The Transformative Power of Empathy

Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT
Founder, Mindfulness & Grief Institute

Iowa Hospital Association
February 17, 2021
Slides & Downloads:
Empathy is a strange and powerful thing. There is no script. There is no right way or wrong way to do it. It's simply listening, holding space, withholding judgment, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of “You’re not alone.”

Brené Brown in *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*
Why Empathy Declines In Med. Students

• Mistreatment by mentors/superiors
• Shift from idealism to clinical realities
• Lack of social support
• High workload
• Curriculum Issues
  • Fragmented patient/physician interactions
  • Unsuitable learning environments
  • Inadequate role models vs. social idealization

(Neumann, 2011)
Why Is Empathy Important in Healthcare?

• Professional Satisfaction
  • Work is more meaningful
  • May reduce burnout
  • Decreased malpractice claims

• Builds Trust
  • Better Communication
  • Better Diagnosis
  • Better Patient Compliance
  • Better Patient Outcomes
5 of the 43 Definitions of Empathy

- “The ability to perceive another person’s point-of-view, experience the emotions of another and **behave compassionately.**” (Geer, 2000)
- “The ability to understand the personal experience of the patient **without bonding** with them.” (Moudatsou, 2020)
- “A basically **passive process** of information gathering.” (Van der Weel, 2011)
- “The act of constructing for oneself another’s **mental state.**” (Hogan, 1969)
- “To perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but **without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition.**” (Rogers, 1975)

(Cuff, 2016)
After The Review: Cuff et. al’s Definition

• Empathy is an emotional response (affective), dependent upon the interaction between trait capacities and state influences.

• Empathic processes are automatically elicited but are also shaped by top-down control processes.

• The resulting emotion is similar to one’s perception (directly experienced or imagined) and understanding (cognitive empathy) of the stimulus emotion, with recognition that the source of the emotion is not one’s own.

(Cuff, 2016)
# Purpose of Empathy In A Clinical Encounter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotive</td>
<td>The ability to subjectively experience and share in another’s psychological state or intrinsic feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>An internal altruistic force that motivates the practice of empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>The helper’s intellectual ability to identify and understand another person’s feelings and perspective from an objective stance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Communicative response to convey understanding of another’s perspective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Mercer & Reynolds, 2002)

Understand
Communicate
Act
Coping Skills, Self-Care & Social Support Helps Build A Foundation

- Have coping skills to deal on-the-spot distress

- Regularly recharge your own battery with self care
  - Meditation/Prayer
  - Movement/Exercise
  - Creative Pursuits/Hobbies
  - Nutrition/Hydration
  - Sleep

- Engage with a supportive community
  - Church/Spiritual Community
  - Support Group
  - Workplace Debriefing Group
Preparation

- Take a centering breath
- Remember *your* purpose
- Enter the room mindfully
  - Be present
  - Use your senses
  - Don’t rush
Connect

• See the person in front of you
• Monitor internal bias
• Adopt an open posture
• Observe non-verbal cues
• Use proprioception
• Modulate your voice
• Listen and clarify
• Respond with compassion
Never underestimate your inner wisdom

and be mindful of bias.
Recall or Create Your Own Experience

• Find a common thread
• Use your imagination
• Try method acting
Engage With The Arts

- Read literature, watch movies or a play with a protagonist that belongs to a different socioeconomic group.
- Visit a contemporary art gallery featuring an exhibit focused on a current social issue.
- Read poetry and music lyrics by artists with different perspectives.
Organizational Practices

• Model empathy
• Training & role play
• Irradicate bullying
• Individual counseling
• Group support
To my mind, empathy is in itself a healing agent. It is one of the most potent aspects of therapy, because it releases, it confirms, it brings even the most frightened client into the human race. If a person is understood, he or she belongs.

Carl Rogers (1986)


Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT
Author, Mindfulness & Grief & From Grief To Peace

MindfulnessAndGrief.com
heather@mindfulnessandgrief.com