



EMPATHY SKILLS

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in another person's situation and see, feel and think from their perspective. It allows you to understand what someone else is feeling as if you were feeling it yourself. Empathy is a connector between you and another person.

Sympathy means that you are “feeling for” someone. Empathy means you are “feeling with” someone.



Some psychologists describe three different types of empathy:

- **Cognitive empathy** – the ability to understand at a rational level what someone might be thinking and feeling and why.
- **Emotional empathy** – the experience of feeling the emotions of someone else as if they were your own.
- **Compassionate empathy** – offering your help and support to the person who is experiencing the emotions.

Empathy is one of the most important life skills you can have and because it is a skill (or actually a set of skills) it can be learned and developed.

Here are a few ways to develop your own empathy skills:

- Curiosity – turn your attention outward and focus on the other person.
- Listen - be “in the moment” with the other person, *don't* think about your response while they are talking and *do* ask clarifying questions if you're not sure what they're saying.
- Validate the other person's feelings.
- Value the other person as someone created in the image of God.
- Keep the focus on the other person, don't make it about yourself.
- Let yourself be open and vulnerable.
- Avoid being judgmental.
- Ask how you can help.



RESTORING YOUR HEART

Empathy and Restoring Your Heart (RYH)



Participating in a Restoring Your Heart Group provides a good place to practice using your empathy skills.



Being a good listener is a key part of empathy. Every RYH workbook describes listening skills for you to learn and practice.



You will see empathy being modeled by your facilitator and the other people in your group.



You will experience empathy from people in your group, learn how it feels to receive it and become better equipped to offer it to others.

Empathy Exercise

Here is a fun exercise to help you develop empathy skills while using your creative imagination.

Most of us really enjoy “people watching”. Sometimes it’s a great way to pass the time while waiting for someone or something. Prime people watching places are in airports and restaurants, but any place where people are going about the ordinary business of their daily life is a possibility.

Next time you have an opportunity, watch someone that you don’t know and wonder where they are going, what their life is like and even how they might be feeling. See what you notice about their body language and facial expressions. Imagine what they could be thinking about. Do they look sad, happy, tired, frustrated, stressed? Notice if they are alone or with someone and observe the kinds of interactions they are having with other people. Make up a story about them in your head and think about why they might be feeling the way they do. Try to see them as you think God would see them.

You won’t know if you are on target with their situation, or way off the mark but it doesn’t matter. The idea is to take your mind off yourself and put yourself in another person’s shoes. Doing this people watching exercise will remind you that other people have problems and joys of their own. It’s a fun way to pass the time and hone your empathy skills.