

5

Understanding People

Let's Begin

1. Think of a friend who has a funny habit and describe the habit.

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2. Think of your sibling/cousin and tell us one thing that differentiates them from you.

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3. Think of a trait of one of your classmates that disturbs you a lot. Write about the trait.

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Understand people to have healthy interactions and relationships with them

All of us are born into this world with a lot of differences. Every human being we come across is different. Even our family members differ in their thought processes, feelings, mannerisms, personalities, likes and dislikes, and so on. Add to this the differences in culture, customs and family values. We have a mixture that is difficult to appreciate and understand.

However, as we live in a society filled with different types of people, it is important that we learn to recognise people, acknowledge the differences, and live and work with them without being judgemental or biased.

Now that we know that people are different, let us try to understand why people are different.

Activity A: Case Study Analysis



Do this activity in pairs. Write what you think is the correct answer and then discuss your answers with your partner.

Case Study 1

Mr Jones was a 45-year-old man. He came from a very poor family. He lived with his parents and four siblings. His father barely earned enough to feed the family. With great difficulty, Mr Jones studied and found a decent job.

Now he lives with his wife and two children. Both his children are studying in Secondary 4 and Secondary 1. His wife is a homemaker.



Mr Jones is a fun-loving and open person, but in money matters, he is very strict. He is very careful about spending money, much to the annoyance of his children.

1. Why do you think Mr Jones is very careful with money?

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Case Study 2

Raya is a 13-year-old girl. She is in Secondary 2. She is a very friendly person and is also very helpful. Raya is a good listener and has many friends. At times however, Raya is overly sensitive. She gets upset if her friends don't talk to her and constantly needs to be the centre of attention. She depends on her friends to acknowledge her and tell her everything.

1. Why do you think Raya feels like this?

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2. If you were her friend, how would you feel about Raya?

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Case Study 3

Charlie is 14 years old. He is very quiet. He barely talks to anyone and has very few friends. He is quite good at studies, but he doesn't open up in class. His parents are very strict and he spends all his time studying.



1. What kind of a person is Charlie?

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2. Why is he very quiet?

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3. Would you want Charlie to be your friend? Why?

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From the previous activity you would have learnt that:

1. Everyone in your class may have a different opinion on why people are the way they are.
2. People are different due to various reasons.
3. There are no right or wrong people, only their behaviour differs.

Did your answers and those of your partner match? Or were they different?

Let us understand these points more in detail

Each of us is a sum total of all the experiences we have had in our lives. When we say a person has a particular personality, what does it mean?

Personality is defined as the characteristic pattern of how one thinks, feels and behaves that makes them unique. It includes the person's moods, attitudes, interests and opinions.

How does one's personality develop?

All of us are born with certain traits that define our personality. For example, even children can exhibit different personalities—they can be quiet, exuberant, naughty, well-behaved, loud, and so on. We carry these traits with us through our lives.

However, our environment, circumstances, professions, culture and other influences also decide how our personality shapes up and how we behave in different circumstances.

Example

- You may like loud music, while someone else likes soft, melodious music
- You may love spicy food, while someone else likes bland food
- You may appreciate art a lot, while someone else appreciates sports

There is nothing right or wrong about any of these. While we were born with some of these traits, we also learnt some others from our families, culture and the people around us.

In the previous case studies, you may have seen how Mr Jones, Raya and Charlie were different people with different thought processes and different behaviour. Why they are the way they are or why they behave in a certain way is not always easy to understand.

Let us look at a few ways in which we can understand people better.

1. Understanding feelings

Activity B: Guess the Feeling



Discuss with your teacher how the people in the following situations would feel.

1. Imagine one of your friends gave you a bar of chocolate but didn't give it to another friend standing beside you. How would your friend feel?
2. You stood first in class, but a friend barely passed and was scolded by the teacher. How would your friend feel?
3. You have been invited to a friend's birthday party, but another friend hasn't been invited. How would they feel?
4. Think of a time when you broke something or lost something valuable at home. Can you think about how your parents would have felt?

You may get answers to the above questions based on your own experiences or what other people have told you. Can you put yourself in the other person's place and think about how they would feel? Can you really appreciate their feelings, emotions and subsequent reactions?

This is called 'empathy'. The ability to put yourself in another person's shoes and feel what they may actually experience is an important quality. It will help us understand people and their behaviour better.

Activity C: Guess Why



You see your mother/family member/guardian shouting. What could be the reasons for her shouting?

Write down a few points.

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3.

From this exercise you can see that the same behaviour could have different reasons. Usually, behaviour is decided by one's emotions and feelings. When we understand one's feelings, we can understand why someone is behaving a certain way. This will help us adjust our behaviour to suit the circumstances. For example, if you understand your mother/family member/guardian is shouting because she is angry about something, then you would do your best not to aggravate her anger further, won't you?

Remember, we don't have to change ourselves, but we can adapt our behaviour according to the situation at hand.

2. Reading Body language

Let's look at an example.

In the morning, during class, your friend is smiling, friendly and full of energy. Later that afternoon, he looks upset, like he might cry.

Which explanation is your best guess for what might have happened in the intervening period?

- a) He had a fight with his friend at lunch, and now they are not talking.
- b) He passed the weekly test.
- c) He just found out he wasn't selected in the cricket team.
- d) The chemistry teacher assigned a lot of homework.

On analysis, we might rule out option b. Your friend may not look upset if he has passed the test.

Now, let us look at the other options. If you closely observe your friend, you may understand the cause of his sadness.

One of the best ways to understand people is by understanding their body language. The way people sit, stand, smile, talk and laugh can tell you a lot about them and their moods and personalities.

3. Listening to Others

People who are good listeners are mostly good at understanding people. Listening to the words that someone is expressing and also understanding what they may not be saying is an art in itself.

Not everyone is adept at expressing themselves well. They may be saying something, yet they may mean something else. When we listen to someone, we should not only listen to their words but also understand the feelings attached to them. This will help us understand even the unsaid things many times.

Another important part of listening is to listen without assuming, judging and interrupting. We may be influenced by certain societal, cultural and familial beliefs. Yet, while we are listening, we should avoid looking at someone through our belief system. We should listen to understand and not to make judgements or to decide what is right or wrong.

Now let us look at some factors that could lead us to misunderstand others.

Why do we misunderstand people?

1. Influences by our family, culture and society
2. Not taking the time to understand others through their body language, the feelings that they exhibit, and their speech
3. Not being empathetic to peoples' situations
4. Being overly judgemental or doubtful of people, their behaviour, their looks and their attire
5. Stereotyping people. For example, all people with thin lips are liars; all people with sharp eyes are cunning; all rich people are bad people, and many such stereotypes.

Having said this, let us remember that there are some 'not so good' people in society. They may have their reasons for being bad or rude. However, we need to learn to identify such people and either avoid them or learn to deal with them.

What are the ways in which we can identify the ‘bad’ people?

1. People who are mean and harm others on purpose
2. People who make you feel scared in some way (When in doubt, you can check with your parents/family members/guardians or teachers to see if it is okay to be scared of that particular person.)
3. Strangers or unknown people who are overly friendly (Their friendliness may make you feel uncomfortable.)
4. People who ask you to keep secrets from your parents and elders in the family
5. People who touch you physically and inappropriately
6. People who make you feel uncomfortable for any reason (Just walk away, trust your instinct or feelings.)

Understanding other people is not always easy. We need to take time to understand people. We need to listen and observe them to truly find the person under the various masks they wear.

We also need to trust our senses. Our senses perceive danger very quickly. If we are doubtful or unsure, we must seek the help of an elder or a family member.

Let's Remember

People are different from one another due to differences in personalities as well as life experiences, upbringing, culture and values. It is important to understand people and their behaviour to have healthy interactions and relationships.

My Space

What I liked most about this lesson :

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I learnt that

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- 1. Observe your parents/family members/guardians. Jot down their behaviour and try to predict what they might be thinking and feeling at that particular time.*
- 2. Discuss with your parents/family members/guardians the people and acquaintances you can trust as well as those whom you need to be careful about. Ask them to explain how they decided whether a person was trustworthy or not.*