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This article is about 'Empathy.'



Empathy ... do you have it, or have you been told you need it? This article explores what empathy is, why it's important, and how you can develop it. Read on to find out more about understanding and sharing the feelings of others.

And don't forget, our last article was about stepping out of your comfort zone! Click [here](#) to find out more about stepping up to challenges, and to access all our previous articles.

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Empathy – Are You Emotionally Intelligent?

By Amanda Pulford
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I bet you've all heard of IQ – intellectual intelligence; however, have you heard of EQ – emotional intelligence? Emotional intelligence reflects a person's ability to empathise with others: to identify, evaluate, control and express emotions; perceive, and assess others' emotions; and use emotions to facilitate thinking and understand emotional meanings. EQ was first discussed in 1964; however, it has gained momentum more recently, and specifically its relevance to mental health, relationships, job performance, and leadership skills.

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Empathy is one of the skills that falls under EQ.

So, what is empathy? Empathy involves understanding the emotion of another person, feeling the emotion and responding appropriately to that emotion. These three aspects are described as empathic cognition, empathic emotions, and empathic behaviour.

Why is empathy important?

Empathy is important for us all. Empathy helps us to communicate with others, it allows us to learn something useful about others, and it allows us to learn something useful about ourselves. Empathy has been associated with better personal relationships, more successful social behaviour, more effective leadership, and increased life satisfaction.

How do we learn empathy? We generally develop empathy as children, primarily through observing how others show it. We may be on the receiving end of expressions of empathy and come to value it for the emotional benefits it had for us. Then we may show empathy ourselves and receive a positive response, such as praise or a smile, that reinforces our actions.

Can empathy be learnt after childhood? Studies have shown that for most adults, they can increase their empathy – whether that is through formal training, or training ourselves.

How? We can follow four simple steps. 1. Understand the benefits of showing empathy. 2. Learn how to identify emotions in others. 3. Learn how to feel these emotions. 4. Learn how to comment appropriately on them. The best way of doing this is through observation of others, practicing, and gaining feedback. So, start by looking for signs in others that they're experiencing emotions. These can include facial expression, postures, sighs, tone of voice, the content of what they're saying and the context they're in.

Then, imagine yourself in the situation of the other person, develop a reason for their emotion, and gently present that to the other person. You'll learn valuable things about yourself and others.

For most people, increasing empathy has many positive effects – in your relationships, at work, socially, and also physically.

If you think you might need help with empathy, then please feel free to contact us on 0488 954 195, amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au or [click here](#)

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