

Empathy and Connection

Edna Contreras

BEFORE YOU READ: What does empathy mean? How is it different from sympathy?

Watching a Family Struggle

A few months ago, I was standing in line to cross the border from Mexico into the U.S. Behind me there was a woman with two children. They were twins. They were very *restless*.

I watched and listened, and I understood that there was something different about them. The twins were becoming more and more frustrated. They yelled at their mother, begged for food, and fought with each other.

Nearby, there was a group of teenagers. They were a few years older than the twin brothers. The teenagers looked at the twins with *disdain* and then burst out laughing. They made fun of the brothers, and suddenly the mother started to cry. At that moment my instinct told me to do something.

Deciding to Do Something

I turned to the twins, and I smiled at them. I asked them if they were okay. I talked with the twins and their mom. Little by little, the tension and frustration disappeared.

The mother explained to me that the twins had autism. She said they sometimes have a crisis

in public, and it is stressful. She thanked me for understanding and helping to calm them down. She said that many people *mock* or just ignore them. But some people do something to help. Finally, we crossed the border and said goodbye smiling.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What did the author do to help? How or why was it helpful?
2. What do *restless*, *disdain*, and *mock* mean? Try to figure it out from the context. Try writing your own sentences using those words.
3. Share a time you have witnessed someone expressing disdain or mockery. Did you do something to interrupt it? Why or why not?

Edna Contreras is a student at Ysleta Community Learning Center in El Paso, Texas. She is a single mother of two children and loves to help her neighborhood and her family. She plans to continue with her education and get a career. She is a very optimistic woman.



Bystander: Do Something? Or Mind Your Own Business?

At first in this story, Edna was a bystander. A bystander is someone who is present at an event but does not take part in the event. Edna watched a group of teenagers mock the twin brothers. She decided to do something. She stopped being a bystander at that point. She got involved. What would you do in this situation? (There is no right or wrong answer.)

