As we work together to end systemic problems, we also can work on ourselves. We can pause to observe, to ask questions, to really understand our own and others’ emotions—without making value judgments and without forming opinions about whether our feelings are right or wrong. We can think long and hard about our biases and the sources of our opinions of others, their feelings, and how they manage them. This resource provides specific strategies to help us shift our mindsets. We can visualize how to apply these strategies with students, colleagues, and parents or caregivers in an effort to be more culturally responsive emotion scientists.
HAVE CONVERSATIONS ACROSS DIFFERENCES

It’s not always easy to talk about differences in our identities, whether these are race, age, gender, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, or ability. And because we have a hard time navigating these conversations, we avoid them. But research shows that these conversations are the key to building connections and overcoming tension across differences. We can do our best to listen to the views, perspectives, and experiences of others and to empathize. We can learn about the stories of those who look different from us, believe different things than us, and see the world differently than us. We can listen with genuine curiosity and a desire to see their points of view clearly—whether or not we agree with them.

STAY PRESENT AND USE ACTIVE LISTENING

When we are engaging in difficult or uncomfortable conversations, we can use active listening to stay present and try to understand what others have to say—even when it makes us feel unpleasant. We also can stay present by noticing how we are reacting physically when we feel offended, irritated, or otherwise put off by another person or their words or actions. Noticing how our heart rate or breathing changes or how our muscles tense up can help us to consciously choose to breathe slowly and deeply, and to stay in the moment.
STRATEGIES FOR SHIFTING OUR MINDSET

BE A BRIDGE, NOT A BARRIER

What do you typically do when someone points out something you did that was offensive or unkind? Not only is it important to be receptive instead of defensive, but we also want to open a door to learning more and building connections. The more we can be open to the stories and perspectives of others, the less likely our biases are to guide us.

CONSIDER THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTENT AND IMPACT

An important aspect of emotionally intelligent communication is being aware of how our messages are received by those around us. Sometimes, in spite of our best intentions, the impact of our words and actions can be negative. When we get feedback about our impact, it can be tempting to explain or defend. But listening empathically and validating others’ feelings will keep communication open.
GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER’S STORIES

Meeting a student or a colleague where they are means learning about and honoring that person’s journey. Taking the time to both share our own story and get to know about another’s background not only fosters trust and perspective taking but it helps us to better respond to each other’s needs.

ACKNOWLEDGE OUR OWN BIASES

Importantly, it is not about suppressing biases, pretending to be color blind, or not seeing others’ differences. It is about identifying our biases (because we all have them) and then working to ensure our behavior reflects our values and beliefs...so that we can treat everyone fairly and respectfully. When identifying our unconscious biases, we can recognize them as a part of us, and consider how they are at odds with our conscious values. When we see differences rather than ignoring them, we can seek out friendships with people who are different and who can expand our points of view. It also can be helpful to search for qualities and goals we might have in common with people who we may view as different.
FOCUS ON PERSPECTIVE TAKING MORE THAN EMPATHY

Though empathy is helpful in creating closer connections, one problem with empathy is that we tend to experience it more for people who we perceive as similar to us. It is harder to stand in someone’s shoes when we have never seen shoes like theirs. Empathy tends to be based on our gut response and may be subconscious. Perspective taking requires conscious effort—it is when we push ourselves to take the viewpoint of those who are different from us, even if we feel no or little empathy toward them. The goal is not to feel sympathy or compassion or even to feel what they’re feeling; the goal is to really understand what they’re feeling and why.

USE OUR FEELINGS AS AN IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

We may feel guilty when we start to see our biases and their impact on our behavior. We may be angered by others’ biases and the systemic problems that have resulted from them. We can channel these feelings into learning more and seeking change in ourselves and the systems around us.