

Empathy 101 (In 2 Steps and 7 Skills)

Empathy helps you create emotional connections with people that help them trust you, help you understand them, and in turn help both of you get your needs from the relationship met. The purpose of this handout is to give you a quick guide to this skill.

COMPREHENSION

The first step in empathy is understanding the other person's emotional experience, *and them believing* that you understand. The skills below can help with this.

- **Inquiry:** For example:
 - “When you turned away and sighed like that, what were you feeling?”
 - “How are you feeling?” OR “Are you feeling sad?”
 - “Can you help me understand why you are feeling sad?”
- **Repeat Emotions:** For example:
 - “I hear that you are feeling sad, discouraged, and angry. Are there other feelings I might be missing?”
- **Acknowledge Reasons:** For example:
 - “So, you are feeling sad because you don't think that I understand you. Is that right?”
 - “When I didn't take out the garbage even though we talked about it twice last week, you didn't know what to do anymore and so you felt angry. Is that right?”
- **End with questions:** See each example above. The questioning language demonstrates that you aren't trying to “get it right” you are trying to connect to the person.

CONNECTION

The second step in empathy is showing that your emotional experience is connected to the other person's emotional experience. If you understand but your emotions don't change to something tender towards them, then the person will feel like your understanding doesn't matter. They won't *feel* your connection with them until they witness you expressing your *tender emotional response* to their feelings.

- **Express your intention to connect with their emotions:**
 - “I want to be here with you so you aren't alone in your sadness.”
 - “I'm asking these questions so that we can be closer.”
 - “Thank you for sharing your emotions with me. It is important to me that I understand you.”
- **Express your tender feelings in relation to what they have shared:**
 - “I'm *glad* that I know about your feelings now so I can try to help you feel better.”
 - “I'm *frustrated with myself* that after our conversations last week, that I forgot to take out the garbage because I don't want to make you angry.”
 - “I am feeling *sad* knowing how sad you are.”
- **Ask what you could do:** Do this only after the above two skills have been used at least once.
 - “What could I do to help you feel more encouraged?”
 - “I thought maybe if I take the garbage out now, it might help. Would it?”
 - “Is there anything I can do to help you feel better?”