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For the Classroom

## The Empathy Deficit

### Video Overview

According to researchers at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, college students today are 40 percent less empathetic than they were in 1979, with the steepest decline coming in the last 10 years. In other words, they might be constantly aware of their friends' whereabouts, but all that connectedness doesn't seem to be translating to genuine concern for the world and one another.

We know technology has wired most of today's kids in a world of endless and up-to-the-minute connections. Yet researchers from the University of Michigan suggest that despite the constant communication, something is missing: empathy... a genuine concern for the world and for each other.

Teens tell us, competition and technology have something to do with today's attitudes.

"With real intense competition, it gets tricky because you don't know who your friends are, you're always competing with each other," says Chandler, age 19.

"I believe that Facebook and wanting to measure up to other people and constantly being able to compare yourself, it's coming on your phone, the computer, real life, there's not one minute where you're not, where you're not trying to measure up to something else," says Ellen, also 19.

Kids today are connected, 24/7. Yet, according to findings from the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, they're also more likely to say that the misfortunes of others don't really bother them. If the world is becoming a less caring place for teens, educators say adults must lead the way – and help kids learn to live from the inside out.

"That means not merely be trained in biology, economics, math, though important, but also be educated from the inside out to change from within. So our care team reaches out, both inside the classroom and outside, to ensure that students feel loved, respected, and mostly that we believe in them. Sometimes all you really need is someone who will cheer you on, who believes in you and you will feel empowered, strengthened, and you perform better," says Dr. Nido Qubein, president of High Point University.

### What We Need to Know

What is empathy? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, it is the imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it. While that is a

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very technical definition, what does it actually mean? Empathy at its core is the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully and directly communicated.

A study conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, found that college students today are 40 percent less empathetic than they were in 1979, with the steepest decline coming in the last 10 years. According to the findings, today's students are generally less likely to describe themselves as "soft-hearted" or to have "tender, concerned feelings" for others. They are more likely, meanwhile, to admit that "other people's misfortunes" usually don't disturb them. In other words, they might be constantly aware of their friends' whereabouts, but all that connectedness doesn't seem to be translating to genuine concern for the world and one another.

The rise of social media and the ease of having friends online may also play a role in the drop in empathy. Add in the hypercompetitive atmosphere and inflated expectations of success, perhaps borne of celebrity "reality shows," and you have a social environment that works against slowing down and listening to someone who needs a bit of sympathy.

## **What Do YOU Think?**

Have you ever felt empathetic toward a friend or someone close to you? Why? Why not? What was that experience like?

Why do you think students today are less likely to show empathy toward others?

Do you believe that social media has an effect on students and their inclination towards empathy?