

## 5 Habits of Empathetic People

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Why talk about empathy? Empathy matters because it enables us to understand what others are going through so we can respond and be helpful.

It is linked with positive social behaviour and research is telling us that greater empathy leads to more helping behaviour.

In addition, those who are empathetic, experience more meaning in their lives and less burnout. That is a good piece of information to know. But can empathy be learned or enhanced? The answer is yes.

Consider the following:

- Invite your Java Music Club (or another group) to explore empathy together as a group. For this session instead of picking a theme, facilitate a discussion around empathy. If possible have a white board or flip chart handy and invite a group member to write the ideas up.
- One approach could be to write the titles of the following 5 habits on the white board and discuss them one at a time. Go around the group—ask each group member what they think about each item.
- Begin with coming up with a definition of empathy as a group and write it up on a white board.
- Then invite them to fill out the empathy self checklist. Follow this up with another meeting in a month. Invite them to fill out the self checklist again and hold another discussion.



### *What is your definition of empathy?*

Brainstorm with the group first. Invite them to offer their ideas and write them on a white board. Then offer the following definition from the Oxford Dictionary:

“Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.”

That means things like imagining how another person feels, to walk in their shoes, to see life through their eyes.

*(See over for the 5 habits of empathetic people)*

# 5 Habits of Empathetic People\*

## 1. Cultivate Curiosity About Others

An empathic habit can be as simple as cultivating curiosity about others.

**Question to ask:** Can you think about the resident that few talk to? Look around you today. Could you find a way to say hello, perhaps sit with them sometime, invite them to the Java Music Club?

## 2. Explore Judgements and Prejudices

We all have prejudices and judgements. Some are subtler than others. Some we are aware of and some not. One empathic habit is increasing our awareness of prejudices and judgements we may have. Most of us have stereotypes in our minds that challenge us. Examples include “Asians are quiet and hardworking”, or “All Americans love baseball” or “Old people can’t learn new things”. When you catch a judgemental thought, reflect and rethink.

**Question to ask:** Can you think of a prejudice that you might have? How could you reframe that. An example might be: “I don’t like this one co-worker that is in my department—she doesn’t speak English well.” This could be reframed to “I don’t know how to interact well with people who don’t speak English well, but I could ask her to teach me a few phrases in her language to help us connect better.”

## 3. Listen Closely and Open Up

This is about setting aside our own problems, and really being open and attentive with somebody else. It is tough to do all day long. But not if it is for just one minute. Try it at least once a day. When someone is sharing something with you, practice being centered and present with them—listen completely. And open up yourself.

**Question to ask:** Would you describe yourself as an open person? What stands in the way for you in listening and opening up when others share with you?

## 4. Help Someone Every Day

Empathetic people are most likely to reach out and help others. Is there someone around you that needs help? It can be as simple as knocking on someone’s door for a visit, getting someone a cup of coffee, or giving stranger a hand.

**Question to ask:** Is there someone you know that could use a little support today?

## 5. Cultivate Compassion

Cultivating compassion in ourselves and for ourselves is a key habit to develop. It is a journey that helps us be kinder to ourselves and those around us. Two ways to cultivate compassion include learning about what compassion skills are and learning how to meditate, reflect or be mindful. For example, mindfulness meditation is a simple practice that helps you learn to calm the mind and body to help cope with illness, pain, and stress. It is a way of focusing on things happening in the present moment.

**Question to ask:** Is there a way that you can include some form of meditation in your life?

Here is a simple approach: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-courage-be-present/201001/how-practice-mindfulness-meditation>

\*Adapted from “Six Habits of Highly Empathic People” Posted by Roman Krznaric.

[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six\\_habits\\_of\\_highly\\_empathic\\_people1](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_habits_of_highly_empathic_people1)