

Nurturing Empathy in Intimate Relationships



1

Read the article below on ways to nurture empathy in an intimate relationship.

2

Pick two ways to nurture empathy from the article that may be the hardest for you to utilize in a relationship. Explain why.

3

Explain how you might be able to get better at using these in your life.

4

Practice! Choose a way to nurture empathy to someone with whom you have a close relationship. How do you think the other person felt? How did you feel?



Having empathy can lead to having compassion. When you have compassion for someone else, you want to help them or relieve any suffering they're experiencing. The idea is that you cannot have compassion for another individual unless you actually recognize or understand that they're actually suffering. Studies have shown that those who lack empathy are more likely than others to commit mean-spirited crimes. In order to be mean-spirited to another person, you must have the ability to lie to yourself about whether the other person is in pain. Psychopaths can easily do this because they tend to perform heartless acts without remorse, while acting charming at the same time.

Needless to say, it's important for those in all the helping professions to be empathetic, and it's particularly important to establish this early in the relationship as this can dictate the success and outcome of the therapeutic relationship.

As humans, we sometimes we get wrapped up in our lives and simply forget empathetic practices. Empathy can be learned from those with whom we keep company, but most of us once in a while need reminders on how to be empathetic:

Here are 7 ways to nurture your empathy:

1

Be self-aware. The more open you are to your own emotions, the more easily you will be attuned to the emotions and feelings of others.

2

Observe body language. Often we can tell a lot by watching other people's body language or non-verbal cues. Watch for facial expressions, hand motions, gestures and tone of voice.

3

Be in tune to someone's emotional truth. It's more important how a person says something than by what they say. Studies have shown that 90 percent of the messages we receive from other people are nonverbal.

4

Be a good listener. To be empathetic you have to really hear what the other person is telling you. To develop empathy, it's important to have all the details. Give the other person a chance to express themselves and refrain from interrupting.

5

Suspend judgement and disbelief. While listening is key to developing empathy, it's also important not to judge what the person is telling you. It's equally important not to offer tips or suggestions. When you want to fix someone else's problem, then there's a good chance you're not empathetic. If you're thinking about fixing the problem, you're not in tune to what they're going through.

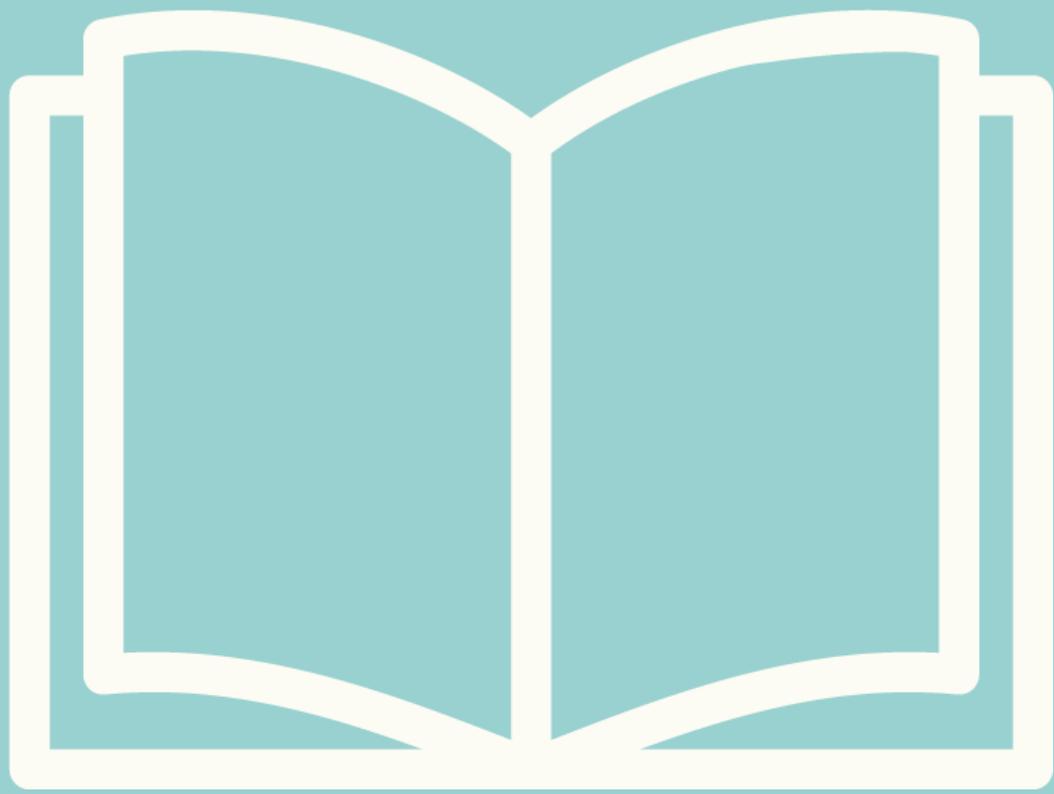
6

Use reflection. While reflection is important in writing, it's also an integral part of being a healer. This is in-line with Carl Rogers therapeutic practice by clarifying back to the person what they're feeling. You might say something like, "It seems to me you're saying that your feelings are hurt."

7

Put aside your own views and values. It's important to do this so that you're completely focused on the other person's needs.

References



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