

What is Empathy?

Empathy is the ability for you to put yourself in the shoes of your partner, be attuned to him/her, and feel what emotions he/she is holding. Moreover, when you are doing this empathy exercise with your partner you should feel as though you are cradling, nurturing and acknowledging his/her emotions, while also understanding, accepting and being loving towards them.

Important Rules for the listener and speaker

- 1.) Avoid generalizations** – making overgeneralizations will lead to your partner feeling hopeless and therefore more likely to ‘tune out’. Being very specific allows your partner to better understand you.
- 2.) Avoid Being ‘Right’**- avoid using your logic and reason to attempt to ‘disprove’ the validity of your partner’s emotional reaction or narrative.
- 3.) Avoid counter critiquing** – avoid responding to your partner’s constructive criticism with your own criticisms about him/her.
- 4.) Avoid Creating the Guessing game. Be clear with your needs and emotions...** do not set your partner up to fail by requiring them to guess what you are feeling or to guess what you need.
- 5.) Avoid avoiding, tuning out, or putting up a figurative wall**
- 6.) Avoid being contemptuous or trying to prove that your partner is inherently flawed.** Avoid trying to attach permanent negative labels on your partner. Avoid pathologizing your partner.
- 7.) Avoid being defensive** – avoid correcting the plot line. Avoid using justifications. Avoid correcting what you view to be a ‘misperception’. Avoid explaining why you did what you did.¹

¹ Hambleton Bishop, W. (2011, June, 8) Empathy Building Exercise: Learning to Be Empathetic and Increasing Emotional Understanding. Retrieved from: <http://www.thoughtsfromatherapist.com/2011/06/08/empathy-building-exercise-%E2%80%93-learning-to-be-empathetic-%E2%80%93-increasing-emotional-understanding/>

Empathy with your Partner

Sharing Exercise

After reading the What is Empathy? Handout, take a moment and each complete a separate Empathy with your partner Sharing Exercise. Then select who is Partner A and Partner B.

Partner A will go first while Partner B will actively listen and then completes the next PDF fun sheet entitled: Empathy with your Partner Response Exercise Worksheet. Then partners will switch roles and Partner B will share while Partner A will actively listen and then respond using the PDF fun sheet entitled: Empathy with your Partner Response Exercise Worksheet.

PART I

When you said or did (*factual information only, NO judgments and NO interpretations*)

I felt (*use your deeper feelings here*) _____, _____, & _____.

When we are disconnected, what I am most afraid of is

What I need from you is (*refer to your list of needs and be specific*) _____,
_____, _____.

When deep inside I feel _____ **and** _____...

I need you to (*offer a simple, direct and specific reassurance from you partner that would help you with these fears and feelings*)
