

# How to be more **empathetic** with others.

“Connection is why we are here. It gives purpose and meaning to our lives.” Brené Brown

How you connect and relate to others can very much play an important factor in how you feel in everyday life. The level at which we get on with our partners, friends, family, colleagues and bosses depends on a key social skill which is empathy.

Many people often confuse empathy and sympathy. Sympathy means understanding someone's challenges and suffering at a distance, whereas empathy is about being able to experience what someone else is feeling by imagining themselves in that person's shoes.



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When you express empathy, you are able to see people for who they are – not who you expect or want them to be. It becomes easier to accept and appreciate them, rather than make assumptions based on your own perceptions about them which may not be true.



Sometimes we don't quite get it right when we're communicating and trying to understand others. But the good news is that empathy is a skill that can be learned.

There are three key factors of empathy:

- 1 Cognitive empathy** - imagining ourselves in the situation (note: if we only do this and not the other two, we are very much playing in the sympathy zone)
- 2 Emotive empathy** – feeling the situation alongside the person
- 3 Empathic action** – not trying to fix the problem or offer a solution



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# **Build** your empathy muscle. Follow these simple steps.

Think about the person who you'd like to show more empathy and understanding for.

- 1 Ask yourself how they've behaved and acted in recent days.**  
What was their mood like? What emotions were they expressing?
- 2 Consider what's potentially going on for this person right now that may be making them feel these particular emotions.**  
If it's a colleague, you might only get to see a part of them when they're at work, so be sensitive if you don't know much about their personal life.
- 3 Think about how you have contributed to a person's situation.**  
If they're going through a particularly difficult time, are you helping to improve their situation?
- 4 Consider what an outsider would think if they saw the two of you interacting.**  
What information would they be able to gather on the situation?  
Sometimes when we view a situation from a completely different perspective we can gain some key insight which can make us change how we respond to a situation.
- 5 Think about what you could do or say to improve the situation for them.**  
Remember: you're in control of your own actions!



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# Now you've reflected, it's time to put it into **practice.**



When you're ready to speak to the person:

- Be fully present with them – focus your attention on what they're saying rather than being distracted looking at your phone or emails!
- If you're unsure about what they've said, repeat back to them in your own words and ask any questions if you're unsure.
- Don't be quick to offer a solution, just simply listen to what they have to say.
- Even if you don't agree with what they're saying, acknowledge what they're saying – you can't disagree with the way a person feels.
- If you feel yourself getting frustrated with the person, take a break and re-visit when you're feeling more grounded.



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**“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”**

Atticus Finch – To Kill a Mockingbird

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