

Figure 1.2: Examining Barriers to Seeing Students

This activity may feel uncomfortable. We are asking you to really examine your thoughts, feelings, judgments, and reactions to someone else. We are asking you to be brave and honest, while also being compassionate with yourself. Use the space provided to respond to the reflection prompts.

Step 1: Think about a student you don't understand, someone you struggle to connect with. Try to remember what you think and feel when you interact with this person. Mark all the possible reasons you may struggle to connect with or understand this student.

- ☐ Assumptions you have about them
- ☐ Triggering behaviors
- ☐ Core beliefs you have about how they should act and who they should be
- ☐ Judgments you have about them
- ☐ Past relationships you've had with someone who they remind you of
- ☐ The way they make you feel (for example, they live in poverty and seeing that exist in the world is hard for you)
- ☐ Ideas you have about who they should be rather than who they are
- ☐ Your own personal stress and burnout
- ☐ Thinking you need to "save" them
- ☐ Being lost in thought (about something that happened earlier or that you need to do later)
- ☐ Preoccupation with how others will perceive that you are doing your job
- ☐ Thinking everyone thinks and feels the way you do—overidentifying with the student
- ☐ Racial identity, sexual identity, or political differences
- ☐ Misunderstanding of human development and what's normal for that age
- ☐ Generational norm differences
- ☐ Idealizing the person
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____

Step 2: Choose one item you marked in step 1 to reflect on. Ask yourself, “Why do I do (or think) this?” and then try to dig a little deeper to understand where that belief or reaction comes from.

For example, if you marked *thinking you need to save them*, ask yourself, “Why do I think I need to save them? Where does that drive come from in me?” Or, if you marked *core beliefs about how they should act and who they should be*, ask yourself, “Why do I think they should be a certain way? Where did that belief come from? Could I be wrong?”

Step 3: Reflecting on the item you chose for step 2, ask yourself, “Is this more important than connecting with and truly seeing this person? Why or why not?”

Step 4: Ask yourself, “What if I let go of this and tried to see this person for who they are? What might happen?”

Step 5: After you understand what might be preventing you from seeing this student, then seek to understand the student. Have curiosity about them. Observe their body language and mood, ask them questions, put yourself in their shoes, remember what it was like to be that age, ask other teachers, or ask parents or caregivers.

Step 6: Consider the following ways to show this student that you see them.

- Notice if they need anything.
- Notice and comment on their interests (sports teams, TV shows, superheroes, or some other interest you notice them displaying on their clothes or notebook).
- Say “hi” to them in the hall.
- Tell them a story that shows you can relate, or acknowledge that you haven’t ever experienced that, but you can see that they are hurting.
- Attend their after-school activities.
- Ask about things that happened in their lives.