

Growing Healthy Relationships Part 3

November 2018

Dr. Lin Ewing

ewinglj@upmc.edu

Key
Relational Skill 4:
Empathy

- Empathy is the experience of understanding another person's thoughts, feelings, and condition from their point of view, rather than from your own. You can imagine yourself in their place in order to understand what they are feeling or experiencing.

AND/OR

- Conveying that you really understand another person's point of view. You don't have to share the same perspective but you understand what they mean. Your husband: I hate doing dishes. You: Yeah, I know, I hear that.

Empathy

- Is the **bedrock of intimacy** and close connection; in its absence, relationships remain emotionally shallow, defined largely by mutual interests or shared activities.
- Without empathy, we could live and work side-by-side with others and remain as clueless about their inner selves and feelings as we are about those of strangers on a crowded subway car.
- Empathy isn't just the engine for closeness and helping behavior; it also puts on the brakes when we are behaving badly and become aware of the pain we're causing. When there are no brakes and an excess of self-interest, there is emotional pain in those that are in relationship with that person.

Empathy is learned behavior

- The capacity for empathy is inborn.
- It is an innate capacity that needs to be developed. Infants learn to identify and regulate their emotions through successful one-on-one interactions with their caretakers, primarily their mothers.
- An attuned mother who's receptive to her child's needs and cues is one who permits her baby to thrive and develop emotionally. By having his or her emotional states recognized and responded to, the groundwork is laid not just for the child's sense of self but sense of other.

Empathy How To:

- **Empathy is acknowledging and understanding the emotion**
- Imagine what the other person is feeling, either after hearing their story or observing their behavior? (“Get behind their eyeballs to see/feel the world as they are experiencing right now).
- “You seem sad right now; is everything alright?”
- You have noticed some discrepant behavior/emotion that you want to acknowledge; you make an ‘educated reflection/guess’ at what you are seeing to the other person that you are reaching out to.
- It is ok if you are wrong, grateful that you are reaching out, and will feel free to ‘correct’ your guess, and often to say more about what they are feeling, i.e., sad.

Empathy vs. Sympathy

- Empathy and sympathy are not synonyms:
 - Empathy is the **experience of understanding** another person's thoughts, feelings, and condition from their point of view, rather than from your own. The experience of understanding often is associated with **a desire to take helpful action if possible**.
 - When you feel sympathy for someone, you identify with the situations that the person finds him or herself in. **You can be sympathetic to someone's situation while being completely clueless about his feelings and thoughts.** Sympathy **rarely compels you into action except**, perhaps, writing a check when you see heartrending photos of abused dogs .

Empathy vs Validation

- Validation goes beyond empathy and is **saying not just that you understand the feeling, but, also, and importantly, ‘the feeling or the behavior makes sense to you,’** for the following reasons:
- Generate reasons why it makes sense.
 - This happened before
 - They had tried to prevent it
 - They had told others about it
 - They had prepared for a different outcome



Relationship Skill 5: Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a predictable part of all relationships and can be a significant source of stress.

It is not unusual for people to suppress negative feelings and take a stance of 'go along to get along.' This is not a healthy long-term strategy for our significant relationships as it can lead to resentment and ongoing conflict.

Approach to Conflict Resolution

- Focus on the problem, not the person
 - If the source of conflict can be clarified as a 'problem to be solved,' it moves it from a personal to a more objective level and can reduce emotionality and introduce more objectivity.
- Use reflective listening
 - How effectively we are able to listen to understand the other person's perspective; just helping the other person to feel heard and understood can go a long way to resolving the conflict (empathy and/or validation).
- Use 'I' statement
 - Communicating your own feelings, needs and perspectives clearly with the use of 'I' statements.
- Know when to take a time out
 - Recognize that there may be the need to take a break if either partner is becoming argumentative, insulting, or aggressive.
- Work toward a resolution
 - Disagreement is normal in relationships; if agreement is not possible, seek a resolution instead that benefits both individuals.

*Key
Relationship
Skill 6:
Emotion Self-
Regulation*

Effective interpersonal relationships depend on both a stable sense of self and a capacity for spontaneity in emotional expression. Successful relationships also require a capacity to self-regulate emotions in appropriate ways and to tolerate some emotionally painful stimuli.

Emotion regulation difficulties interfere with a stable sense of self and with normal emotional expression. Without such capabilities, it is understandable that some adults may develop more dysfunctional and unhealthy relationships.

Those with difficulties controlling impulsive behaviors and expressions of extreme negative emotions cause great drama and distress in many ways in their relationships. In particular, difficulties with anger and anger expression preclude the maintenance of stable relationships.

Emotion Regulation Skills

- Identify and label emotional response
- Reduce vulnerability to 'emotion mind'
 - Engaging in healthy eating; getting adequate exercise; treating physical illness; reducing use of non-prescribed mood-altering drugs; increasing sense of mastery by engaging in activities that build a sense of competence.
- Increase positive emotional events
 - Increasing pleasurable events in life is an approach to increasing positive emotions; recommended to make daily, positive changes
- Increase mindfulness to current emotions
 - Experiencing current emotions without judging them. It is the judgment of negative emotions that decreases the ability to tolerate them.
- Taking opposite action: a way to regulate an emotion is change the behavioral component by acting in a way that is inconsistent with the emotion
 - e.g. doing something nice for a person one is angry with; approaching what one is afraid;

Mindfulness:
Experiencing
emotions without
judgment

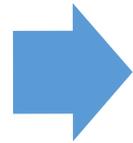
“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.” “It’s about knowing what is on your mind.” *Jon Kabat-Zinn*

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Me Me Me

When to Consult a Professional

Most of us face struggles sometime in our lives including stress at work, difficulty with a partner, etc. May include emotional symptoms such as depression or anxiety, behavioral or cognitive symptoms.



Sometimes these struggles can be eased by taking better care of yourself, and talking to a family member or friend.



Two guidelines can be helpful to decide if you or a loved one could benefit from therapy:

- **Is the problem distressing?**
- **Is the problem interfering with some aspect of life?**

Oral input for
Part 3 to
follow soon



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)