

Empathy Spectrum Diagnostic Interview (ESDI)

This structured clinical interview is designed to assess empathy dysregulation across emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Use the provided questions and scoring rubric to evaluate the presence and subtype of Empathy Spectrum Disorder (ESD).

1. Emotional Resonance

- 1.1 How do you usually feel when someone close to you is in pain or distress?
- 1.2 Do you ever physically feel others' emotions in your body?
- 1.3 Are there times when you feel nothing, even when you think you should?
- Follow-ups: Does this vary by person? Have you ever pretended to feel emotions?

2. Cognitive Perspective-Taking

- 2.1 Can you typically understand what others are feeling or thinking without them saying it?
- 2.2 Have you used this ability to your advantage before?
- 2.3 Do you think more about others' motives than their emotions?
- Follow-ups: Are some people harder to read? Do you analyze people a lot?

3. Empathic Behavior

- 3.1 How do you decide whether or not to help someone who is struggling?
- 3.2 Can you recall a time you wanted to help but didn't? Why?
- 3.3 Have you helped someone and regretted it?
- Follow-ups: Has anyone felt intruded on by your help?

4. Attachment & Relational History

- 4.1 How were emotions handled in your early family life?
- 4.2 Were there rules about emotional expression at home?

- 4.3 Did you ever feel responsible for others' emotional well-being?
- Follow-ups: Were you encouraged or discouraged from showing emotion?

5. Empathy Dysregulation Triggers

- 5.1 Are there topics or people that shut down your emotional responses?
- 5.2 Do others' strong emotions ever feel overwhelming or unsafe to you?
- 5.3 How do you respond to someone crying in front of you?
- Follow-ups: What happens in your body in those moments?

6. Motivational Alignment

- 6.1 When you're kind to someone, what usually motivates it?
- 6.2 Have you done the right thing without feeling emotionally driven to?
- 6.3 Is empathy a strength, weakness, or strategy to you?
- Follow-ups: Have you felt manipulated by someone else's empathy before?

Scoring Guide

Each question is rated on a scale of 0–3:

- 0 – Functional: No disruption or dysregulation observed.
- 1 – Mild Dysregulation: Some incongruence, but adaptive behavior.
- 2 – Moderate: Frequent dysregulation or misalignment.
- 3 – Severe: Chronic empathy misalignment, emotional detachment, or flooding.