

Essentials of Empathy

- Empathy is giving your compassionate attention to another by either silently or verbally guessing their feelings and needs.
- Empathy requires mindfulness of your own experience as you listen.
- Empathy requires a willingness to enter the other's world with acceptance and respect.
- Keeping your energy and awareness centered in your abdomen and heart helps you to be a big container for feelings and needs rather than being pulled around by the details of a situation or your own opinions and reactions.
- Empathy often requires the ability to be comfortable with uncomfortable emotions and witness the suffering of others without trying to get them out of it. This means you let go of any agenda for the other person. (Requests about the behavior of others occur in your direct and honest expression, not in empathy).
- The ability to offer empathy increases when you trust yourself to be true to your own feelings and needs. That is, you know that offering someone empathy doesn't mean you are abandoning yourself. You know how to set a boundary when you are done offering empathy.
- Offering empathy sometimes means that you are letting go of your own need for mental clarity regarding the facts and details of what someone is saying in order to keep your focus on feelings and needs. You learn to be okay not understanding content when it serves the connection.
- You cultivate a basic sense of trust that when someone is heard deeply she has greater access to her own wisdom.
- In offering empathy you remember that you are not indicating agreement or disagreement.