


How to Be More Empathetic

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Highly [empathetic](#) people are more likely to have more friends, more meaningful relationships, and be high-functioning generally. On the other hand, having a low ability to empathize is associated with different personality disorders like antisocial personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder. While the task of being more empathetic might seem daunting, it is possible with practice over time.

What Is Empathy?

Empathy is understanding someone else's experience so much that you can imagine having their experience yourself. It is the foundation for [kindness](#) and understanding. It helps us in relationships to understand the needs, experiences, and feelings of the other person.

It is different from sympathy, as sympathy is merely focused on responding or reacting to the experiences. Empathy takes it one step farther to being able to put yourself in the person's shoes.

There are two types of empathy:

- **Emotional empathy.** As you might gather from its name, emotional empathy refers to the phenomenon of being able to feel the same emotion as the other person. The second component of it is feeling distress at their hardship, while the third component is feeling compassion for them. So the distress you might feel is not related to the feeling of the other person, but your own personal feeling of upsetness that someone else is going through something painful.
- **Cognitive empathy.** This is how you can perceive and intellectually understand the way someone else feels. This is more like a skill than emotional empathy and takes time to cultivate. Cognitive empathy involves time to learn how to identify certain emotions and behaviors.

How Do We Feel Empathy?

Many neuroscientists believe that empathy is merely the process of simulating the same emotion in ourselves that we see in other people. This is called the Simulation Theory.

However, preliminary evidence suggests that we have specialized neurons in our brains called “mirror neurons” that get activated when we see and feel emotions. Many scientists believe that empathy is created with these mirror

neurons.

Other scientists believe that empathy is created entirely through the intellect. The idea is that we are able to experience empathy by seeing others and understanding intellectually how we should feel or react to someone else's feelings.

While there are many theories, how exactly we feel empathy is not known for sure. Most likely, it is a combination of all or some of these theories. Perhaps we feel different types of empathy in certain situations.

How to Practice Empathy in Your Daily Life

Empathy is a natural part of our development, even in animals. But, of course, many factors can impact someone's ability to be less or more empathetic towards others. Still, usually, an individual's general ability to empathize stays roughly the same over the course of their life.

However, it is never a bad idea to find more ways that you can practice more empathy in your day-to-day. Some great places to start are:

- **Become curious about people you don't know.** Empathetic people are people who are curious about those around them. They may strike up conversations with strangers or observe others with openness. They are people who kept the natural curiosity that we all have when we are children. This curiosity helps us empathize because it exposes us to different world views, lifestyles, and people we would not usually meet.
- **Focus on similarities rather than differences.** Every single one of us has biases. There are always ways to put other people into boxes and make assumptions about them based on stereotypes or cultural stigmas. Doing this to others keeps us from understanding other people's individuality and unique qualities. This can help us to better understand them.
- **Put yourself in someone's shoes.** For example, instead of walking past the homeless person in the train station and simply thinking about how unclean they look, try and get a better idea of their life. This could be anything from bringing them a meal or care package and saying hello to volunteering at a [homeless](#) shelter. Either way, immersing yourself in the lives and experiences of others is a great way to increase your empathy.
- **Listen, but also share.** Empathy is not just about having empathy for others but also about showing ourselves to others. Trusting someone with your genuine thoughts and feelings is crucial to building a healthy and empathetic relationship with someone else. Empathy is fantastic because it is not just a one-way street. It can go both ways.
- **Connect with social action movements.** Empathy doesn't have to be just an individualistic concept. It can extend to large groups of people and exist in a global or community-wide plane. Getting involved in advocacy groups or charity efforts is a great way to embody empathy.
- **Get creative with it.** So often, people think that just because someone disagrees with them or if the other person lives a different lifestyle than they do, that person doesn't deserve empathy. Using your imagination and creativity is essential when empathy seems hard or even impossible. Through your creativity, empathy is possible even when you didn't ever think it could be.

 **Show Sources**

SOURCES:

Lesley University: "The Psychology of Emotional and Cognitive Empathy."

Mind & Body: "Six Habits of Highly Empathic People."