

The Benefits of Compassionate Communication

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One of the challenges students can face in any classroom is group work. Even in [co-creation environments](#), where students are involved in determining the activities and assessments for a course, group work can still present obstacles. No matter how much you plan, it's hard to predict what the dynamic of a group will be like, [which can be influenced by different factors like communication styles and levels of participation](#). These differences can be further heightened in online or flexible (HyFlex) environments, where it is harder to read body language and facial cues over video calls.

However, being able to work effectively in a team is an important life and career skill, and it is important to help students build strong communication skills for success in the classroom and beyond. Compassionate communication, which is a part of the movement in higher education to reshape institutions into [compassionate campuses](#), can help students navigate the nuances of group dynamics.

Compassion is defined as your desire to help relieve another person's suffering when you are confronted with it. Compassionate communication can help students identify helpful and unhelpful behaviours in themselves and others, making them more attuned to how they influence group dynamics. In 2017, the following approaches were identified as central to the pedagogy of compassionate communication:

- Understanding compassion
- Preventing cliques
- Helpful group behaviours
- Unhelpful group behaviours
- Coping strategies when under pressure to speak

By using these approaches, students can become more self-aware of their own communication style as well as others'. Research has shown that compassionate communication can improve one's ability to address unhelpful group behaviours, enhance helpful group behaviours, and increase inclusivity for all group members.

As post-secondary institutions continue to explore ways to improve students' experiences in online and hybrid courses, teaching compassionate communication skills may be an effective way to help improve group work experiences, and ultimately, student success.

📄 Take a look at the Teaching & Learning Centre's [Groups](#) webpage for resources and ideas which will help you understand groups and will help you construct better group activities for your students.

References

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