

Teach Yourself to be More Understanding and Empathetic

Everyone that hasn't suffered a brain injury or mental illness is capable of empathy. Some of us are in touch with this ability, while others could use a little practice.

What is empathy?

Empathy is a concern for the welfare of others. **It's the ability to detect or predict the emotions and thoughts of others.**

It's easy to see why this would be a handy skill to master. Empathy has an impact on your relationships. This is true for both your personal and professional relationships. Empathy can make your life easier and more fulfilling at home and at work!

Try these tips to increase your empathy for those around you:

1. **Avoid making assumptions.** Your view of the world is limited. Your experiences are just your own. Others have lived a different reality. If you're from a well-off and intact family from the United States, you don't have a clue what it's like to deal with the weight of growing up in an orphanage in Ukraine. If you've never lost a job, avoid assuming that you know exactly what that experience feels like. Making assumptions only gets in the way of developing empathy. **When you catch yourself making assumptions, question them.** Prove your assumptions to be true or false before making any decisions.
2. **Ask questions.** One way to understand others is to ask questions. Develop a genuine interest in them. Enhancing your communication skills assists your ability to

connect with, and to understand, other people. Ask open-ended questions.

3. **Listen.** Listening intently is related to asking questions and avoiding assumptions. **Seek to understand the emotions that the other person is feeling.** Asking questions and then listening to the answers is a pivotal part of creating empathy within yourself.
4. **Try to understand a group of people outside of your experience.** Suppose you're a young, Christian male. You might decide to learn about Hasidic Jews. Or if you've never been poor, you might learn about the homeless. Read books and talk to people. Strive to understand what it would be like to be born a part of a particular group.
5. **Put yourself in the other person's shoes.** One way to relate better to others is to imagine yourself in the same situation. This can be painful. It's not enjoyable to imagine that your spouse has died or that you're entirely out of money. Ask yourself, "What would I be thinking and feeling if I were in this situation?" **Just asking yourself this question is the most significant step you can take toward being empathetic.**
6. **Be present.** Give your undivided attention to others. You can't be empathetic if you're thinking about something else while someone is speaking to you. You're not as good at hiding your disinterest as you think! You miss most of the information, verbal and non-verbal, communicated to you if you're not paying attention.
7. **Practice having more meaningful conversations.** Talking about sports is fine, but it's not a deep and personal topic. One way to get the ball rolling is to talk about something important to you. The more you share, the more you're going to receive in return. **Be open, and others will be more open with you.**

Empathy is an important skill. It can greatly increase your ability to communicate and connect with others. Being able to

understand their feelings and thoughts will boost your rapport with them. Enhance your personal and work relationships with empathy, and you'll benefit in many ways.

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