

# Embrace Vulnerability. Create Connection.

## Improve Classroom Behavior.

By Sharoya Ham

If you are a teacher looking for a simple, meaningful way to build stronger classroom bonds, this reflection exercise works especially well at the start of a new calendar year, when students have enough interactions at school to reflect on and are ready to reset.

The heart of the activity is you! When you model vulnerability by sharing something you find challenging, students feel safer, more connected, and more willing to engage. Stronger relationships lead to improved behavior and a more productive learning environment.

Use this script closely. The pauses, tone, and smiles all matter.

### For Students Under Age 9

#### The Script

“Hey class, I have an activity that is *really special to me*.”

(Pause. Smile.)

“I’m going to share a question with you, and we’re going to take time to think about it together.”

**“Here's the question: When was the last time something *at school* felt really hard? What helped you keep going?”**

“May I go first? I feel a little nervous sharing my story.”

(Neutral face.)

#### Sample Teacher Share

“Last week, I had trouble remembering where I put my keys. I looked everywhere and felt really frustrated. What helped me was taking a deep breath and asking a friend for help. Sometimes we all need a little help, and that's okay.”

Simple. Honest. Relatable.

## Activity Steps

1. Give students 5-10 minutes to draw or write their response quietly.
2. Review expectations for respectful listening (eyes on speaker, quiet voices, gentle hearts).
3. Share your story first and ask, "Can anyone else think of a time when something felt hard?"
4. Invite students to share one at a time. Keep shares brief (1-2 minutes each).
5. After each share, say, "Thank you for sharing. Has anyone else felt this way?"
6. If no one responds, affirm the student: "You are not alone. Others experience this too. We can talk more later if you want."

## For Students Ages 9+

### Reflection Question

"What is something *at school* that has felt really hard this year? Looking back, what advice would you give yourself?"

### The Script

"Hey class, I have an activity that is *really special to me*."  
(Pause. Smile.)

"I'm going to share a prompt with you, and we're going to take time to think about it together."

**"Here's the prompt: What is something at school that has felt really hard this year? Looking back, what advice would you give yourself?"**

"May I go first? I feel a little nervous sharing my story."  
(Neutral face.)

### Sample Teacher Share

"Talking on the phone has always made me nervous. When I have to call parents, I worry I might stumble over my words or that my message won't come across the way I intend. Looking back, I would tell myself that it's okay to feel nervous and that preparation helps me feel more confident."

Simple. Honest. Relatable.

## Activity Steps

1. Give students a few minutes to complete the prompt quietly in writing, drawing, typing, or any other way that works for them.
2. Review expectations for respectful listening (active listening, no interrupting, supportive body language).
3. Share your story first and ask, "Can anyone relate to feeling this way?"
4. Invite students to share one at a time. Allow 2-3 minutes per share.
5. After each share, say, "Thank you for sharing. Can anyone else relate to this experience?"
6. If no one responds, affirm the student: "You are not alone. Others experience this too. Let's talk more after class if you'd like."

## Tips for Success

- **Set the tone:** Your vulnerability invites students to be vulnerable too.
- **Respect boundaries:** Never pressure students to share. Participation is always optional.
- **Follow up individually:** If a student's response raises concerns, check in with them privately after class.
- **Acknowledge feelings:** No student should leave feeling they are the only one who struggles.
- **Create closure:** End by acknowledging everyone's courage in sharing and reflecting together.

When we normalize challenge and create space for authentic connection, we build classrooms where everyone belongs.