

# EMPATHY



Marshall Rosenberg  
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*Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing. Often, instead of offering empathy, we have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Empathy, however, calls upon us to empty our mind and listen to others with our whole being.*

An **Empathic Response** is intended to acknowledge the other person's perspective -- how a person sees or understands a situation, and/or how they feel or what matters to them.

Here are the main types of empathic responses:

- **Empathic Presence:** Empathic presence is the basic foundation of empathy, the intention to be focused in this present moment with learning or discovering another's experience. This presence can be expressed through silence, leaving space for others to share.
- **Empathic Intention:** Being grounded in an intention to respond empathically is essential to shift from the habitual paradigm of non-empathic responses to the more connecting paradigm of empathic responses. This intention is cultivated through a combination of long-term personal decisions about how to engage with others, and in the moment decisions: "How can I be empathic in this moment?"
- **Empathic Inner Work:** The empathic intention although essential is often not enough by itself to enable leaders to bring an empathic response; they will often need to do some empathic inner work to achieve their goal of responding empathically. The main types of empathic inner work are self-empathy, the stop technique and the blame-dissolving process.
- **Empathic Reflection:** Solidly grounded on an empathic intention and galvanized by empathic inner work, empathic reflection are statements aiming at giving the speaker an experience of being heard and understood, and in a non-judgmental way. An essential component of an empathic reflection is that it involves asking if the person has been heard accurately.

Example: "What I heard you say is that although you were 99% done on the report, you decided to sleep on it, and in the morning you realized that a major point was missing, and now you'd like me to find a way to push back the deadline; is that it?"

- **Empathic Guessing:** Empathic guessing is an advanced empathic reflection. It involves the idea of exploring what might be happening behind the words that were expressed by the speaker for the purpose of supporting them to understand themselves in a deeper and more precise way, and to be heard more completely. Typically, when moving to empathic guessing, the listener would drop the reflection and only focus on this deeper exploration of the speaker's experience. Asking a question that points to the underlying feeling and needs that a person has.

Example: "Are you bummed about this because you want to experience more support?"

## NON-EMPATHIC RESPONSES

Giving Advice / Fixing

Analyzing / Diagnosing

Storytelling

Pity / Sympathy

Reassuring / Consoling

Shutting down

Changing the subject

Interrogating

Feed the fire

One-upping

Arguing / Being Right

Defending / Justifying

# HUMAN FEELINGS

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## WHEN NEEDS ARE BEING FULFILLED

We are likely to feel...

**Glad,**  
Confident,  
Delighted,  
Elated, Encouraged,  
Excited, Exuberant,  
Grateful, Happy,  
Hopeful,  
Inspired, Proud,  
Relieved,  
Satisfied, Touched,

**Loving,**  
Affectionate,  
Compassionate, Friendly,  
Nurtured, Sensitive,  
Tender, Trusting, Warm,

**Peaceful,**  
Absorbed,  
Blissful, Calm,  
Content,  
Relaxed, Satisfied,

**Playful,**  
Adventurous,  
Alive,  
Eager,  
Effervescent,  
Energetic,  
Enthusiastic,  
Invigorated, Refreshed,  
Stimulated

## WHEN NEEDS ARE CALLING FOR ATTENTION

We are likely to feel...

**Confused,**  
Embarrassed,  
Frustrated, Hesitant,  
Perplexed, Torn, Troubled,  
Worried,

**Mad,**  
Angry, Agitated,  
Bitter, Disappointed,  
Disgusted, Enraged,  
Exasperated, Furious,  
Hostile, Irritated,  
Pessimistic, Resentful,

**Sad,**  
Depressed,  
Discouraged,  
Disheartened, Dismayed,  
Distant,  
Gloomy, Heavy,  
Helpless, Lonely,  
Overwhelmed,

**Scared,**  
Afraid, Anxious,  
Horrified, Lonely, Nervous,  
Panicky, Skeptical,  
Suspicious, Terrified,

**Tired,**  
Exhausted,  
Fatigued.

# HUMAN NEEDS

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## Well-Being

**Sustenance**  
balance  
exercise  
movement  
food, water, air  
health  
nourishment  
nutrition  
rest, recreation  
rejuvenation  
sleep  
touch  
warmth  
wellness  
vitality  
energy

**Safety**  
comfort  
peace  
protection from harm  
relaxation  
security  
shelter  
trust

**Order**  
abundance  
calm  
ease  
confidence  
consistency  
equanimity  
flow  
focus  
harmony  
interdependence  
predictability  
simplicity  
serenity  
stability  
structure  
tranquility  
trust  
wholeness

## Connection

**Love**  
affection  
care  
closeness  
dignity  
intimacy  
equality  
esteem  
positive regard  
generosity  
kindness  
mattering  
importance  
nurturing  
support  
help  
respect  
honoring  
valuing

**Empathy**  
awareness  
acceptance  
acknowledgment  
communication  
compassion  
consideration  
empathy  
openness  
presence  
recognition  
receptivity  
sensitivity  
understanding

**Belonging**  
collaboration  
community  
companionship  
cooperation  
generosity  
inclusion  
hospitality  
welcoming  
mutuality, reciprocity  
partnership

## Self-Expression

**Freedom**  
adventure  
actualization  
autonomy

**Choice**  
creativity  
innovation  
growth  
challenge  
humor  
independence  
joy  
play  
fun  
spontaneity

**Honesty**  
authenticity  
clarity  
congruence  
dependability  
integrity  
power, empowerment  
presence  
reliability  
trust

**Meaning**  
achievement  
success  
aliveness  
appreciation  
gratitude, beauty  
celebration  
mourning  
contribution  
discovery  
efficacy  
effectiveness  
excellence  
mastery, skill  
inspiration  
learning, passion  
purpose  
vision  
wisdom, wonder