

Empathy

What is Empathy?

Empathy is the ability to sense other people's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling.¹

Empathy is the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner; and, *also*: the capacity for this.²

Why is Empathy Important?

Empathy helps us connect and help others, but like other traits, it may have evolved with a selfish motive: using others as a "social antenna" to help detect danger. From an evolutionary perspective, creating a mental model of another person's intent is critical: the arrival of an interloper, for example, could be deadly, so developing sensitivity to the signals of others could be life-saving.³

Empathy in Relationships

The ability to convey support for a partner, relative, or friend is crucial to establishing positive relationships. Empathy enables us to establish rapport with another person, make them feel that they are being heard, and, through words and body language, mimic their emotions. Perspective-taking, or the empathic ability to assume the cognitive state of another person and see a problem through their eyes, can further cement a connection.⁴

Types of Empathy

There are different types of empathy that a person may experience:

- **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 sort of 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.

¹ [Empathy Definition | What Is Empathy \(berkeley.edu\)](#) . Accessed 23 June 2022.

² [Empathy Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster](#). Accessed 24 June 2022.

³ [Empathy | Psychology Today](#). Accessed 28 June 2022.

⁴ Ibid.

- **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 [theory of mind](#), or thinking about what other people are thinking.⁵

Empathy is different from sympathy - it's about taking perspective instead of just feeling sorry for someone else.

Powerful Empathy Statements for Friends

- It sounds like you did everything you could.
- I can see how difficult this has been.
- The whole thing sounds so discouraging.
- I can totally see why you would be upset.
- This is so hard.
- I can't believe how well you're holding u, considering how much stress you're under.
- If that happened to me, I would be so mad too.
- What a day you've had.
- I hear what you're saying.
- It's totally natural for you to feel this way.⁶

⁵ [What Is Empathy? \(verywellmind.com\)](#). Accessed 23 June 2022.

⁶ [Powerful Examples of Empathy Statements \(yourdictionary.com\)](#)