really angry with one of your friends or someone in your family for letting you down? Have you wanted to scream or yell, or even strike out and punch something? Everybody has emotions like this, but the key to controlling them is recognizing what you are feeling and why, as well as understanding what you can do about them.



## Finding the Real Feeling

Sherri really is angry. But if she took the time to look at her feelings, she'd realize that the person she's angry with is herself. It wasn't Taylor's responsibility to make sure she studied for the math test; it was hers. When she didn't do well on the test, she blamed her friend because that was easier than admitting she had messed up.

Think about how you feel sometimes. You might think you are feeling down or depressed when actually you're just tired. Did you stay up extra late last night? Did you have to get up earlier than usual this morning? Before you put a label on how you are feeling, look at what is going on in your life for clues. Sherri thought she was angry at Taylor, but what she was really feeling was guilt. Learning to recognize your real true feelings is the first step in knowing what to do with them.



## Now What?

Once you have a handle on your honest feelings, it's time to do something with them. Yelling at your parents, siblings, or friends is rarely the solution to any conflict. It will just increase the negative feelings you have, and the problem won't be solved. Working through your emotions so you can work out problems takes a number of communication skills that you will need to learn. You'll use these skills for the rest of your life.

The first key to sharing how you feel and resolving a conflict is picking the right place and time to talk. Don't try to discuss your curfew with your dad as he is flying out the front door late for work. Don't try to smooth out the argument with your brother when he is in the middle of writing a report. You need to choose a time and place that will allow you both to give your full attention to the situation. And you should avoid having to worry about time limits or interruptions.

## The Skill of Listening

Hearing and listening are not the same thing. Think about watching television. You often hear the words and music of the commercials, but are you listening to them? Notice how your attention shifts when the commercial ends and your show comes back on. The same thing can happen during a conversation. It's easy to daydream when someone else is talking, or to think about what you are going to say as soon as they finish. But both of these actions mean you aren't listening. Really listening to what the other person is saying is an important part of understanding how he or she is feeling and what the problem actually is. To do this, you need to do the following:

- Make and keep eye contact.
- Ask questions if you don't understand something or didn't hear it properly.
- Respond immediately when asked about something.
- Give your full, undivided attention.
- Nod now and then.
- Never interrupt.

## The Skill of Responding

After you have listened closely to someone explaining his or her thoughts and feelings, it's your turn to speak. Before you start talking, however, try doing a "reality check," a skill that



makes sure you understand what you've just heard. You *paraphrase* (PAIR-uh-fraze; summarize) the person's words to show that you were listening and that you are trying to understand his or her side of the story.

For example, imagine if Taylor had responded to Sherri's anger by saying, "Sherri, you are feeling really angry at me because I didn't show up last night and help you study for the math test. You didn't do well on it, and you think that it's my fault."

Do you think that Sherri would have gotten so angry if she had realized that Taylor was truly listening to her?

Now it's your turn to express your feelings. Make this part easier for everyone by learning to use "I" messages instead of "You" messages. Start your statements with "I." This will let you express how someone's behavior makes you feel. Instead of "You are so thoughtless," you might say, "I felt really sad when you didn't come over." Taylor's statement "You are being ridiculous" could be turned into "I feel really angry inside when you yell at me, Sherri." Messages that start with "you" will make a person feel defensive, while "I" statements express a feeling.

Take a look at how each of these statements makes you feel when you read them:

"You didn't call me like you said you were going to!" or "I felt really disappointed when you didn't call last night."

"You always make me late!" or "I am late to school when you aren't ready on time."

It's important to realize that your life will be full of emotions. But, learning to recognize what you are honestly feeling and then learning how to deal with it are even more important. Listen, respond, and communicate!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How does Sherri feel?

- A. happy
- B. angry
- C. bored
- D. scared

2. What sequence of actions is described in the passage?

- A. steps baseball coaches can take to improve the performance of their team
- B. steps adults can take to make sure they get a good night's sleep
- C. steps people can take to communicate their feelings
- D. steps students can take to prepare for a math test

3. Read these sentences from the passage:

After you have \_\_\_\_\_ listened closely to someone explaining his or \_\_\_\_\_ her thoughts and feelings, it's your turn to speak. Before you start talking, however, try doing a 'reality \_\_\_\_\_ check,' a skill that makes sure you un \_\_\_\_\_ derstand what you've just heard \_\_\_\_\_ .

What can be concluded from this information?

- A. Understanding how other people feel is important when communicating how you feel.
- B. Sherri is angry at Taylor because Taylor did not come over and study with her the night before.
- C. Sometimes people watch television commercials without paying much attention to them.
- D. When speaking to others about your feelings, it is important to use "I" messages instead of "You" messages.



4. What would probably be a good place to talk about your feelings with someone?

- A. a classroom full of students taking a math test
- B. a quiet room with only you and the other person in it
- C. a movie theater with big screens and lots of people
- D. a busy restaurant that plays loud music at all times

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. how to ignore people when they bother you
- B. how to make friends at school
- C. how to daydream when others are talking
- D. how to communicate your feelings

6. Read the following sentences: "It's important to realize that your life will be full of emotions. However, learning to recognize what you are honestly feeling and then learning how to deal with it are even more important."

What does the word **emotions** mean above?

- A. feelings
- B. tests
- C. friends
- D. children

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

When people have bad feelings, \_\_\_\_\_ they should identify exactly what they are feeling and why.

- A. never
- B. finally
- C. first
- D. including

8. How is listening different from hearing?

---

---

---

9. Why should people use "I" messages instead of "You" messages when expressing their feelings?

---

---

---

10. Imagine that Sherri followed all the steps recommended by the passage before expressing her feelings to Taylor. What might she have said or done differently when speaking to Taylor in the hall? Support your answer with information from the passage.

---

---

---