

## **Benainu: Derech Eretz and Empathy Email to Parents**

Dear Parents,

As part of Benainu, Mrs. Hervitz recently led a lesson on Derech Eretz and Empathy, why they are so important, and how they have complex meaning in early adolescence, middle school, and beyond. Utilizing the core value of Derech Eretz, skill of empathy, and role plays, this session focused on the importance of empathy- noticing and understanding the feelings of others, taking someone else's perspective, and how to navigate conflicts with respect and compassion.

Please see attached handout for more details.

### **Defining Derech Eretz**

- The students made a strong connection between its literal meaning, "way of the world" to how we, human beings, should live and conduct ourselves thoughtfully within this world.
- Defining Empathy
- We reviewed how it differs from sympathy, why it's important, and how it's connected to Derech Eretz. The students had sensitive and meaningful ideas to contribute to this conversation such as, "empathy is hard to actually do" and "empathy is when you can actually feel inside your body what another person is feeling inside of theirs".
- We discussed the "Guidelines for Empathy" and "How Can I Be Empathetic" attached to this email.
- Role Plays
- The students engaged in role plays that modeled recurrent MS problem scenarios. The students were given specific choices of props that symbolized feeling great, strong, special vs. props that symbolized discomfort, embarrassment, confusion.
- The students shared their thoughts on why these props represented the feelings of the characters- when receiving and giving insensitivity you feel like you are wearing a shoe with toilet paper, which represents the need to run far away or feeling stuck. The trash can represents feeling like "trash". The superman costume, rainbow boa, and yellow hat symbolize feeling strong, special, and powerful when you use and receive empathy. And more.
- During the role plays, the students enjoyed many good laughs and also were able to grasp and relate to the significance of the scenarios.
- During the session, the 6<sup>th</sup> graders enthusiastically participated in the large group discussion, asked thoughtful questions, shared openly, and raised important points. It's clear that this was just one of many opportunities to discuss students' developing sense of self, sense of others and social functioning.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why is empathy so important?
- Present a situation in which they would need to take on a different perspective.
- What does it really mean to "accept differences"?
- What are some ways you disagree respectfully/what are some ways your disagree disrespectfully?

Looking forward to their continued growth in Benainu.

**Mrs. Vicki Hervitz, LCSW-C**

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