



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



THE JUBILEE CENTRE  
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

# Cultivating Compassion:

Learning to Feel, Think and Behave Kindly Towards Others

*Teacher Handbook*

# Background For Teachers



This teacher handbook offers a 5-week intervention to promote compassion in years 7 and 8. Some activities are short and have been designed with a view to their implementation in form time. Other activities require a longer session and could take place in PSHE lessons, English or drama lessons or any lesson where the form group is taught together.

The activities presented in this handbook are based on sound empirical research, and have been specifically designed for young adolescents. Calling to mind times when one has been comforted by others can, in turn, promote empathy and compassion for other people. Perceiving the self as more similar to other people increases feelings of compassion, while research suggests that as people feel a greater sense of status over others they feel less compassion for them.

Compassion can be promoted by means of targeted exercises and practices, many

of which have their beginnings in spiritual exercises of world religions. For instance, Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM) which derives from the Buddhist practice of metta bhavana (kindness cultivation) has recently been used in psychological experiments and therapeutic interventions. While there are variations in the manner in which LKM has been adopted, they all attempt to alter people's basic outlooks of themselves in relation to others by using guided reflections and visualisations to engender feelings of warmth and caring for others.

The compassion activities presented in this handbook attempt to enhance children's empathic concern for others, perspective-taking skills and compassionate behaviour. The handbook uses a number of activities that have demonstrated success in promoting compassion in both adult and child populations. It also encourages young people to reflect on the meaning of compassion in an associated workbook which can be found in the Appendix.



# Finding Common Ground



## Week One: Day One Activity (10–15 minutes)

In this short (form time) class activity students reflect on what qualities they share with other people.



1. Encourage everyone in the class to think of a person in their life who seems to be different from them in every way. This could be someone with whom the class member has been in conflict.

If prompts are needed, explain that the person could:

- Have different interests
- Follow a different religion



- Have a different lifestyle (eg, be a vegetarian)
- Come from a different country

2. Once everyone has brought a person to mind, ask the students to write down things they imagine they share with this person. If prompts are

needed, the person could be:

- Similarly vulnerable to pain and illness
- Similarly attached to possessions (eg, mobile phone, favourite toys)
- Upset by the same things

3. Ask the class to look at the list of things they share with the person they chose to think about. How does this make them see this person differently? Encourage students to share their insights with the class. Try to emphasise common ground between students and the people they chose to think about.

4. Encourage class members to think about this activity if they meet someone who seems 'different' from them in the following weeks and to try to see the common ground with the other person. This can be shared at a later date.

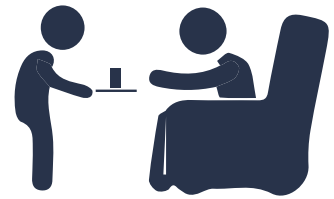
## Materials

- Paper
- Pens

# The Jar Of Kindness



## Week One: Day Two and onwards

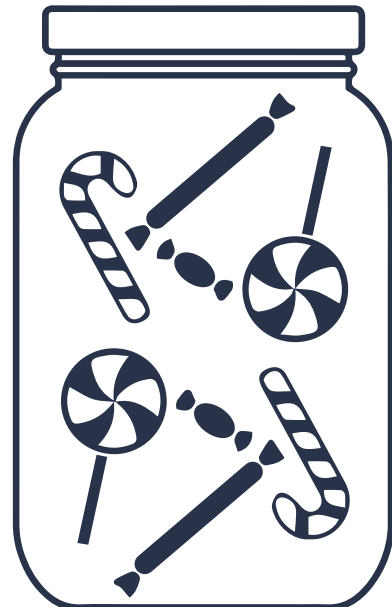


This is another short (form time) class activity. Students write a few sentences about something someone has done for them recently that they thought was kind, thoughtful or considerate. Ask the students to write down how this made them feel. The teacher prepares a model example of their own as a guide. Students can add their name to the paper if they wish, though they can leave the paper blank if they prefer.

The papers are folded up and collected and placed in a jar and the lid is screwed on. An old-fashioned sweet jar might work well for this. The jar stays on the form teacher's desk until a few days to a week later when the form teacher begins to share some of the contributions from the class.

This activity can expand to fit the form time available.

If the student has added their name to the paper, the teacher can ask if he or she would like to expand on what they've written and talk about the kindness they received.



## Materials

- Coloured paper
- Pens
- Attractive jar

# Exploring The Meaning Of Compassion



## Week One: Days Two, Three, Four or Five

This activity is designed to take up a whole lesson, rather than a form time slot. It is divided into three activities. This activity could constitute an English lesson or PSHE lesson.

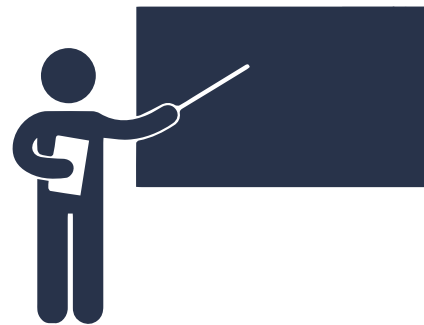
### Activity 1 (10 minutes)

Ask students to draw a 'mind map' of gratitude. Please impress upon the class that they are to do this activity on their own and that there are no right or wrong answers. Encourage them to add as many spokes to the mind map as they can. Ask the students to rate how positive or negative the words and phrases in their mind map are using a scale of 1–5 (where 1 = very negative to 5 = very positive). You can write the scale down on the whiteboard. Go around the class to ensure students have fully understood what is expected of them.



### Activity 2: Class Discussion (10 minutes)

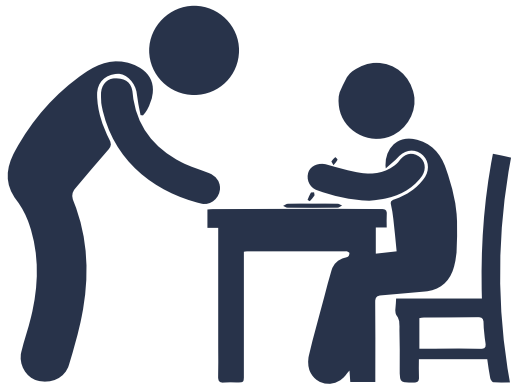
- After you have collected the mind maps, ask students to discuss what ideas they came up with in small groups (5 minutes).
- Ask a representative from each group to report what sort of words they had on their mind maps.
- Were they mainly positive words? Were there any negative words?



# Exploring The Meaning Of Compassion



## Activity 3: Who is my Neighbour? (40 minutes)



Use 'The Good Samaritan' workbook supplied in the appendix. Encourage the class to engage in the activity on their own.

If there are students in the class who really struggle to read on their own, a teacher or teaching assistant can help these students by reading them the poem and story, stopping at the appropriate places for them to write their answers in the spaces provided.

If writing is difficult, answers can be dictated by the student to a teaching assistant or teacher. Alternatively, you can encourage other students in the class to assist with reading and writing if necessary.

At the close of the lesson remind students of the earlier Week One form time activity 'Finding Common Ground'. We feel much less like helping someone if he or she doesn't seem to be a member of our 'in-group' (people like us). Who we see as part of the 'in-group' can be expanded if we emphasise similarities that cut across group boundaries.



### Materials

- Pens
- Good Samaritan Workbook

# Loving Kindness

# Meditation (LKM)



**Weeks Two, Three, Four, Five**  
(Daily – or near daily – Form time activity)

## Background for Teachers



Regular practice of Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM) increases feelings of warmth and caring for other people. It shifts people's basic outlook of themselves in relation to others, increasing empathy and compassion in the process. LKM has a long history and derives from the Buddhist tradition where it is called metta bhavana. In the Pali language, metta means 'love' in a nonromantic sense. It can be translated 'friendliness' or 'kindness'. *Bhavana* means development or cultivation. The commonest form of the practice has five stages.

In the first stage, **you feel metta for yourself**. You start by becoming aware of yourself, and focusing on feelings of peace, calm, and tranquillity. You can use an image, like golden light flooding your body.

In the second stage you think of a **good friend**. Bring them to mind as vividly as you can, and think of their good qualities. Feel your connection with your friend, and your liking for them, and encourage these to grow by wishing them well. If it is helpful, you can use an image such as shining light from your heart into theirs.



Then think of **someone you do not particularly like or dislike**. Your feelings towards this person are 'neutral'. This may be someone you do not know well but see around, such as your postman or someone who regularly serves you in a shop. Include them in your feelings of metta.

Then think of **someone you are currently having difficulties with**. Trying not to get caught up in any difficult feelings, you think of them positively and send your metta to them as well.



# Loving Kindness

# Meditation (LKM)



In the final stage, you **think of all four people together** – yourself, the friend, the neutral person, and the difficult person. Then you extend the feelings further to everyone around you, to everyone in your neighbourhood; in your town, your country, and so on throughout the world. Then gradually relax out of meditation, and bring the practice to an end.

On the following page you will find a Loving Kindness Meditation that has been adapted for young people. In the first few days the emphasis is on getting the young people used to being quiet and settled. Over subsequent weeks, different elements of the meditation can be gradually incorporated, as the teacher deems suitable.





# Loving Kindness

# Meditation (LKM)



## A Loving Kindness Meditation for Young Adolescents

**Weeks Two, Three, Four and Five  
(7 minutes, form time)**

In the first week it is important to be able to establish as peaceful and quiet a space as possible in the form room. Clearly there are limitations here as to what can be achieved at what can be a busy administrative time

for many teachers. Consequently, it is important to start with trying to establish at least five minutes of quiet time. It is probably advisable to attempt this later in form time, when the initial hubbub has died down.



In the first week, the emphasis will be on trying to create a quiet space for reflection. Begin with an invitation to the students to participate in the activity. The invitation approach will help to create an environment where the students feel safe and feel they are not being forced to take part. It is quite likely that some students will giggle at first and find the activity 'silly'. Gently remind them not to disturb other people when this happens (it is inevitable, particularly at first!).

Tell students to let the teacher or a teaching assistant know if the reflection becomes upsetting for them at any point. In the

unlikely event that this happens, students for whom this task becomes distressing should let the teacher/ teaching assistant know. You can do this with a sign, such as putting one's hand up or asking the students to display a 'worry card' (a red card which they can display if they need to stop the activity). These students can then speak about what is troubling them after the session. In the meantime these students can (if they wish) think of things to add to the 'jar of kindness' (page 2) or repeat the 'finding common ground' activity (page 1). Or they can just sit quietly if they prefer.

## Loving Kindness

# Meditation (LKM)



### Begin the reflection by saying:

We are about to try a kind of reflection. It is something that can be calming and I'd like to invite you to participate. This is voluntary, you can choose to listen and participate or you can sit quietly and not participate – all I ask is that you don't stop others from having a go.

The best way to do this is with both feet feeling the ground, your bottom on your seat and your back straight but if you'd like to place your head on the desk that's ok too. Just use this time to be still.

Sit quietly, feel your feet on the floor and focus on your breathing as it goes in and out of your body. When you are ready, close your eyes and imagine that you are bathed in a bright golden light that is calming and relaxing you. Breathe in and out and be aware of your breath as you breathe in... and out. Be aware of your feet in your socks and shoes and how it feels where your feet are making contact with the floor. Be aware of where your back is touching your seat and breathe in and out. As you breathe out imagine the golden light that surrounds you. Breathe in and out and see yourself, in your mind's eye surrounded by that light.



Now think of a good friend of yours. Bring them to mind as vividly as you can. Imagine their face as if it is a close-up photograph and concentrate on how they look when they are smiling. Imagine that you are zooming out from your friend's face and in your mind's eye imagine them doing one of the activities they enjoy. Now think of things about your friend that you admire. Think of your friend's strengths of character. Think about good times you have had with your friend. As you do this, imagine that the same golden light that was all around you is also surrounding your friend. Imagine your friend is basking in this beautiful calming light.

## Loving Kindness

# Meditation (LKM)



Now take your focus away from your friend and bring to mind someone you don't know well but whom you see around quite a lot day to day. This could be someone you see on the way to school, a lollypop lady or a lollypop man, the postman or someone who regularly serves you in a shop. I'll just give you a few moments to think of someone. Now focus your attention on seeing their face as clearly as you can and then imagine them in the place you normally see them, doing what they're normally doing. Now, as you imagine this person going about their day, see the same golden light that shone on you, then on your friend, shining on this person.

Focus on your breathing again, in and out. Now think of a person you had some disagreement with recently or in the past. Focus your attention on seeing their face and imagine how they looked the last time you saw them. In your mind's eye pull away from their face so that you have a picture of their whole body language the last time you saw each other. Keep breathing slowly, in and out. Now as you imagine this person, try to picture them in the golden light that previously shone on you, then on your friend and on the person you don't know very well. Now picture the golden light and imagine you are stepping into it yourself. Feel how warming, peaceful and calming the light is. Now imagine you are calling your friend, the person you see often but don't know very well, and the person you have difficulties with to join you in the light. Feel what it is like to be standing in the light together.



Now imagine that the light is spreading outwards. Imagine the light spreading to other people, to your school... to your neighbourhood... to your town... to your country... to the wider world. Imagine the world spinning in the dark of space and imagine the whole world bathing in that golden, peaceful light.

Breathe in, breathe out. Become aware of your breath as you breathe in and breathe out. Feel your feet on the floor and your back against the seat where you are sitting. When you are ready, open your eyes and look around the room.

It may not be possible to complete all elements of the reflection in the first week or two.

# Supporting One Another (Part I)



## Week Two

(On any day of the week to suit the school's timetable)

This activity is designed to take up a whole lesson, rather than a form time slot. It could form part of a literacy lesson or a PSHE lesson.

## Background for teachers

Thinking about people to whom you turn when you're distressed and recalling times when you've been comforted by them promotes empathy and compassion.

## Activity 1 (45 minutes)

- Ask the students in your class to think about people who have helped them when they were feeling upset. Encourage them to think of at least four people.
- Invite students to reflect on and write down what qualities and characteristics are common to these people. Try not to use prompts.
- Ask students to recall a particular occasion when they were upset or worried and were helped by one of these people. Ask them to describe what was wrong, what the person did to help them and how it made them feel to be helped. Students can describe as many people as they would like to in the time available. Provide coloured pencils and pens to illustrate the story.



## Homework

Reflecting on this activity, encourage students to think about the sort of things they could do to offer people support when they are upset. What kinds of support are there? What kinds of things do people need support for? Encourage students to be ready to discuss this the following week.

## Materials

- Paper (or exercise book)
- Coloured pencils/pens

# Supporting One Another (Part II)

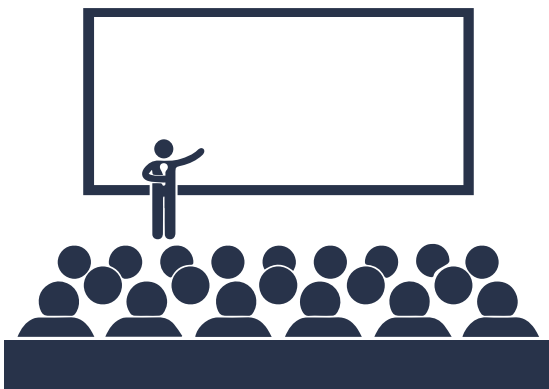


## Weeks Three, Four and Five (Form time activity)

This activity consists of sharing students' reflections on what kinds of support they have received and what they can offer to people in need. This follows up the activity of the handbook. The activity is to be spaced out over the duration of this programme as a short form time activity where students take it in turns to share their reflections.

Students are to be encouraged to reflect on and talk about:

- What happened to them and how someone helped in that situation
- How the person who helped them made them feel
- Whether the experience taught them anything about helping other people in need
- What they have done to help others in the past
- What they could do to help other people in the future



The teacher can start the ball rolling by sharing with the class an example of support they received from someone and what it taught them about how they can help other people. You may wish to touch on the different sorts of needs people have (physical, emotional, educational etc) and the ways of offering help.

# Perspective-Taking Exercise



## Week Three: Any day of the week.

An hour-long session will be required for this activity (repeated in Week Four). This activity is ideal for a drama lesson, though it can take place in any lesson in which the form group is timetabled together. The teacher will need to ensure that the room provides a suitable space for acting out the scenarios described.

## Warm up activity: Anyone Who (5-7 minutes)

### Aims:

- To get the students standing up and moving
- To encourage the shyer students to talk and take part

### Instructions

Students sit in a circle with one chair less than the number of participants. The student standing in the centre (who doesn't have a seat) says 'change seats anyone who is wearing red' or 'anyone who has a brother' etc. The relevant students stand up to change seats. The student standing in the centre attempts to get a vacant seat, along with the other students changing places. The student who is left without a seat is the next to say 'change seats anyone who...'



If you are more comfortable doing a different warm up activity feel free to substitute this for your preferred activity.

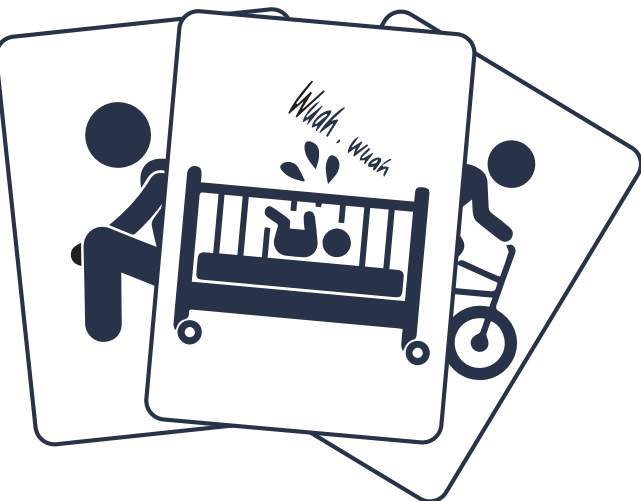
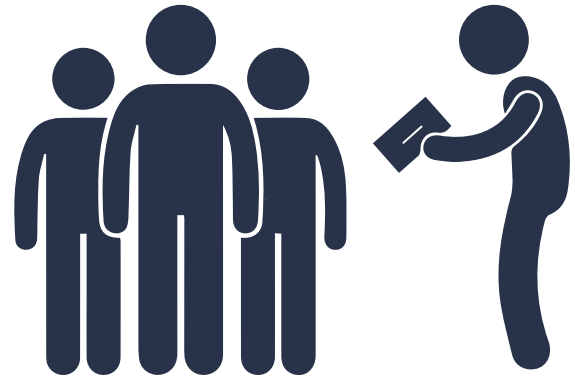
# Perspective-Taking Exercise



## Main activity (40-45 minutes)

Before the session, teachers are to prepare envelopes which contain a card detailing one of the following nine scenarios. Divide the class into groups of three or four students. Hand out one envelope to each group.

- You are part of a group who witnesses a classmate being picked on in the playground at lunch time.
- You and a friend are playing outside the flats where you live when you see your neighbour carrying bags of shopping to the main entrance. You know the lift to their third floor flat is broken.
- You bought a packet of crisps and a banana from the corner shop on your way home. You pass a homeless woman/man who has a sign in front of him/her which says, 'Hungry, please help'.
- You and a friend hear the news that a friend from your swimming club had to be rushed into hospital to have their appendix taken out.
- You learn that two of your closest friends didn't get the results they expected in an exam.



- Your Mum/Dad/guardian has been told they may lose their job because of cuts where they work.
- You are at your friend's house. Your friend and his/her parents are out of the room when his/her baby sister/brother starts screaming and crying. You can tell the baby is very distressed and upset.
- You and a friend have been out on your bikes. You stop at the supermarket to buy some water, chaining your bikes to the racks. When you emerge five minutes later your friend's bike has been stolen.
- Your friend is very upset. Your friend is sad to be missing the end of year school disco because he/she has chickenpox and is highly infectious.

# Perspective-Taking Exercise



Allow the groups 5 minutes or so to discuss how they will act out the scenario on the card 'in tableau' (freeze-frame).

1. Ask the first group to represent their scenario on the card in 'tableau'. You can call this a 'freeze frame' or snapshot of the scenario depicted on the card.
2. See if the other students (the 'audience') can guess what their classmates are representing.
3. Ask the whole class (including the actors) what they think each of the characters they are portraying might be feeling. Do not prohibit any kind of response. Just continue asking around the class.
4. Ask the audience what could be done to turn the negative situation into a positive one. Invite volunteers to 'step into the tableau', replacing one of the characters in the tableau.
5. Invite the new group to act out the scenario for a minute or so.
6. Ask the audience how each of the characters in the tableau is feeling now.



Invite each group to take part until everyone has participated.

Depending on the school's photo-taking policy you may wish to photograph this activity to create a story-board for a display.



# What's the Story?

## Compassion in the News...



### Week Five: Any day of the week.

An hour-long session will be required for this activity It could form part of a literacy lesson or a PSHE lesson.

### Background for teachers

This activity encourages students to take a caring and compassionate interest in what is going on in the world. News stories aim to stimulate students to feel for those who are in pain and distress and to think about what can be done to alleviate their suffering. The activity aims to make clear that the need for compassion and kindness in an imperfect world is visible all around us.

### Activity

Allow the class time to familiarise themselves with some stories in the news. You may wish to give the class actual newspapers (dating from the past week) or allow time to search the internet for a suitable story. Ask each student in the class to choose a story involving suffering.



### (10–15 minutes)

The stories can be about any kind of suffering. They could be about a person or a group of people, or animals. The stories could focus on local news or world news. They could be 'headline' news or something smaller – a few sentences in the corner of a page. They could be about the world itself (ecological 'suffering'). The main point to get across is that the story needs to speak to the student's heart.

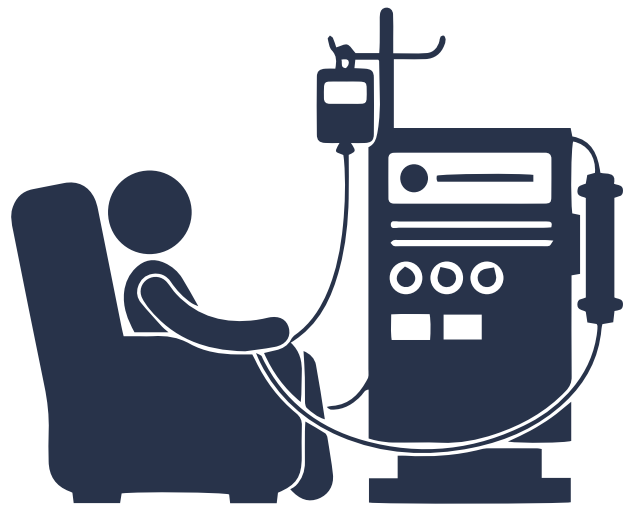
# What's the Story?

## Compassion in the News...



Once everyone has found a story, ask the students to (25 - 30 minutes):

- Write a few sentences summarising the story.
- Imagine that they are the sufferer. This may require more imagination if the student selects non-human suffering (an animal or the world). But do encourage as much diversity as possible. Explain that giving human characteristics to animals or objects (anthropomorphism) is perfectly OK for this imaginative exercise.
- Imagining themselves as the sufferer, ask students to write about what they are thinking and feeling. What are they most worried about in their situation and what can they do about it? Is there anything they can do? Is there anything they can't do to change things? What effect does the suffering have on them and on other people/the world?
- Ask the students to imagine the responses to these questions in as much detail as they can. Ask the students to write down what they think can be done to help the sufferer. Who can help? What things would help alleviate the suffering?
- Ask the young people to reflect on what they could do to help the sufferer? Is there anything they can do?



If students finish the activity early, they can draw a picture to illustrate their work, or pick another news story and continue with the same exercise.

# What's the Story?

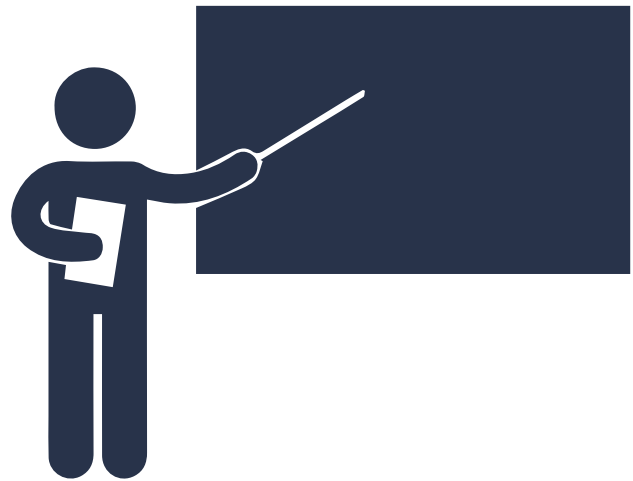
## Compassion in the News...



### Scaffolding for less able students

It may be helpful to write some 'starter sentences' to help less able students to begin their reflection. These can also be displayed on the board:

- The story is about a ...
- When I think about our/my situation I feel ...
- I worry about our/my situation because ...
- I cannot stop thinking that ...
- I am worried that ... will happen
- I fear that if...
- If only ... would help us/me
- If only ... would stop
- What we/ I need is ...
- I/we could help in a small way by ...
- I/we could ask ... to help by ...



Invite volunteers to share their reflections and possible solutions with the class.



### Materials

- Paper
- Pens
- Recent newspapers/access to the internet



# The Good Samaritan

Name

.....

School

.....

Class

..... Age.....

# About you...

What is your gender? (please tick the correct box)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Male
<input type="checkbox"/>	Female

What is your ethnicity?

<input type="checkbox"/>	White-British	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese
<input type="checkbox"/>	White-Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Asian Background
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other White Background	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mixed - White and Black Caribbean
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black British-Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mixed - White and Black African
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black British-African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mixed - White and Asian
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Black Background	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Mixed Background
<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian British-Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Ethnic Background, please state .....
<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian British-Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian British-Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rather not say

What is your religion?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Christianity	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikhism
<input type="checkbox"/>	Buddhism	<input type="checkbox"/>	Athiest (non-believer)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Judaism	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please state .....
<input type="checkbox"/>	Islam	<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hinduism	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rather not say

Do you practise your religion?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rather not say

Are you a UK citizen?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, please state your country of citizenship .....
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know

## **The Good Samaritan**

*By Jenny Tuxford (with her permission)*

One Saturday in winter  
a youth, whose name was Mark  
went to see his team play  
at Upton Park.

To see them win the FA cup  
had always been his dream.  
Now they were playing Liverpool  
a really brilliant team.

West Ham took all their chances  
and it gave Mark such a thrill  
that when the final whistle went  
the score was fifteen-nil!

The cheers and shouts subsided,  
his team had won the cup.  
Mark was feeling happy  
till two men beat him up.

One man stole his wallet,  
one hit him on the head.  
They pushed him down and ran away,  
leaving him half dead.

The grounds had nearly cleared by now,  
just a few folk left about.  
Mark tried to summon help  
but he was far too weak to shout.



What do you think Mark was thinking when he saw a fellow West Ham supporter coming towards him?

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### Now let's carry on with the poem...

The last man now came through the gate.  
He was not a welcome sight.  
Mark moaned when he detected  
the striped scarf – red and white!

If he thought he'd help him  
he'd have to be a fool,  
for he was with the other side –  
a fan from Liverpool.

'Oh, let me help,' the stranger cried,  
tying a hanky round Mark's head.  
'Crawl into my Mini  
and we'll go find you a bed.'

They finally found a hospital,  
out of the stranger's way,  
but he took Mark grapes and visited him  
every single day.



How do you think Mark was feeling when he saw the last man leaving the grounds?

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What words would you use to describe the doctor's character?

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How would you describe the fellow West Ham supporter?

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Do you think Mark expected the Liverpool fan to help him? Why/why not?

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What words would you use to describe the Liverpool fan's character?

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What lessons does this poem teach us about human nature?

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The poem is based on the following story from the book of Luke in the Christian Bible.

### **The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25- 37)**

A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?"

Jesus answered him, "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

The man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind"; and 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'"

"You are right," Jesus replied; "do this and you will live."

But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “Who *is* my neighbour?”

Jesus answered, “There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Take care of him,’ he told the innkeeper, ‘and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.’”

And Jesus concluded, “In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour toward the man attacked by the robbers?”

The teacher of the Law answered, “The one who was kind to him.”

Jesus replied, “You go, then, and do the same.”

### Let’s pause for some more questions...

In the biblical story the Jewish man is helped by a Samaritan man. Samaritans are from a different religious and ethnic group than Jews. In the poem the West Ham supporter is helped by a Liverpool fan.

Can you think of other groups you might expect would not be inclined to help each other?

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The story from the Bible begins with a question: Who is my neighbour?  
How well do you think the story and the poem answer that question?

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Having read the story and the poem, who do you think your 'neighbour'  
is?

Imagine that you are either the doctor or the West Ham fan from the poem. You returned home to your steak dinner or to wash your hair. That night (or the next day) you write about the events at the football match in your diary.

Write down which person you have chosen to be and what you are thinking and feeling in your 'diary' on the next page:



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