



Employee NEWSLETTER

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How to Become More Empathetic

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In a world where many of us feel less connected to one another, giving and receiving empathy are more important than ever. We all yearn to be truly heard and understood.

Fortunately, providing empathy is a skill that can be learned and practiced. When we know how to be empathetic with someone, the other person is assured that their feelings matter, and they receive the important gifts of connection and validation.

What is Empathy?

Being empathetic means being on the same level with another person and focusing intently on the feelings they're expressing. It means putting yourself in their shoes, holding their emotions in a tender way, and validating who they are and how they feel. You are in the moment with that person, attempting to understand what they're telling you and how a particular situation feels to them.

There's a difference between offering sympathy and offering empathy. Receiving sympathy may come across as someone feeling sorry for you or putting you in an inferior position, as if they are saying, "You poor person, I feel bad for you." Empathy is about authentically hearing and understanding the other person, without trying to solve a problem, tell them what to do, or tell them a similar story about yourself. When you are truly tuned in to the other person and listen to them with empathy, the focus remains on them, not you. You don't have to agree with what they're telling you; you are there to listen and care about them.

How to Offer Empathy

- Listen carefully not only to what you are being told, but especially to the feelings being expressed.
- Repeat back to the person what you have heard them tell you, in order to make sure you are understanding them. You may say something like, "I am hearing that you're feeling (sad or angry or confused) about (whatever the situation might be)." We call this repetition of what the other person has expressed "reflective listening." And it's important to do this because too often we make wrong assumptions about other people based on our own issues or experiences, rather than listening deeply to what the other person tells us.
- The person talking to you can then let you know if you have heard them correctly. If not, ask them to kindly tell you again what they want you to know and assure them that you want to understand them.
- When you can accurately repeat back what you are hearing, acknowledge the person's feelings and empathize with feelings. You may say something like, "I see you are hurting and feeling sad, and I know that does not feel good." Or, "I understand that this situation makes you feel angry and frustrated. Just know that I'm here with you."
- When the person feels heard, you can brainstorm solutions if they ask for that, but most people don't want you to tell them what to do. They just want you to listen and understand.

Sometimes empathy can be expressed very simply with just a few words, such as: "Dang, that's terrible." Or, "Wow, that must hurt." Or, "You must feel really betrayed."

Although offering empathy may seem easy and straightforward, there is a surprising lack of it in today's culture. Learning how to become more empathetic

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will help deepen your connections with your children, partners, family members, friends, and others. It's a truly priceless gift.

References:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-legacy-distorted-love/202209/how-become-more-empathetic>

