

Measuring Outcomes of Mastering Empathy

Ashoka Fellows show that empathy is a skill that can be learned, practiced, and measured



If it's considered a skill at all, empathy is generally relegated to the category of “soft” skills that cannot be measured. [Ashoka Fellows](#), however, are measuring their impact—and the outcomes of mastering empathy—in clear and tangible ways, boosting the profile and importance of empathy as a learning outcome, and demonstrating that, far from being a trait that one either has or does not have, empathy is a skill that can be learned, practiced, and measured.

For example,

- Among students participating in Ashoka Fellow [Eric Dawson's Peace First](#), 77% of students reported that [Peace First](#) helped them reduce their levels of fighting.
- Of the teachers and school administrators polled at Ashoka Fellow [Jill Vialet's Playworks](#) schools, 88% report a decrease in the number of disciplinary referrals.

- Ashoka Fellow [Mary Gordon's Roots of Empathy](#) saw an increase in helping behavior in up to 78% of the program's students, and similar improvements in students' levels of acceptance, perspective-taking, and ability to share and cooperate.

Three Forms of Measurement

Measurement of empathy in youth, and particularly in schools, tend to take three forms:

I. Aggression & negative behaviors

- Reduced violence and bullying
- Reduced disruptive behaviors
- Reduced ethnic and racial tensions

II. Pro-social & positive behaviors

- Increased capacity to resolve conflicts peacefully
- Increased inclusive behavior & openness to others
- Increased cooperation & fair play

III. Improved school culture and performance

- Improved school-wide morale
- Improved overall learning environment
- Reduced injury
- Reduced number of suspensions and incidences of violence
- Increased attendance

Tools of Measurement

Applied empathy encompasses various skills making measurement complicated. Ashoka Fellows have, however, devised a number of assessments that measure some of its component parts, and their accompanying outcomes. Here are a couple of examples:

- Ashoka Fellow [Vishal Talreja](#) teamed up with two UK-based psychologists to develop [Dream a Dream's](#) Life Skills Assessment Tool. The tool tracks participants' progress across a series of 5 distinct categories, including their interpersonal skills and their ability to manage conflict, beginning with baseline data the moment they



enter the program, and ending with a final assessment when they leave. The team has used it to build a dispersion map, which has allowed them to look at the highest, lowest, and median scores, in order to devise appropriate interventions for participants of varying levels of need. Comparing results at the start and finish of the program, they are similarly able to identify what's working and what isn't, and to improve the program accordingly.

- Ashoka Fellow [Jim Thompson](#) of the [Positive Coaching Alliance](#) has athletes fill out a [Triple Impact Competitor Self-Assessment](#), in which they rank their performance against a series of statements. These statements include “I’m on the lookout for leadership opportunities that help my team achieve its goals” and “my teammates would say I’m a positive teammate and one who builds strong team chemistry.” The process invites continual reflection and personal goal-setting, and encourages participants to take ownership over their own behavior and progress.