

## Empathy and Sympathy

### *Empathy*

Empathy is the ability to emotionally understand what other people feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine yourself in their place. Essentially, it is putting yourself in someone else's position and feeling what they are feeling.

Empathy means that when you see another person suffering, such as after they've lost a loved one, you can instantly envision yourself going through that same experience and feel what they are going through.

### *Signs of Empathy*

- ✓ You are good at really listening to what others have to say.
- ✓ People often tell you about their problems.
- ✓ You are good at picking up on how other people are feeling.
- ✓ You often think about how other people feel.
- ✓ Other people come to you for advice.
- ✓ You often feel overwhelmed by tragic events.
- ✓ You try to help others who are suffering.
- ✓ You are good at telling when people aren't being honest.
- ✓ You sometimes feel drained or overwhelmed in social situations.
- ✓ You care deeply about other people.
- ✓ You find it difficult to set boundaries in your relationships.

### *Types of Empathy*

**Affective empathy** involves the ability to understand another person's emotions and respond appropriately. Such emotional understanding may lead to someone feeling concerned for another person's well-being, or it may lead to feelings of personal distress.

**Somatic empathy** involves having a physical reaction in response to what someone else is experiencing. People sometimes physically experience what another person is feeling. When you see someone else feeling embarrassed, for example, you might start to blush or have an upset stomach.

**Cognitive empathy** involves being able to understand another person's mental state and what they might be thinking in response to the situation. This is related to what psychologists refer to as the theory of mind or thinking about what other people are thinking.

### *Uses for Empathy*

Empathy allows you to build social connections with others. By understanding what people are thinking and feeling, you can respond appropriately in social situations. Research has shown that having social connections is important for both physical and psychological well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Empathizing with others helps you learn to regulate your own emotions. Emotional regulation is important in that it allows you to manage what you are feeling, even in times of great stress, without becoming overwhelmed.

Empathy promotes helping behaviours. Not only are you more likely to engage in helpful behaviours when you feel empathy for other people, but other people are also more likely to help you when they experience empathy.

### **Barriers to Empathy**

Some people lack empathy and, therefore, aren't able to understand what another person may be experiencing or feeling.

#### ***Cognitive Biases***

Sometimes the way people perceive the world around them is influenced by cognitive biases. For example, people often attribute other people's failures to internal characteristics, while blaming their shortcomings on external factors.

#### ***Dehumanization***

Many also fall victim to the trap of thinking that people who are different from them don't feel and behave the same as they do. This is particularly common in cases when other people are physically distant.

#### ***Victim Blaming***

Sometimes, when another person has suffered a terrible experience, people make the mistake of blaming the victim for their circumstances. This is the reason that victims of crimes are often asked what they might have done differently to prevent the crime.

### **Sympathy**

Sympathy is a feeling of pity or a sense of compassion — it's when you feel bad for someone else who's going through something hard. The ability to feel sympathy for others is a great part of what makes us human, and it's what compels us to reach out and offer help.

- ✓ Having thoughts about what someone feels
- ✓ When in conversation, giving unasked advice
- ✓ Passing judgment

- ✓ Only noticing the surface-level issue
- ✓ Understanding only from your perspective
- ✓ Ignoring or suppressing your own emotions

### ***Sympathy, Empathy, and Compassion***

Sympathy – the power of entering into another’s feelings or mind: ...  
compassion

Empathy - the power of entering into another’s personality and imaginatively experiencing his experiences.

Compassion – fellow feeling, or sorrow for the sufferings of another

### **Differences between Empathy and Sympathy**

#### **Comparison chart**

Empathy versus Sympathy comparison chart

	<b>Empathy</b>	<b>Sympathy</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Understanding what others are feeling because you have experienced it yourself or can put yourself in <a href="#">their</a> shoes.	Acknowledging another person's emotional hardships and providing comfort and assurance.
<b>Example</b>	"I know it's not easy to lose weight because I have faced the same problems myself."	"Trying to lose weight can often feel like an uphill battle."
<b>Relationship</b>	Personal understanding	Understanding the experience of others

### **Four ways to practice empathy**

#### ***1. Listen actively instead of focusing on what to say next***

Even when listening to someone else, people are often focused on their thoughts. It’s easy to think about what to say next instead of focusing on what the other person is saying. This gets in the way of fully and actively listening to the other person. It also makes it difficult to understand the emotions of another person.

Failure to listen will make it difficult to empathize. Instead of focusing on your response, pay close attention to what someone is telling you. Listen attentively, not just for their words, but for other non-verbal cues, too. Watch their body language and tone of voice to understand how they feel. You can easily miss these signals when you're focused on your response.

When the other person is finished speaking, take a moment to process the information. Only once you've processed all nuances of the conversation should you focus on what you want to say. If you have a position of leadership, encourage your team to practice active listening.

## ***2. Repeat in your own words***

One of the first things you can say after listening to someone is to repeat what they've said but in your own words.

## ***3. Prioritize emotional intelligence***

Emotional intelligence is an important soft skill to practice in your workplace if you want to improve empathy.

People who have high emotional intelligence tend to be:

- ✓ More self-aware
- ✓ Able to manage themselves
- ✓ Aware of social cues
- ✓ More capable of managing relationships

In the workplace, it's crucial to prioritize emotional intelligence in your team. It facilitates strong communicators, collaborators, and leaders.

## ***4. Understand what the other person needs***

Everyone is wired differently. We all have different needs. It's easy to imagine what you'd need if you were in the same situation as someone else. But what you need isn't necessarily the same as what they need. Resist the urge to automatically leap to conclusions about what someone needs when they tell you what they're going through. Instead, use your listening skills to figure out what they need. If you're not sure, ask. It's better to ask someone what they need than to assume and provide the wrong kind of support.

## References:

<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/sympathy.html>

<https://www.betterup.com/blog/empathy-vs-sympathy#:~:text=This%20means%20that%20both%20empathy,but%20from%20your%20own%20perspective.>

[https://www.diffen.com/difference/Empathy\\_vs\\_Sympathy](https://www.diffen.com/difference/Empathy_vs_Sympathy)

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-empathy-2795562>

<https://www.betterup.com/blog/empathy-vs-sympathy#:~:text=Empathy%20involves%20feeling%20what%20someone,but%20from%20your%20own%20perspective.>