

Empathy

What you'll learn:

- What is empathy and when to use it
- How to empathise with someone

1. What is Empathy?

Empathy is the capacity to recognize or understand another's state of mind or emotion, and is important in building and maintaining relationships.

It is often characterized as the ability to "put oneself into another's shoes", or in some way experience the outlook or emotions of another being within oneself. Empathy is not necessarily about compassion or sympathy, but it is about making an emotional connection to someone, to show you understand what they are thinking or feeling.

“Three quarters of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world would finish if people were to put on the shoes of their adversaries and understood their points of view”- Mahatma Gandhi

Sometimes it is difficult to understand other people's point of view and how they see things compare to you. Look at these two pictures – what do you see?



Empathy



An old woman with a hooked nose?
A young woman turning away?



A woman's face?
A Musician playing the saxophone?

Communication and Engagement



Understanding that other people may not see things the same way you do would be a positive first step to developing your empathy skills.

2. How to empathise with someone

When demonstrating empathy, we don't have to solve other people's problems, fix anything or be a psychologist. We simply need to acknowledge the feelings we believe they may be having about the situation. Here are two examples of how to empathise with someone – feel free to add your own example in the last row.

Situation	Empathetic Response
A single parent arrives at work on Monday morning, after being at the hospital all weekend with a sick child. They have figures to deliver by 12 noon Monday.	'It must be very worrisome right now, is there anything I can do to give you a hand?'
A colleague is feeling the affects of numerous organisational changes, you have noticed they are withdrawing and becoming isolated from the team.	'You seem discouraged these days, if you want to talk about things, I am open to listening'

Debrief: Consider a situation recently where you saw something differently to someone else, how could you have used an empathy statement to build relationships ?