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### Overview:

In “Creating a Compassionate Community,” Jane K. Atwood addresses the importance of strengthening community inclusion efforts, especially for children and adults with developmental disabilities such as autism.

### Summary:

In this excerpt, “How to Cultivate Compassion,” Jane K. Atwood, Parent Advocate at Bittersweet Farms, outlines three necessary components of compassion: awareness, self-reflection, and empathy. She explains that by holding ourselves accountable to exercising these qualities, we can build more compassionate, engaged responses and inclusive communities for individuals with developmental disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder.

**ODE 9-12 STANDARD 1: *Health*; Topic 1, *Healthy Lifestyle Choices*; Topic 2, *Empathetic and Productive Relationships***

### Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, define “ability.” Pinpoint a few abilities that each of you might have. Does every student have the same set of skills? Should people in the class be treated differently because of the different types of skills they have?
2. What are some differences between sympathy and empathy?
3. What are some important ways that your community can develop more empathy for those who need it?
4. Why is compassion important to a community? In what specific ways can stronger compassion lead to increased engagement with individuals with developmental disabilities?

### Activity:

Split the class into several small groups. Each group should have a discussion on one topic (ex: favorite vacation spot, favorite food, etc.). Designate one person in the group to communicate without speaking or writing. As he/she tries to communicate, do not give him/her more time to “speak” than anyone else.

After this exercise, discuss how this scenario may compare to the challenges people with autism may experience when interacting with their classmates.

[Activities to help students understand autism.](#)

### Resources:

Autism Speaks: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/>

Video & Lesson featuring Student Athletes on the Autism Spectrum: <https://wgte.pbslearningmedia.org/>

