

Communicating with Empathy

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Communication and empathy are both crucial aspects of relationships. Empathy is a fundamental human emotion that allows us to understand and share the feelings of others. It is an essential aspect of our social interactions and helps us to build meaningful relationships with those around us. Empathy requires us to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, to see things from their perspective, and to feel what they are feeling².

Empathy is not only important for personal relationships but also for society as a whole. It allows us to connect with people who are different from us, to understand their experiences and perspectives, and to work together towards common goals. Without empathy, we risk becoming isolated from one another and unable to solve the complex problems facing our world today.

However, showing empathy can be challenging at times. It requires us to step outside of ourselves and our own

experiences, which can be uncomfortable or even painful². But by practicing empathy regularly, we can become more compassionate individuals who are better able to navigate the complexities of human relationships.

In Action:

Have you ever had a conversation with someone close to you, maybe a partner or other close loved one, and there is a disconnect? Perhaps they don't fully understand where you are coming from, or maybe they don't truly care about what you are talking about? Or, maybe you have been the one that does not fully understand or care about the situation being presented. This interaction could be missing something important: Empathy!

Open communication is a huge aspect of having empathy in a relationship, and likely fosters a stronger connection in the relationship. However, it is important to understand that it is okay to not fully understand how your partner is feeling. You do not need to be an expert communicator or licensed professional to provide empathy and understanding to your partner.

Simply trying to understand how a person is feeling is an important part of empathy. When we have more empathy in our relationships, we're more likely to have stronger and happier relationships³.

Here are two ways to practice improving communication, empathy, and understanding in relationships.

Have Regular Checkups

Regular relationship and communication checkups are a great way to foster connection in a relationship. A relationship that values connection will make room for empathy.

Relationship checkups can look different for different people, but the main goal of this checkup is to allow each individual to feel heard, understood, and cared for. If you are looking for ideas on how to conduct a relationship checkup or what to talk about, check out this article, [10 Relationship Checkup Questions](#)⁴.

Practice Active Listening

The goal of active listening is to seek to truly understand what someone is saying to you, *and* be able to show them you are listening. Body language is an important aspect of active listening. Facing the person who is speaking and keeping eye contact shows the speaker that you care about what they are saying. This will also allow the listener

to pick up on the nonverbal cues the speaker may be showing.

The listener should listen without showing judgment or cutting the speaker off. Including small phrases like 'yes' can show the speaker you are listening without being disruptive. The listener should be focused on understanding and empathizing, rather than looking for solutions or sharing opinions. Asking questions and staying actively engaged in the conversation is a great way to better understand how the speaker is feeling and allows you to show empathy³.

Lastly, if you cannot empathize, sympathize. Occasionally, a situation may present itself where you are not able to understand or fully put yourself in someone else's shoes. You should not pretend to understand or feel something that you do not. Doing this may lead you to accidentally invalidate other's experiences. Invalidating is when a person's thoughts, feelings or emotions are rejected or ignored¹. Being emotionally invalidated could cause someone to struggle with managing their own emotions, or could lead them to develop low self-esteem as they hide their emotions instead of sharing them¹. After all we've learned in regards to empathy, these are obviously things we'd like to avoid in our relationships. Ultimately, if you need to, show sympathy if you cannot show empathy. And remember, you don't have to be an empathy expert to be in a healthy relationship. Empathy and communication take a lot of practice but you and your partner can practice together and become stronger because of it³!