

dare
to
*lead*TM

BASED ON THE RESEARCH OF
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WHAT DOES EMPATHY LOOK LIKE?

1. When you share something personal and vulnerable, and you really feel understood, what does it feel like?

2. When you share something personal and vulnerable, and you don't feel as if anyone understands, what does it feel like?

3. When you share something personal and vulnerable, what is your ideal empathic response? Do you like the person listening to:

- Make eye contact
- Look away so I don't feel so self-conscious
- Reach out to hug me
- Give me my space
- Respond right away
- Just listen and stay quiet
- Something else? Name it here:

4. When someone shares something painful and personal with you, do you:

- Worry about saying the wrong thing?
- Want to say something really comforting?
- Get nervous?
- Worry about not feeling anything?
- Not know what to do if you really don't want to know?
- Want to fix it?
- Are there any other responses you tend to have when someone shares something with you? Name them here:



EMPATHY MISSES

1. I feel sorry for you.

SYMPATHY VERSUS EMPATHY

The person who responds with sympathy (“*I feel so sorry for you*”) rather than empathy (“*I get it, I feel with you, and I’ve been there*”). The subtext of this response is distance: These things don’t happen to me or people like me. If you want to see a shame cyclone turn deadly, throw one of these at it: “*Oh, you poor thing*” or “*Bless your heart.*”

2. You "should" feel shame!

JUDGMENT

The person who hears the story and actually feels shame for you. The friend gasps and confirms how horrified you should be. Then there is an awkward silence. Then you have to make this person feel better by convincing them that you’re not a terrible person.

3. You’ve let me down.

DISAPPOINTMENT

The person who needs you to be the pillar of worthiness and authenticity. This person can’t help you because they are too disappointed in your imperfections. You’ve let this person down.

4. This feels terrible. Who can we blame? You?

DISCHARGING DISCOMFORT WITH BLAME

Because shame is visceral and contagious, we can feel it for other people. This person immediately needs to discharge the discomfort and vulnerability of the situation by blaming and scolding. They may blame/scold you: “*What were you thinking?*” Or they may look for someone else to take the fall: “*Who was that guy? We’ll kick his butt.*” Caution: Parents can fall easily into this when a child shares a shaming story with them. “*How did you let this happen?*”

5. Let’s make this go away.

MINIMIZE/AVOID

We minimize and avoid when we want hard feelings to go away. Out of their own discomfort, this person refuses to acknowledge that you’re in pain and/or that you’re hurting: “*You’re exaggerating. It wasn’t that bad. You rock. You’re perfect. Everyone loves you.*”



EMPATHY MISSES

6. If you think that's bad!

COMPARING/COMPETING

This person confuses connecting with you over shared experiences with the opportunity to one-up you. *“That’s nothing. Listen to what happened to me one time!”*

7. Don’t upset people or make them uncomfortable.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

You hold someone accountable for language, comments, or behavior that marginalizes or dehumanizes others, and it causes discomfort or conflict. When this person observes this or hears your story of what happened, they respond with, *“I can’t believe you said that to your boss!”* or *“I can’t believe you went there!”* or *“You can’t talk about that stuff with people”* versus an empathic response of *“That must have been hard – you were really brave”* or *“It’s hard to stand up for what you believe in – thank you.”*

8. I can fix this and I can fix you.

ADVICE GIVING/PROBLEM

SOLVING

Sometimes when we see pain our first instinct is to fix it. This is especially true for those of us whom people seek out to help with problem-solving. In these instances, rather than listen and be with people in their emotion, we start fixing.

Any other misses that you’ve experienced?

We have all experienced these empathic misses, AND we’re all capable of being “these friends” – especially if someone tells us a story that gets right up in our own shame grille. We’re human, imperfect, and vulnerable. It’s hard to practice empathy when we’re struggling with our authenticity or when our own worthiness is off-balance. That’s why we have to commit to practicing empathy, screwing it up, and circling back.



EMPATHY MISSES, CONTINUED

1. When you think about the eight types of empathy misses, are there one or two that shut you down?

2. What emotion comes up for you when your sharing is met with one of these empathic misses, and how does that affect your connection with the person?

3. On the flip side, how do you rate your own empathic skill?

4. Are there one or two empathic misses that you typically use that you need to change?

5. Are there any other expressions of empathy misses that you've experienced?



TERESA WISEMAN'S

Attributes of Empathy

- 1. Perspective Taking*
- 2. Staying Out Of Judgment*
- 3. Recognizing Emotion*
- 4. Communicating Emotion*
- 5. Practicing Mindfulness
(Kristin Neff)*

