

# Developing your Empathy

We live in a very divided, separated and opinionated world. Whether is it politics, religion, sports or did Carole Baskin kill her husband, we each have strong opinions and often cannot share the perspective of someone else. With so much separation and division, it has become more difficult to have empathy for other people.

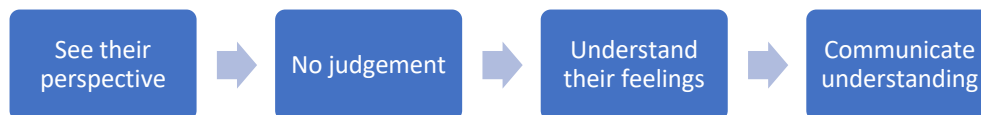
Empathy is understanding the perspective of others. It is the skill of treating people according to their emotional responses. To be empathic, you must think beyond yourself and your own concerns.



Empathy is used in three distinct senses: *Knowing* another person's feelings or cognitive empathy; *Feeling* what that person feels or emotional empathy; and *Responding compassionately* to another's distress or compassionate empathy. I notice you, I feel with you, and so I act to help you. You do not need to respond every time but at least develop cognitive/knowning empathy with others. I understand or know cognitively what you are feeling.

I do not have to feel the same way or even agree with what and how you are feeling, but I understand why you might feel that way. When you can begin to understand someone else's perspective (not always agree), you can begin to communicate more effectively and build deeper relationship and trust.

So how do you develop empathy?



## 5 Steps to develop Empathy:

1. **Recognize body language.** Being aware of someone's facial expressions, body movement, eye contact and voice can give me clues of what someone might be feeling or how they are responding to their situation.
2. **Listen.** Listening is a tool of empathy. Empathy occurs when listening turns to understanding – not necessarily agreeing – but full understanding of why people say or do what they do.
3. **Notice the emotion.** Empathy is a person's social radar. It helps you understand the issues or concerns that lie behind someone else's feelings. It is not mind reading, but the ability to tune into other's emotions. Empathy feels like acceptance, trust, listening, and caring all at once.
4. **Respond verbally.** Being able to reflect what the person is feeling is a key element of empathy. When I can verbally articulate what the other person is saying, it shows I am making an attempt to listen. "So, you are frustrated by...?", "Sounds like you are upset, happy, sad, glad..." whatever emotion you are hearing. If you are wrong, usually the person will say, "No, I'm not upset but I'm..."
5. **Respond with action – when appropriate.** Empathy doesn't mean becoming a part of someone's emotional drama. It is not wearing your emotions on your sleeve, constantly rescuing someone, soft skilled, esoteric touchy feeling feel good approach with others. Empathy is a skill. In fact, Daniel Goleman has said that empathy is the single most important emotional intelligence skill a leader can have.

Empathy requires us to put aside our bias and worldview to better understand other people's perspective and experiences. What will you do to build your empathy skills?

How can you better develop the skills of Emotional Intelligence? We have consultants and coaches who have successfully worked with individuals, teams, and organizations to help develop their EQ skills. For more information contact [philr@reynoldsconsulting.org](mailto:philr@reynoldsconsulting.org) or 713 249 38436

