

0.20. EMPATHY

0.20.1. What Is Meant By Empathy?

- ✓ **Definition:** The Encyclopedia Britannica defines empathy as: *"The ability to imagine oneself in another's place and understand the other's feelings, desires, ideas, and actions."*
- ✓ In simple words, empathy is closely related to the ability to read other people's emotions.
- ✓ Empathy depends not only on one's ability to identify someone else's emotions but also on one's capacity to put oneself in the other person's place and to experience an appropriate emotional response.
- ✓ Empathy is the ability to not only detect what others feel but also to experience that emotion oneself.

0.20.2. Elements Of Empathy

Empathy must incorporate the following elements:

- ✓ Imagination which is dependent on the ability to imagine;
- ✓ The existence of an accessible Self (self-awareness or self-consciousness);
- ✓ The existence of an available other (other-awareness, recognizing the outside world);
- ✓ The existence of accessible feelings, desires, ideas and representations of actions or their outcomes both in the empathizing Self ("Empathor") and in the Other, the object of empathy ("Empathee");
- ✓ The availability of an aesthetic frame of reference; and
- ✓ The availability of a moral frame of reference.

0.20.3. Comparison Of Empathy With Sympathy

Empathy and sympathy are very close and are sometimes used as synonyms. The easiest way to separate them is to remember that empathy is about *feelings* whilst sympathy is about *actions*. Thus you may empathize with another person and then act on this by telling them how sorry or happy you feel for them.

Empathetic people are often very sympathetic. They can hardly stop themselves as they really do feel for the other person.

The sharing of the painful feelings of another person is characteristic of both sympathy and empathy. However, the person using sympathy would pay more attention to the pain than to the love for the father whereas the person using empathy would pay equal attention to the pain and love.

0.20.4. Benefits Of Empathy

The value of empathy comes not from understanding the other person's feelings, but what you do as a result of this. Empathy has many benefits as given below:

1. **Empathy connects people together:** When you empathize with me, my sense of identity is connected to yours. As a result, I feel greater in some way and less alone. I may well, as a result, also start to empathize more with you.
2. **Empathy heals:** Therapeutically, it can be a very healing experience for someone to empathize with you. When someone effectively says 'I care for you', it also says 'I can do that, I can care for myself.'
3. **Empathy builds trust:** Empathy displayed can be surprising and confusing. When not expected, it can initially cause suspicion, but when sustained it is difficult not to appreciate the concern. Empathy thus quickly leads to trust.
4. **Empathy closes the loop:** Consider what would happen if you had no idea what the other person felt about your communications to them. You might say something, they hated it, and you continued as if they understood and agreed. The more you can empathize, the more you can get immediate feedback on what they are experiencing of your communications with them. And as a consequence, you can change what you are saying and doing to get them to feel what you want them to feel.

Comment: Thus the concept of empathy is a projection of one's own personality into the personality of another in order to understand him better. When you see the world from the other perspective you can be sensitive to his joy and suffering, in the case of sympathy you will only be sensitive to the suffering.

True empathy helps to understand others better. This is the way to make healing relationship, if you pay too much attention to yourself and your impact on the others you have a very limited perspective that will not help you with your relationship. Also empathy is far more effective when it is offered, as opposed to when people ask for empathy.

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