

# Concentric Altruism

## Facilitation Guide



Tool for  
**Civic Character**

 10 minutes

 Educator-prep  
Lifelong Learners

### Materials

- Watch [The Human Spark - Kids Are Naturally Altruistic](#)

### Making Connections

Principled Innovation asks us to work with others and recognize the limits of our own knowledge so that we can better understand and tackle the complex issues our communities face.

Connecting Character Assets:

[Perspective taking](#)  
[Altruism](#)

### About this Guide

While there is considerable evidence that human beings [instinctively seek to help others in need](#), we must first understand what those needs are. However, for people who aren't in our own groups – and especially for those in opposition groups – understanding others' needs takes effort and reflection. Use this activity individually or in a classroom/team setting to consider the needs of others and determine how we might foster “change for the good of humanity.”

In Principled Innovation, altruism – acting in others' interests, even if it costs us something – functions as a glue for the change process. True innovation requires seeing things from new perspectives, and it can take some degree of personal sacrifice to gain those perspectives. Perspective-taking often costs us something, such as time, emotional work, patience, or a willingness to listen when we want to speak. And in a diverse society, these personal costs are called upon when we seek to act with civility at those times when everything inside us wants to shout back the reasons we believe someone else's ideas are wrong. Building a strong community on a foundation of honest and civil discourse is hard work, and altruism makes it possible. This labor of love – the altruism captured in the act of civility – is part of building a stronger community.

As educators, hearing out a parent or a student when they share their thoughts on how we can do our jobs better can take a heavy toll on us. Our self-defensive mechanisms instantly assume that they are wrong and shut down our mind's willingness to truly seek their perspectives and respond with civility. Yet those outside perspectives are frequently exactly what is needed to lead to educational transformation that starts in an individual classroom and has the potential to ripple through the educational system. Listening in these moments is altruistic – sacrificing our own desire to speak in the interest of hearing what others have to say.

In this activity, participants are asked to reflect on the needs of others in a stepwise process, beginning with some of the people we know best – our families – and moving outward to the people in our ingroup and then to people in our outgroups. This reflective process can help expose our lack of understanding and push us to humanize others and seek their perspectives.

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### Instructions

#### 1 Situate

Play the video.

Explain that altruism – helping others, even at some cost to ourselves – seems to come naturally to human beings. Making “positive changes for humanity” – as the Principled Innovation framework describes it – makes us feel good. However, in order for us to act altruistically, we need to know what others’ needs are, and understanding those needs can require altruism too – because it takes emotional work to truly consider perspectives that are opposed to our own or hear from people who we consider to be opponents.

#### 2 Reflect

1. Share the following graphic with participants. (Consider uncovering one segment at a time as you go through steps two and three.)



2. Ask the participants to identify three needs of one person in each of these groups. Explain that when we get to the outer two groups, it can be difficult to know what those needs are. This is where altruism comes in: it might cost us something to find out – whether in terms of time, energy, patience, or a willingness to critically reflect on outside perspectives.
3. After identifying the needs of someone in each group, ask participants to consider what concrete steps they might be able to take to act altruistically on one of the needs in each group.

#### 3 Share

Some participants might be willing to share something they wrote down – if so, hearing participants’ reflections would be a constructive way to conclude the activity.