

# My Empathy Tree (Levels A-B)

# WRITTEN

To develop early empathy by helping students recognise basic feelings, explore simple helping actions, and add "leaves" or "apples" to their Empathy Tree to celebrate kindness and connection.



## Learning Intentions

### Notice feelings:

..... Students aim to recognise simple feelings (happy, sad, calm) in themselves with adult support.

### Show when they need help:

Students aim to express a need for help using gesture, picture, or AAC.

### Recognise helping behaviour:

Students aim to notice when someone helped them or when they helped someone in a simple way.



## Success Criteria

I can point to or choose a picture showing a helping action.

I can show how I feel using a face picture, gesture, or AAC.

I can choose a feeling to show how someone else might have felt.



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**Duration:** 8–12 minutes

## Objective

To develop early empathy by helping students recognise basic feelings, explore simple helping actions, and add “leaves” or “apples” to their Empathy Tree to celebrate kindness and connection.

## What You Need

- Paper or a pre-drawn **tree outline** (found in PDF resource)
- Stickers, pre-cut leaves/apples, or coloured pencils
- Emotion visuals: **happy, sad, calm** (found in PDF resource)
- Simple helping visuals: sharing, giving, holding hands, comforting (found in PDF resource)
- AAC devices or choice boards with: *help, happy, sad, yes/no, me, friend*

## Setup

- Provide each student with their own small Empathy Tree sheet or work together on a large class tree.
- Lay out the help-action visual cards and the emotion faces cards in front of the students.
- Model the routine:  
“We choose a helping picture... we choose a feeling... we put it on our tree.”

## Gameplay / Activity Steps

### 1. Helping Example (Highly Supported)

Teacher shows 2 - 3 simple helping visuals: Teacher can demonstrate with another educator or use images on their device up on the screen.

- Sharing a toy
- Helping lift an item
- Giving a hug
- Sitting with a friend

Teacher asks:

“Did you help someone lately?”

Students respond by:

- Pointing to a picture
- Nodding or eye gaze towards a picture
- Using AAC (press *help*)
- Allowing adult to model the choice if needed
- Allow the student to model or act out the choice if needed

Students place the chosen picture or sticker **onto their tree** as a leaf or apple.



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## 2. How Did You Feel?

Show 3 simple emotion faces: **happy, sad, calm.**

Teacher prompts:

"How did you feel when you helped someone?"

Students respond by:

- Pointing to the relevant emotion they felt
- Touching the relevant emotion card
- Making a face that replicates their emotion
- Pressing AAC "happy"
- Using a gesture (smile, relaxed body, thumb-up)

Adult narrates:

"You felt happy when you helped!"

Add this emotion face to the tree near the helping picture.

## 3. How Did the Other Person Feel?

Teacher prompts:

"How do you think your friend felt?"

Offer one choice at a time if needed:

- "Happy?"
- "Calm?"
- Students choose the emotion with gesture or AAC.

Add that emotion face to the tree as another leaf/apple.

## 4. Grow the Tree

Students repeat the process to add **2-3 helping leaves** to their tree.

Each leaf represents:

- A helping action
- A student feeling
- A friend feeling

Celebrate each addition:

"Your tree is growing! Kindness makes big, strong leaves."

## Debrief

Use visuals or AAC:

- "Who did you help?"
- "Show me how you felt."
- "How do you think they felt?"
- Students can point to:
- Peer photos
- Teacher photos
- Emotion faces

Responses may be verbal or non-verbal.



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## Variations

### 1. One-Choice Helping Tree (Reduced Cognitive Load)

Students choose between just **two** helping visuals, then one feeling.  
Good for learners with emerging understanding.

### 2. Sensory Empathy Tree

Use textured leaves (felt, foam, stickers).  
Students place leaves on a big tactile tree on the wall.  
Supports sensory-seeking learners and increases engagement.

### 3. Whole-Class Empathy Forest

Each student adds one leaf to a shared tree.  
Helps build community and a sense of belonging.

### 4. "Someone Helped Me" Version

Instead of "I helped," focus on:

"Did someone help you?"

Useful for students who may struggle to recall or understand their own helping actions.

## AAC-Specific Supports

Suggested buttons:

- help
- happy
- sad
- calm
- me
- friend
- yes / no

Model AAC throughout:

"You felt... *happy*."

"Friend felt... *calm*."

Provide slow wait time for all selections.

### For Wheelchair Users / Accessibility

- Provide pre-cut leaves on a tray for easy access.
- Use Velcro choices on eye-level boards for pointing or eye gaze.
- Students may direct an adult to place their leaf.
- Encourage expressive gestures (eye gaze, smile, raising hand) to show feelings.
- Ensure visuals are within reach or close visual range.



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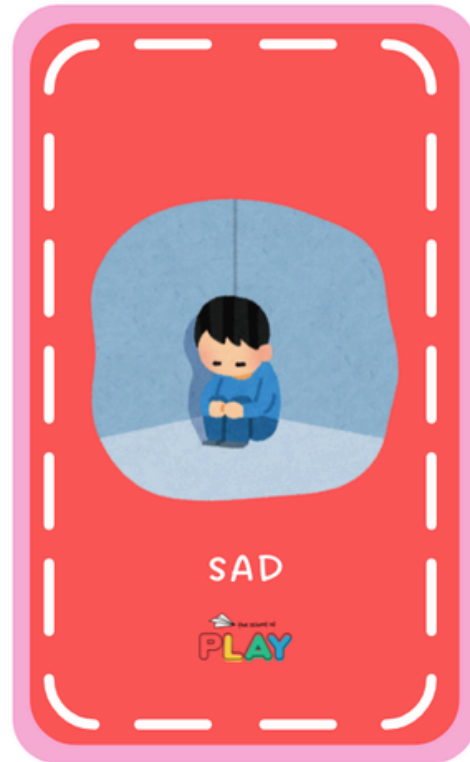
## Notes for Inclusion

- Celebrate all attempts: pointing, reaching, tapping, looking, sounds, or AAC.
- Provide clear, simple modelling of each emotion.
- Reinforce early empathy: noticing feelings in self and others.
- Keep emotional vocabulary small, concrete, and predictable.
- Link to Levels A–B SEL: self-awareness, emotional expression, social awareness, and building connection.



# EMOTIONS CARDS

PRINT AND CUT OUT THE EMOTION CARDS. STUDENTS CHOOSE A FACE TO SHOW HOW THEY FELT AND HOW THE OTHER PERSON MIGHT HAVE FELT AFTER A KIND ACTION, THEN ADD A DRAWING OR STICKER TO GROW THEIR EMPATHY TREE.



# EMOTIONS CARDS



LOVED



APPRECIATED



SURPRISED



STRONG



# EMOTIONS CARDS



EXCITED



CALM



THANKFUL

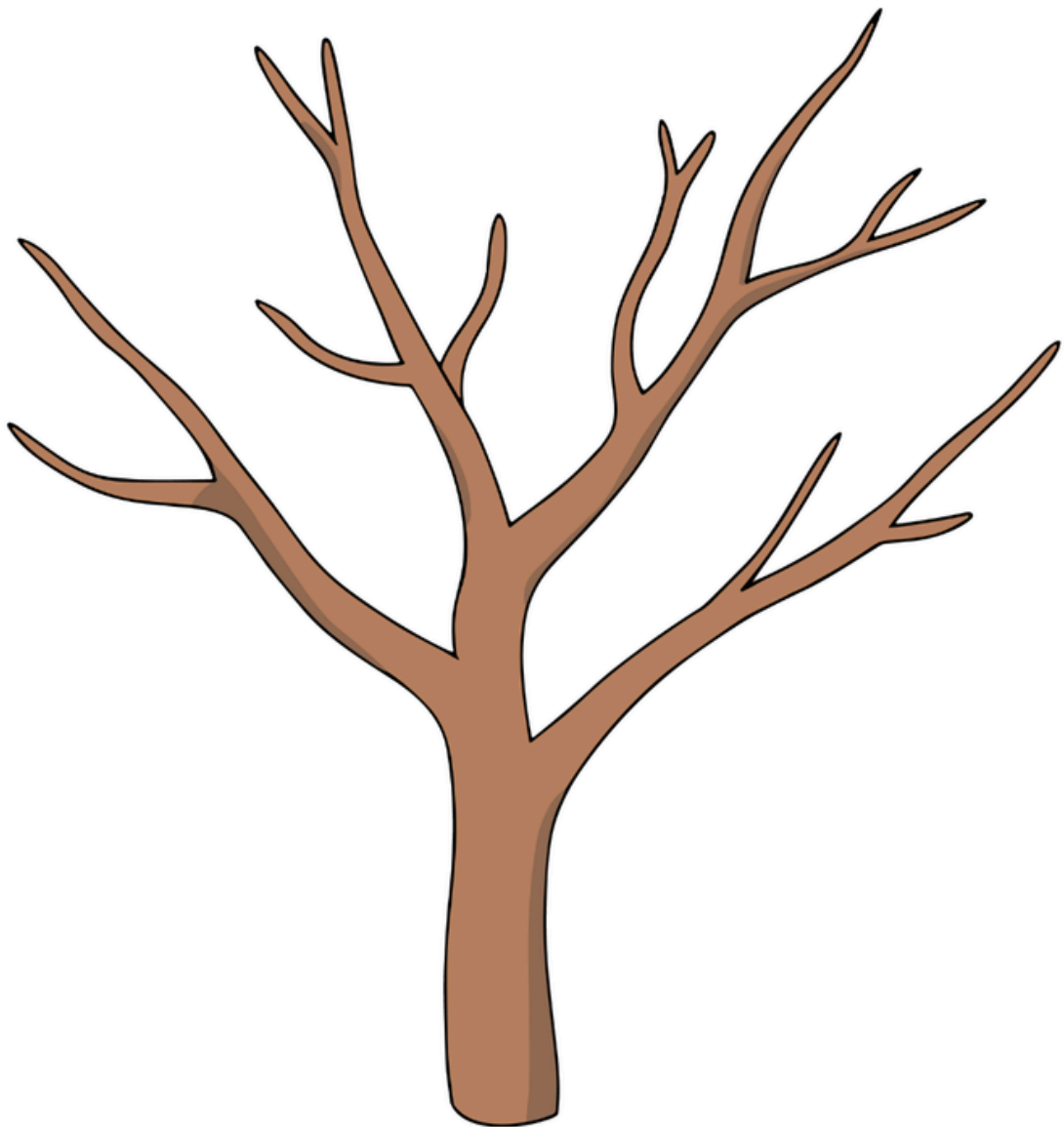


TIRED





# TREE OUTLINE



# HELPING VISUAL CARDS



SHARING A TOY



HELPING  
PICK UP



COMFORTING  
A FRIEND



INVITING TO PLAY



# HELPING VISUAL CARDS



HOLDING  
THE DOOR



HELPING CARRY  
SOMETHING



GIVING A TURN



SITTING WITH A  
FRIEND

